

Name: _____

Zebras

By Guy Belleranti

Did you know a zebra's stripes are as unique as a person's fingerprints? While each of the three zebra species has its own general stripe pattern, no individual's stripes are exactly the same.

What are the zebra species? They are plains zebra, the Grévy's zebra and the mountain zebra. All are wild relatives of horses and donkeys, and all live in Africa.

The plains zebra is the most common. The Grévy's and mountain zebra are much more rare. The numbers of all three are shrinking because of habitat loss, hunting, and competition with livestock for water and their favorite food, grasses. In fact, zebras graze on grasses so much that their teeth must keep growing so they don't wear away!

Why do they even have stripes? No one knows for sure, but camouflage is a good guess. The mass of stripes in a running herd of zebras might make the herd look like a big striped moving blob. This would make it hard for predators to pick out a single zebra to attack. Some scientists also believe the uniqueness of the stripes might help zebras tell who is who.

Zebras are social animals that can live together in large herds or smaller family groups. They stay close together when grazing, they run together when they try to escape from predators, and they even groom one another.

Plains and mountain zebras form small family groups called harems. Each harem



group consists of one male (called a stallion), a few females (called mares), and their young (called foals).

Grévy's zebras do not live in harems. Grévy's stallions are more territorial than other zebra stallions. They patrol individual territories to keep other stallions out. Grévy's zebras do form loose herds, and sometimes they even mix in with herds containing another zebra species.

Gathering in herds increases safety, for then many eyes and ears are alert for danger. Predators include lions and hyenas. Zebras also need to watch out for African hunting dogs, leopards, cheetahs, and, when crossing water, crocodiles.

Zebras sleep standing up. This keeps them ready to be on the run in a moment's notice. Even newborn foals are standing within 20 minutes and running within an hour. When a zebra spots danger it makes barking and braying sounds to warn others. While running is their best defense, zebras can also bite. They can also break an attacker's bones with powerful kicks.



About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with wild animals and teaching others.

Name: _____



Zebras

By Guy Belleranti

1. List four ways a zebra can defend itself from predators.

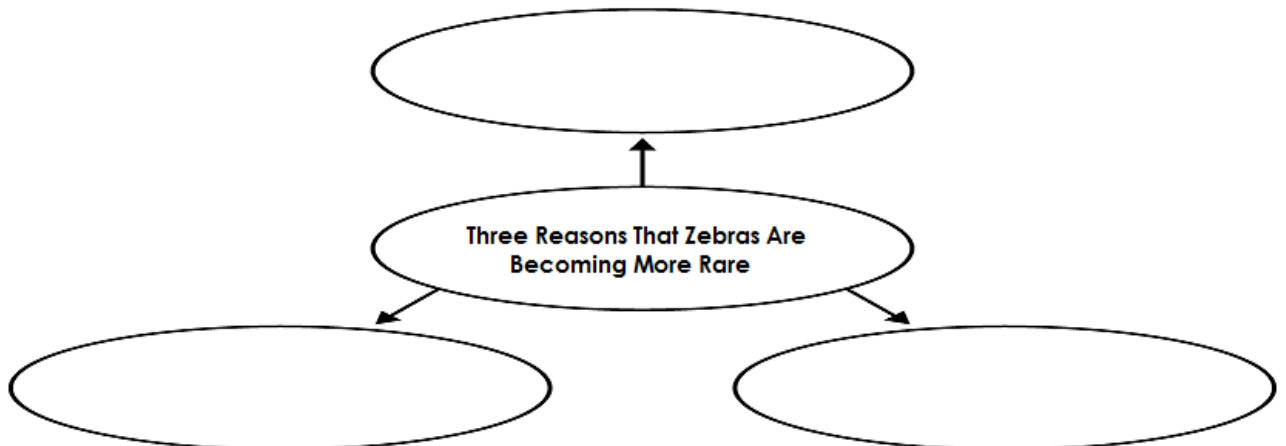
2. Which fact about zebras is not true.

- a. Wild zebras live in Africa.
- b. A male zebra is called a stallion.
- c. Zebras usually sleep standing up.
- d. A female zebra is called a foal.

