

KIDS CORNER

AFRICA'S LITTLE FIVE

This document aims to teach you about the 'Little Five', which refers to the leopard tortoise, elephant shrew, buffalo weaver, antlion and rhino beetle.

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Who are the Little Five?

People who travel to Africa typically hope to see the Big Five — the “must-see” animals that safari leaders are quick to point out. These are the leopard, elephant, buffalo, lion, and rhino. Without the Big Five, African photo safaris wouldn't be anywhere near as popular as they are.

The Big Five get most of the attention, but let's not ignore the smaller animals that are their namesakes. These are the Little Five: the leopard tortoise, elephant shrew, buffalo weaver, antlion, and rhino beetle. The Little Five are all much, much smaller than the Big Five animals that they're named after, but they're all very interesting in their own right.



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The Leopard Tortoise

The leopard tortoise (pictured second from the top) gets its name from the markings on its shell, which look somewhat similar to a leopard's spots. That's about all that the leopard and the leopard tortoise have in common, though.

The leopard tortoise, despite being one of the Little Five, is the fourth largest tortoise species, ranging from approximately 30 to 70 cm in length and between 13 and 18 kg in weight. It's very common in the savannahs of eastern and southern Africa, where it lives in burrows abandoned by foxes, jackals, or aardvarks. The only digging the leopard tortoise does is to create nests in which to lay its eggs.

The leopard tortoise's diet consists primarily of grasses, succulents, and thistles, which doesn't always provide enough calcium to develop strong bones and eggshells. To get the calcium it needs, the leopard tortoise chews on bones and may even ingest hyena dung.

The leopard tortoise plays an important role in its habitats by dispersing seeds. It can't digest seeds, so they pass through its intestinal tract whole and germinate where they fall.



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The Elephant Shrew

One look at the long snout of an elephant shrew explains how it got its name. It certainly isn't because of its size, which is approximately 22-30 cm in length (not including the tail), and between 30 and 600 g in weight.

There are several species of elephant shrew, and they are found in various types of habitat; from forests and jungles to grasslands and woodlands; though they prefer areas that are densely covered by leaf litter. The elephant shrew's diet consists of insects, earthworms and arthropods (such as spiders and centipedes)

The elephant shrew (pictured second from the bottom) differs from other small mammals in several ways:

- Unlike other insectivores, the elephant shrew feeds during the day rather than at night.
- Many pairs live monogamously with a mate in a territory they defend vigorously. Interestingly, a pair of elephant shrews spends very little time together.
- The female elephant shrew has a menstrual cycle similar to human females. This is extremely rare in non-primates.



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The Buffalo Weaver

The white-headed (or, white-faced) buffalo weaver (pictured on the top, right) doesn't get the "buffalo" part of its name because it has any physical resemblance to a buffalo. Rather, its name is due to the fact that it follows the African buffalo around and feeds on the insects stirred up by the buffalo's hooves. Native to East Africa, its usual habitat is the dry brush and acacia thickets of the savannah where the African buffalo is found.

The buffalo weaver is a very noisy bird that relies on vocalisations to scare off intruders. The male attracts females by spreading its wings to show off their white bands and displaying its bright orange-red rump and under-tail feathers. Buffalo weavers forage, breed, and roost in small groups, but breeding pairs are usually monogamous. They work together to build their nests, and both parents feed their chicks. The design of a buffalo weaver nest is unusual and elaborate. The nesting materials are pushed together, but not woven, into a large oval shape. There is a short entrance tube that slants downward into the nest. The interior of the nest is divided into several rooms. There are usually several such nests in a tree, and unoccupied nests may be taken over by other species such as the African pygmy falcon.



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The Antlion

Worldwide, there are about 2,000 different species of insects classified as antlions. The life cycle of the antlion is egg → larva → pupa (developmental transition from immature to mature) → imago (adulthood). The “lion” part of the name comes from the predatory behaviours of the antlion in the larval stage. The larvae typically dig pits to trap the ants and other insects the antlion feeds on. An antlion trap is funnel-shaped and approximately 2 cm in width and depth. The antlion waits at the bottom of the pit for its prey to fall in. Antlions are found primarily in dry and sandy areas where it’s easy for the larvae to dig their traps. Where the ground is hard to dig, the larvae hide under leaf debris and ambush their prey.

In adulthood, the antlion is a flying insect with a long, slender body. Adult antlions are nocturnal, feeble flyers and usually go unnoticed except when fluttering around in search of a mate.



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The Rhino Beetle

The rhino beetle (pictured on the bottom) is found in many regions across the world and gets its name from the horn on its head, which resembles the horn of a rhinoceros. They belong to a big family of beetles known as scarabs, which are characterised by their stout bodies and clubbed antennae. There are over 300 species of rhino beetle.

The rhino beetle has also been reported as the strongest animal on Earth; it is able to lift at least 30 times its body weight. Among the largest beetle in the world, some species of rhino beetle reach up to 150 mm in length. The tough exoskeleton protects the beetle from predators, primarily birds and snakes, while its horn allows it to dig in the ground and hide from predators or brandish as a weapon when fighting over food or mating rights.

The rhino beetle can also fly. It has two sets of wings — an outer protective pair and an inner working pair. In the larval stage, which can last several years, the rhino beetle feeds on rotting wood or leaves. Adults feed on plant sap, nectar, and fruit.

In Asia, the rhino beetle is a popular pet that people pay as much as \$350 U.S. for.



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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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