



ANIMAL CHAMPIONS



- When big isn't slow
- The tiny-but-mighty
- Heroes of perseverance
- and so much more!

Ranger Rick



Animal champions are much like human champions—there is something about them that makes them stand out from the rest. Some of them run, swim, or fly faster than other animals. Others can jump higher, dive deeper, or travel farther. A few are champions because they live the longest, grow the tallest, weigh the most, or are simply the strongest.

Animal champions set records just like human athletes do. But it is much harder to measure these records, because they are set in wild places where it is difficult to get accurate measurements. For this reason, most of the records you see in this book are approximate. They are the best guesses that scientists can make.

On these two pages, we show some of the fastest creatures in the animal world. As you read about them, remember that top speed for human runners is 20 to 25 miles per hour. And the fastest human runners can only run at this speed for a few hundred yards.

The honey bee is tiny compared to a human. But it can fly almost as fast as a human can run. It beats its wings an incredible 15,000 times every minute!



Heavy people do not run very fast. But some heavy animals can run with amazing speed. Elephants can charge at 25 miles per hour. And black rhinos can run nearly 35 miles per hour, even though they may weigh over 3,000 pounds.

We don't think of ducks as fast creatures. But canvasback ducks can fly more than 70 miles per hour when migrating.



The cheetah is the fastest mammal for short distances. It can run faster than 70 miles per hour. But it gets tired quickly and usually stops after a few hundred yards.



Hummingbirds move their wings faster than any other birds. Some of them beat their wings 4,500 times per minute.



For its size, the female house spider is much faster than a cheetah. It can run 330 times the length of its own body in 10 seconds. To match this, a cheetah would have to run faster than 115 miles per hour.



When diving, peregrine falcons may reach speeds of **200 miles per hour**. When flying level, peregrines have been timed at 60 miles per hour.



Pronghorn antelopes are the fastest land mammals over long distances. They can run at a steady speed of 35 miles per hour for many miles. Their top speed is probably more than 50 miles per hour.

Ostriches can't fly, but they can run faster than any other bird and most other animals as well. They can reach speeds of up to 35 miles per hour and keep it up for 20 miles. They are also the largest of all birds, and they lay the largest eggs.





Size is something we usually judge by our own size. If an animal is bigger than a person, we say it is a big animal. If it is smaller than a person, we say it is a small animal. But we should really judge the size of an animal by *what kind of animal it is*. For instance, a beetle that weighs 3½ ounces may seem very small to us—but it is a giant in the insect world.

Also, when you are talking about size in the animal world, you must remember *what kind of size* you are talking about. For example, the African elephant is the *heaviest* land animal in the world. But giraffes are *taller*. Reticulated pythons are *longer*. And, if we count their wingspan, albatrosses are *wider*. In a way, they are all the largest.



The wandering albatross has the longest wings of any bird. The wingspan for this bird can be as long as 12½ to 13 feet.

Around 40% of all living mammals are rodents. This group includes rats, mice, squirrels, chipmunks, woodchucks, gophers, porcupines, and beavers. The largest of all rodents is the capybara of South America, also called the "water hog."



The heaviest land animal on record was an African elephant. It weighed more than 24,000 pounds.

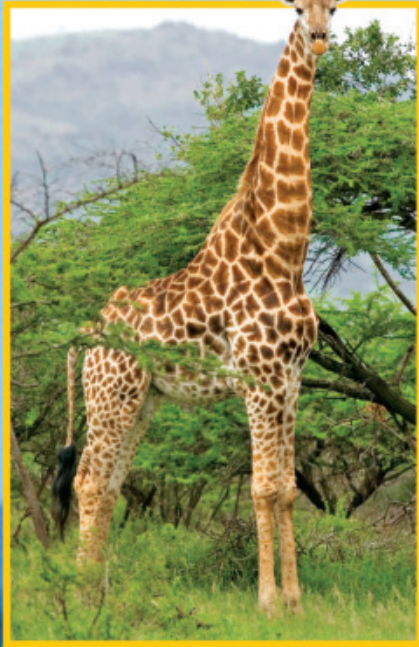


Goliath beetles are the heaviest insects on earth. They can weigh more than 3½ ounces—approximately 200 times heavier than a house fly.

