

YZC Animal of the Month, January 2010

Okapi

Okapia johnstoni



Okapis are instantly recognised by their striking colour and pattern. Their back is a reddish brown fur, while the tops of their legs are striped and the bottom of their limbs mostly white. The okapi on display in the museum shows this pattern beautifully.

Okapis are closely related to Giraffes. They have large eyes and ears, and an incredible long, mobile, blue tongue.

The tongue on an okapi is so long the animal can use it to clean its ears and eyelids! Okapis are herbivores. They are browsers. This means that instead of feeding on grass as grazers do, okapis feed on the leaves and other parts of shrubs and trees.

In the wild okapis are found in dense, humid forests in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Africa. These animals are very secretive, and only became known to science around 1900. When they are seen, okapis are usually either alone, in pairs or in small family groups.

They are never found in herds. Deforestation and hunting may threaten the survival of okapis. However, the impact of these activities upon okapi populations cannot easily be measured as the animals are so elusive their numbers are unknown.