3. What type of sounds can zebras make?

- a. They can squeal and snort.
- b. They can neigh and whinny.
- c. They can bark and bray.
- d. Zebras do not make sounds.

4. Use information from the article to complete the graphic organizer.



Name: _____

Zebras

By Guy Belleranti



The words below are vocabulary words from the article. Some letters are missing. Write the missing letters and then write the full word on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. ___ a r ___

hint: female horse or zebra

2. ___ ___ f ___ ___ s e

hint: method for protection or resisting attack

3. ___ ___ r ___ ___ t o ___ ___ a ___

hint: willing to protect an area of land

4. ___ h e ___ t ___ ___

hint: spotted cat

5. ___ r ___ ___ e

hint: to eat grass or plants

6. ___ i ___ ___ ___ t o ___ ___

hint: cows, pigs, and other farm animals

7. ___ ___ ___ o m

hint: to clean one's body

ANSWER KEY

Zebras

By Guy Belleranti



1. List four ways a zebra can defend itself from predators.

Running is a zebra's best defense. Zebras can also make barking and braying sounds to warn others. They can bite. They have powerful legs for kicking.

Also accept these answers: They can walk minutes after they are born. They stand up while they sleep so they're ready to run. They gather in large herds so predators have trouble picking out a single zebra. Their strips can provide camouflage.

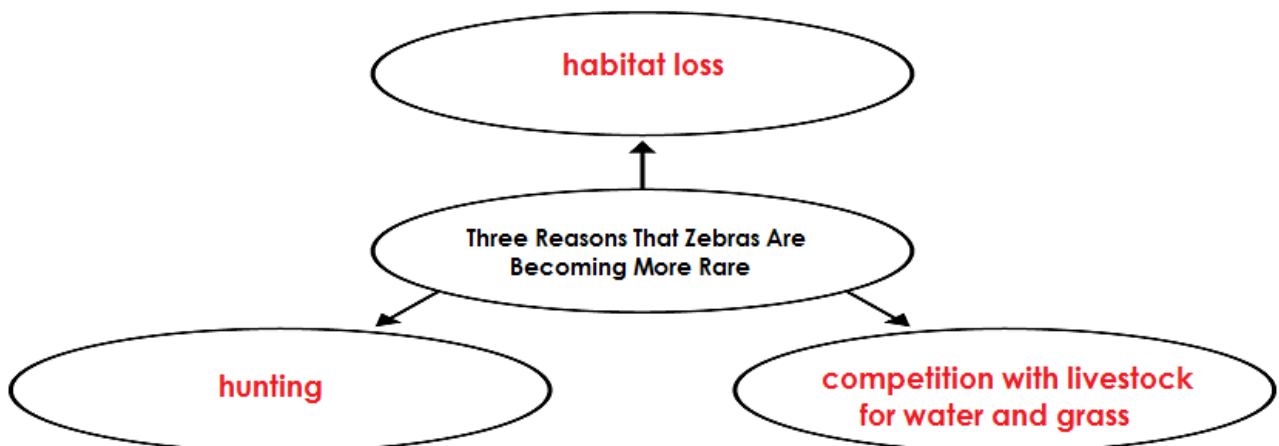
2. Which fact about zebras is not true.

- a. Wild zebras live in Africa.
- b. A male zebra is called a stallion.
- c. Zebras usually sleep standing up.
- d. A female zebra is called a foal.

3. What type of sounds can zebras make?

- a. They can squeal and snort.
- b. They can neigh and whinny.
- c. They can bark and bray.
- d. Zebras do not make sounds.

4. Use information from the article to complete the graphic organizer.



ANSWER KEY

Zebras

By Guy Belleranti



The words below are vocabulary words from the article. Some letters are missing. Write the missing letters and then write the full word on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. mare mare
hint: female horse or zebra
2. defense defense
hint: method for protection or resisting attack
3. territorial territorial
hint: willing to protect an area of land
4. cheetah cheetah
hint: spotted cat
5. graze graze
hint: to eat grass or plants
6. livestock livestock
hint: cows, pigs, and other farm animals
7. groom groom
hint: to clean one's body