Komodo dragons are the largest of all lizards. They can be over 10 feet long and can weigh more than 200 pounds.

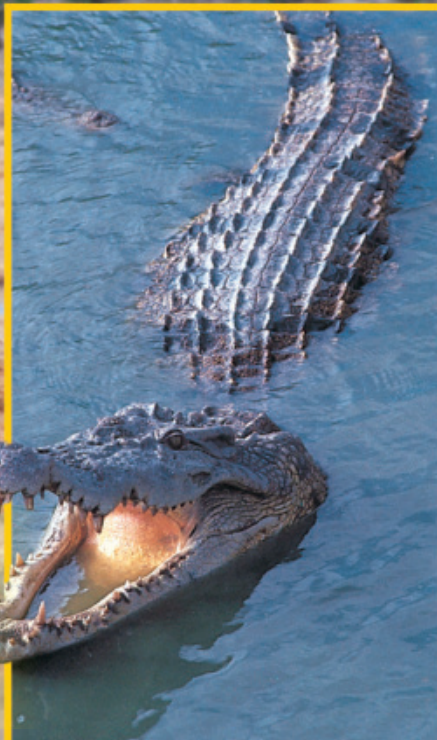


The title "tallest land animal" goes to the giraffe. The greatest height ever recorded for a giraffe is 19 feet 3 inches.



Kori bustards are the heaviest of all birds that can fly. The record weight for a kori bustard is 42 pounds.

Reticulated pythons are the giants of the snake world. They can be over 32 feet long.



Saltwater crocodiles are the biggest reptiles in the world. The largest ever measured was 20¼ feet long and weighed 2,370 pounds.



The largest meat-eating land animals are the polar bear and the Kodiak bear. In 1960, a huge polar bear was measured after it had been killed by a hunter. It stood 11½ feet tall and weighed 2,210 pounds.



Humpback whales are the largest musicians in the world. Male humpbacks make haunting "music" underwater that can be heard for great distances. It may be that humpback whales can actually hear each other when they are more than a thousand miles apart.



Long life is something we usually judge by comparing it to human age. If an animal lives longer than most people do, we say it has a long life. But the oldest human on record lived 122 years, and not many animals can match that. So we don't think that most animals live very long.

But we should really judge the age of an animal according to *the group* that it belongs to, not according to human age. For instance, most insects live less than one year, so an insect that lives 50 years is really very old. It lives 50 times longer than the average insect. If you could live *50 times longer* than the average human, you would live to be more than 3,500 years old!

The oldest bird for which an age can be proved was an Andean condor (like the one shown at right). The bird was hatched in a zoo and lived there for 80 years.



We know that some types of birds can live a very long time. Some people say that a sulphur-crested cockatoo (like the one shown here) lived more than 120 years. But there is no way to prove this claim.

The longest-living fish is probably the lake sturgeon. These strange-looking creatures may live to be more than 80 years old.



Giant tortoises can live more than 150 years. Some tortoises living today were hatched in 1870!





Gorillas can live a long time, but nobody is sure just how long. The oldest known gorilla lived to be 63 years old at the Little Rock Zoo in Arkansas.

In the horse family, wild donkeys live the longest, up to 47 years. They are the only wild horses that outlive the domestic horse.



“Hippopotamus” is a Greek word meaning “river horse.” Of course, hippos aren’t really horses, but they do live longer than horses—as long as 50 years.



Queen termites can live and lay eggs for more than 50 years. And some scientists believe that they can live over 100 years.



Red-eyed Tree Frog

When a predator approaches a slumbering red-eyed tree frog, the frog opens its huge bright eyes and startles the predator long enough to let the frog jump to safety. This two-to-three inch amphibian can leap about 10 feet—60 times its body length. Some species of tree frogs can leap more than one hundred times their body length. They “sail” from one tree branch to another, much like flying squirrels.





