



ALL ABOUT THE PLAINS BISON

GRADE 6

By Troy
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Bison are large-hoofed mammals with shaggy brown fur that used to live near the northern part of Canada. They have poor eyesight but have great hearing and a great sense of smell.

Bison often rub, roll and wallow. Wallowing is basically rolling around in mud, water and snow. Wallowing creates a saucer like pit in the earth called wallows. These wallows were once very common in areas like plains and commonly hold stuff like rainwater and excess water that flows over the earth's surface.

Despite their size, Bison are excellent runners and surprisingly, very good swimmers. They can cross rivers half a mile (800 metres) wide, but are very buoyant so they stay afloat.

Bison are adapted to the extreme weather conditions of the Great Plains, from the extreme heat of summer to the frigidness of winter. Using their hump, which is mostly composed of muscle, Bison dig really deep into the snow to find vegetation below. 🌿

SPECIES FACTS

WEIGHT
600 to 860 kilograms

LENGTH
Up to 2.8 metres

DIET
Grass, plants and sometimes berries

HABITAT
River valleys and plains

STATUS
Threatened

PREDATORS
Bears, wolves and cougars

LIFESPAN
15 years in the wild and 25 years in captivity

ISTOCK

MEET THE RICHARDSON'S GROUND SQUIRREL



GRADE 6

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The Richardson's Ground Squirrel's name comes from a famous naturalist and surgeon, Sir John Richardson. Some other names for them are dakrat, flickertail, gophers or simply prairie dogs. They are also members of the rodent family because of their big front teeth which they use to gnaw. In fact, their teeth never stop growing!

Their small brown bodies, short, sturdy tail and little ears make them blend in nicely with their habitat—the prairies. Their underground burrows are surprisingly large and detailed, with sleeping chambers up to 75 centimetres wide, and five to 10 burrow entrances! They make their burrows up to a metre deep because of their predators. Some predators cannot catch them underground such as coyotes or foxes, but Black-footed Ferrets can easily climb down into their burrows and catch them when they are sleeping. Badgers can also dig them out with their large paws and sharp claws.

Female Richardson's Ground Squirrels usually have six pups in April and May. When the pups are born, their eyes aren't fully developed and they are deaf. But they sure do grow fast! At 15 days of age, their fur has grown, but their eyes remain closed, and they still depend on their mother's milk for food. At 22 to 23 days old, their eyes finally open and they start to explore the den.

Small as they are, their diet can be big! Because they are 80 per cent herbivores, their meals include grains, plants, flowers, weeds, roots and some other vegetables. They occasionally feed on bird eggs, grasshoppers, beetles and roadkill, which is an animal killed by a vehicle. Their enormous diet is extremely important for the Richardson's Ground Squirrel, especially during the five to nine long months that they hibernate. Without that great, big amount of vitamins and minerals, they would not be able to make it. 🐿️

SPECIES FACTS

DESCRIPTION

Adults: 300 grams
Pups: 50 - 100 grams

WEIGHT

Dark brown on top and tan on the belly to camouflage. Short, small tail and small ears

LENGTH

Adults: 30 cm
Newborns: 8 cm

DIET

Plants, roots, grass, seeds, nuts, grains, roots, weeds, beetles, grasshoppers, bird eggs

HABITAT

They live in the prairies, in southern Alberta and southern Saskatchewan.

PREDATORS

Ferrets, badgers, coyotes, bobcats, red and gray foxes, snakes, eagles and falcons

LIFESPAN

They normally live 1 - 4 years

TIM EDWARDS/NPL/MINDEN PICTURES





ALL ABOUT THE BELUGA WHALE

GRADE 6

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The Beluga Whale is a part of the *Monodontidae* family, like the Narwhal. The scientific name for the Beluga Whale is *Delphinapterus leucas*. They are also known as melonheads, white whales and sea canaries. They're nicknamed sea canaries because of the high pitched clicks and sounds that they make.

Beluga Whales are easily recognized by their white colouring and the absence of a dorsal fin. They use their white skin colour to blend in with the white icebergs to hide from predators. They're also easily recognized because of the bump on their head also known as a melon. They have that bump on their head because they use echolocation. Beluga Whales use echolocation by making high pitched squeaks and clicks and, those squeaks and clicks bounce off large rocks, and the noise bounces back to the beluga as an echo and that helps them not hit the rocks.

When a baby Beluga is born, it is born light brown or gray color and will gradually turn white over the next three to five years. The mother Beluga Whale will usually give birth to one calf a year, and the calf will stay with the mother for about two years, then venture out on their own. 🐋

SPECIES FACTS

DESCRIPTION

White body with small flippers, and a short snout

WEIGHT

907 kg - 1,361 kg

LENGTH

4 m - 6.1 m

DIET

Fish, crustaceans, worms

STATUS

Endangered

PREDATORS

Polar Bear, Killer Whale

LIFESPAN

35 - 50 years

FLIP NICKLINE/WINDEN PICTURES



MEET THE SOCKEYE SALMON

GRADE 6

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Have you ever heard of Sockeye Salmon? Also known as blueback and red salmon, they are one of many species of salmon living in the Pacific Ocean. Most Sockeyes are anadromous, which means they live in both salt and fresh water. However, there are populations of Sockeyes known as Kokanee, that spend their whole lives in the freshwater lake or river they were born in.

Our salmon adventure begins in the freshwater lakes and rivers where the Sockeye Salmon begins its life. Females lay about 1,500 to 10,000 eggs at a time, however, only up to 10 of those eggs will survive to become adult salmon. A lot of the eggs aren't fertilized, others are too weak and a lot get eaten. If the salmon is lucky

enough to survive, it will then spend one to three years in their birthplace before swimming out to the ocean.

After maturing in their lake or river, it is time for the Sockeye Salmon to begin its journey to the ocean. They wait for environmental cues to tell them when to leave for the ocean. While on their voyage, the young salmon's scales grow and turn a silvery colour. During the night, smaller fry (young salmon) will ride tail-first on the current, while the larger ones swim using their own fins towards the ocean. Estuaries, the area at the mouth of a river, are a necessary component of a young salmon's migration. They help the salmon adjust to the saltwater, and signify that they have reached their destination. 🐟

SPECIES FACTS

DESCRIPTION

Blue tinged with silver colouring while living in the ocean, red-bodied with green colouring on their heads when they return to spawning grounds

WEIGHT

2.3 - 7 kg

LENGTH

60 - 84 cm

HABITAT

Pacific Ocean, lakes and rivers in British Columbia

RANGE

British Columbia waters, Pacific Ocean

DIET

Insects while young, Zooplankton, Shrimp

STATUS

Endangered

PREDATORS

Fish, birds, bears

LIFESPAN

2 - 7 years