



Hippopotamus

Hippopotamus amphibius

©Karlings_u

DESCRIPTION

Large mammal	Males weigh 1 600 to 3 200 kg, females 1 400 to 2 300 kg. They measure 4 m in length and 1.5 m in height, with massive heads and canines and a powerful 150-degree gape jaw capable of biting through most objects.
Longevity	Live up to 55 years.
Semi-aquatic	Skin must remain moist as it starts cracking if exposed to air and sun for too long, hence hippos mostly leave water bodies to graze at night. While sleeping they involuntarily rise to the surface to breathe before sinking back again, displaying the same behaviour even when chemically immobilized with appropriate drugs.
Patriarchal pods	During the night, they graze independently of each other, but come back to pods during the day. They live in large pods of about 15 individuals dominated by a polygamous male.
Territoriality	Extremely territorial with respect to their pods except while out grazing. Mark respective boundaries by scattering dung through rapid tail swishing. When water starts drying up, they fight violently with each other to occupy the best pod territories.
Diet	They do not consume aquatic vegetation. They mostly eat herbs (95–99%), about 40 kg/night (up to 60 kg). They prefer young, short plants, pulling them with their lips. They can consume animal carcasses and, in exceptional cases, eat meat. They leave the water after sunset and can travel several kilometres to graze at night.
Reproduction	To seduce females, males can fight mortally. Mating takes place underwater and females usually produce one calf every 2 years after 8 months of pregnancy. Social system based on sexual territoriality, hence non-breeding males settle outside pod territories.
Dung and footprint	Scattered dung 10 cm in diameter. Big footprints measuring 25 cm in length.

BEHAVIOUR TO EXPLOIT

Sharp senses	Have excellent senses of smell, hearing and sight, even at night.
Grazing	Graze silently out of water (noticeably noisy in water). Move considerable distances while grazing, following established paths and returning before dawn.
Changing tactics	Change tactics when heavily persecuted, often hiding in swamps along rivers during the day and quietly moving to avoid confrontation.

IMPACTS

Crop raiding	Serious damage to crops by grazing and trampling at night.
Other impacts	Rare accidental encounters with humans, mostly when returning to water due to perceived danger, resulting in serious injury or death. Able to destroy boats and equipment if they come too close.

Key types of conflict:



Supported by



Funded by the
European Union

PLACES OF CONFLICT

Crop fields Mostly raiding crops adjacent to rivers and lakes at night.

Within water bodies Boats approaching too close to bull pods.

Other places Unexpected encounter while travelling along riverbank and elsewhere, mistakenly getting in the way of a hippo returning to water.

TOOLS THAT CAN BE USED



Chilli string

is a string impregnated with hot chilli pepper or any other strong foreign scent stretched across the hippo paths.



Chilli brick

is a hardened brick made of elephant dung and coarsely crushed pepper. Its combustion produces an extremely irritating smoke.



Chilli pepper gas dispenser

is a plastic device that propels a ping-pong ball filled with chilli oil that bursts on impact, atomizing chilli pepper to the hippo.



LED light

is a powerful torch that emits an intense strobe light capable of confusing animals, and can also be used to summon people to help.



Warning bell

is a combination of metal cowbells and reflective bottles hung from a cross-wire/string on taller poles some 10 to 80 metres from the crops.



Electric fences

are barriers that produce electric charges of several thousand volts of very short duration. When touched they produce an unpleasant electrical charge.

APPROACH AND STRATEGY



Human casualties

The strategy relies on the prevention of accidental close encounters with the hippo, especially along riverbanks to avoid coming in the way of the animal returning to the water.

Within a water body, avoid going close to the male pods.



Property damage

Hippos can destroy boats and fishing equipment. Strategy is to avoid fishing or boating close to their herds.

Tools such as LED lights and chilli pepper gas dispensers can be used if the animal is coming close.



Crop destruction

Chilli strings to be installed across hippo paths outside the area to be protected, followed by warning bells installed adjacent to the crops.

Complementary tools are chilli bricks, electric fences, chilli pepper gas dispensers and LED lights.

The SWM Programme is a major international initiative that aims to improve the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife in forest, savannah and wetland ecosystems. It is being funded by the European Union with co-funding from the French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM) and the French Development Agency (AFD). Projects are being piloted and tested with governments and communities in 19 participating countries. The initiative is coordinated by a dynamic consortium of four partners, namely the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF), the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). For more information please visit:

www.swm-programme.info



Some rights reserved. This work is available under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence