

KIDS CORNER

THE BIG FIVE

This document aims to teach you about the 'Big Five', a term that refers to the African lion, leopard, rhino, elephant and Cape buffalo.

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Who are the Big Five?

The term 'Big Five' refers to the African lion, leopard, rhino, elephant and Cape buffalo. The phrase Big Five was coined by big-game hunters who hunt these five animals usually for sport or trophy. The Big Five animals were selected for the degree of danger and difficulty involved in hunting them. The Big Five are considered to be among the most dangerous and most popular species for big game hunters to hunt.

Big game hunting is a controversial sport (or hobby) that involves the hunting of large game (animals). The hunting of large game almost always includes large terrestrial mammals who are hunted and killed for meat, animal by-products (such as horn or bone), trophy and/or sport.

Big game hunting is controversial and has been banned in many African countries. Despite the violent origins of this term, Big Five is now used as a general marketing term, particularly by safari tour operators.

Fun fact: There is a group of African animals referred to as the Little Five, and they are: the rhinoceros beetle, buffalo weaver, elephant shrew, leopard tortoise, and the antlion.



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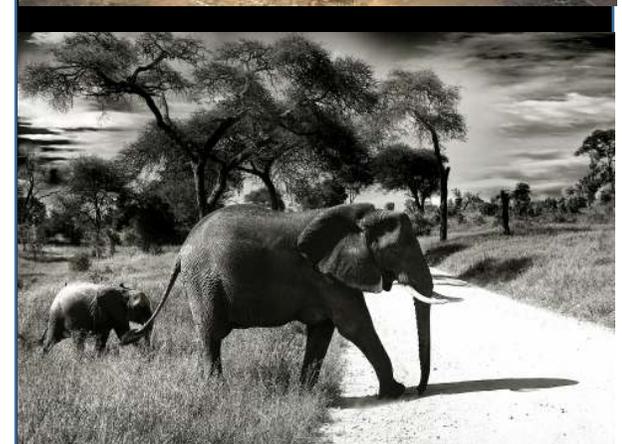
THE BIG FIVE

African Lion

IUCN status: Vulnerable

Lions generally live on grasslands and open savannahs across Africa. Their populations have been steadily declining for the last five decades and they have been listed as 'Vulnerable' on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. In 2015 the IUCN reported that the Lion population had undergone a 42% population decrease between 1993 and 2014 and estimated that fewer than 20,000 lions remained across Africa. The major threats to lions are indiscriminate killing (particularly due to human-wildlife conflict and wildlife-livestock conflict) and habitat loss.

Trophy hunting is a controversial topic throughout the global community. Advocates of trophy hunting say that it is an important conservation tool because the revenue from big game hunting contributes to lion conservation. However, according to the IUCN, this industry has been mismanaged and lions have been killed without regulation, with no clear evidence that the funds from trophy hunting are supporting lion conservation. Furthermore, lion populations continue to decrease across the continent.



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African Elephant

IUCN status: Vulnerable

The African elephant is the largest terrestrial animal on Earth. There are two distinct species of African elephant: The African bush elephant and the African forest elephant. However, there is still debate regarding the classification of the African elephants into species and subspecies.

Africa's elephants cover an enormous range and tend to move through a variety of habitats; occupying dense forests, open and closed savannahs, dry grasslands and, sometimes, arid deserts.

The African elephant has been listed as 'Vulnerable' on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. In 2016, the African Elephant Status Report noted a continental decline in elephant numbers. They attributed this decline to the surge in poaching for ivory that began around 2006.

Poaching for ivory and meat is a major threat to the African elephant. However, illegal hunting remains a significant cause of the decline in population, particularly in Central Africa. Habitat loss and fragmentation caused by ongoing human population expansion and rapid land conversion is also a major threat to the elephant's survival.



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White/Black Rhinoceros

Black Rhinoceros IUCN status: Critically Endangered

White Rhinoceros IUCN status: Near Threatened

While there are five extant species of rhinoceros, the African rhinoceros is divided into just two distinct species: the black rhinoceros and the white rhinoceros. The black rhinoceros is considered by hunters to be one of the Big Five due to its high endangerment status and elusiveness. However, safari operators will include both the black and white rhinoceros under the umbrella term, Big Five.

The white rhinoceros is considered to be a 'grazer' and generally inhabits tropical and subtropical grasslands, savannahs and shrublands. The elusive black rhino is a 'browser' that inhabits semi-desert savannahs, woodlands, forests and wetlands.

Valued for their horns, the black and white rhinoceros are threatened from poaching, which is rapidly pushing them towards extinction. Their horns are prized in Traditional Chinese Medicine, as well as being sold on the black market and made into jewellery, dagger handles and other trinkets.



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African Leopard

IUCN status: Near Threatened

The leopard is the smallest of the Big Five and is widely distributed in most of sub-Saharan Africa and parts of northern Africa. The feline inhabits a wide range of habitats within Africa, including mountainous forests, grasslands and savannahs.

The leopard belongs to the genus *Panthera*, alongside the lion, tiger and jaguar. The IUCN recognises nine subspecies of leopard though this figure is disputed by various conservationists. All subspecies except the African leopard can be found in Asia, South Asia, and India.

The leopard is listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List due to continued human persecution, habitat loss, commercial hunting and the illegal wildlife trade. Poorly managed trophy hunting has also added increased pressure on many leopard populations across Africa.



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Cape Buffalo

IUCN status: Least Concern

The African (or Cape) buffalo is one of the most successful grazers in Africa. The Cape buffalo is the largest and most typical of the four subspecies of buffalo and are usually found in South and East Africa. Other subspecies include the forest buffalo, the West African savannah buffalo and the southern savannah buffalo.

The Cape buffalo inhabits swamplands and floodplains, as well as grasslands and forests in mountainous regions of Africa. They have very few predators and are capable of defending themselves against apex predators such as lions.

The buffalo is listed as 'Least Concern' by the IUCN as the species remains widespread across Africa. However, this status is dependent on the animal's value to both trophy hunters and tourists. Their value to hunters, in particular, has paved the way for increased conservation and anti-poaching efforts across Africa.

The Cape buffalo is highly unpredictable and dangerous to humans, which is why it was included as one of Africa's Big Five by game hunters.



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Australian Curriculum Mapping

GRADE 6 SCIENCE (ACSSU094): The growth and survival of living things are affected by the physical conditions of their environment.

YEAR 7 SCIENCE (ACSSU112): Interactions between organisms, including the effects of human activities can be represented by food chains and food webs.

YEAR 9 SCIENCE (ACSSU176): Ecosystems consist of communities of interdependent organisms and abiotic components of the environment; matter and energy flow through these systems.

YEAR 10: SCIENCE (ACHGK070): Human-induced environmental changes that challenge sustainability.

SUSTAINABILITY (01.9): Sustainable futures result from actions designed to preserve and/or restore the quality and uniqueness of environments.



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Download our mobile game app, World of the Wild, and see how you can participate in virtual wildlife conservation.