Strength and agility are two of the most important qualities for human athletes. Many human champions take pride in their ability to lift great amounts of weight. The strongest human can lift about two times his own weight. But, as you will see, some animals can do even better than that. For example, there are insects that can lift *50 times* their own weight.

With a pole to help them, some humans can jump as high as 20 feet—about three times their own height. But there is an insect that can do *66 times* better than that, without using a pole!

When it comes to diving, the deepest that any human has gone is about 300 feet—on one breath and with no swim fins. And the longest that any person has held his breath underwater is 22 minutes. But there is an air-breathing mammal that can dive *far deeper* and hold its breath *much longer*.

For its size, the common flea is the greatest jumper of them all. It can jump *200 times* its own height.



Some of the best divers of all air-breathing animals are the sperm whales. These enormous mammals of the sea may dive two miles below the ocean's surface. And while they're underwater, they may hold their breath almost *two hours!*



Chimpanzees are only about half as tall as humans, but they are three times stronger. They can lift six times their own body weight.



Leaf-cutter ants can lift and carry *50 times* their own weight—and they do it with their jaws.





The tiny kangaroo rat is named for its jumping ability. It is actually a better jumper than the gray kangaroo. The gray kangaroo jumps 8 times the length of its body—but the kangaroo rat can jump **48 times** its own length.

The high-jumping champion of the cat family is the puma. One of these magnificent cats was seen jumping 18 feet straight up in the air.



The strongest land animal of all is the Asian elephant. It can lift more than 2,000 pounds with its trunk. And it can drag a load weighing over 20,000 pounds.

In one hop, a gray kangaroo can jump a distance of 44 feet. And when it really gets going, it can leap more than 11 feet off the ground.



Marathon runners are proud of their ability to run long distances. They run over 26 miles without stopping. But many animals travel much farther. They may go *thousands* of miles in search of food, or to escape bad weather. And some will journey very long distances to find good places to lay eggs or raise their young.

When animals take regular trips like these every year, their movements are called migrations. During these migrations they show a determination and endurance that we can only admire. Nothing seems to stand in their way. Many of them cross wide oceans or barren wastelands. Others fly over the highest mountains. Some may swim up the fastest-rushing streams. And they make all of these amazing journeys—across oceans, mountain ranges, and vast wildernesses—without a map to guide them!

Caribou often migrate long distances between their winter and summer homes. To get from one home to the other, they may travel 800 miles or more. Along the way, they often have to cross water and other obstacles, but nothing stops them.

At the end of their lives, salmon return to the places where they were hatched to lay their eggs. To make this journey, a Chinook salmon may swim as far as 3,000 miles.



Arctic terns are probably the greatest travelers among the birds. They may fly 20,000 miles in a single year—a distance almost equal to a trip around the world.



Siberian tigers often wander great distances in search of food. One big male walked more than 620 miles in just 22 days.



Before they can lay their eggs, green sea turtles must return every year to the places where they were hatched. To do this, some of them may swim up to 2,800 miles.



The greatest travelers of the mammals are California gray whales. Every year, these huge animals migrate **26,000 miles** from feeding grounds to breeding grounds and back again. They swim about 115 miles a day.



The red bat is the champion flyer among the mammals. These bats may migrate more than 5,600 miles each year, and most of that journey is over the ocean.



Although here they have apparently landed for a quick dip in the water, bar-headed geese are probably the highest flying birds. They have been seen flying over the top of Mount Everest at an altitude of 29,500 feet—more than 5½ miles up in the air.





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| <i>Eagles</i> | | |
| <i>Elephants</i> | | |

ON THE COVER:

A Plumed Basilisk Lizard

The basilisk does something that many believe to be impossible—it can walk on water! Fringes of special scales on their toes allow them to escape predators by running across streams and rivers.

Created and Written by
John Bonnett Wexo

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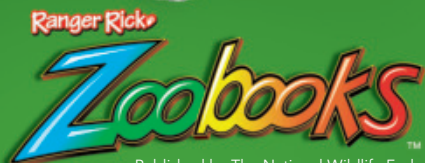


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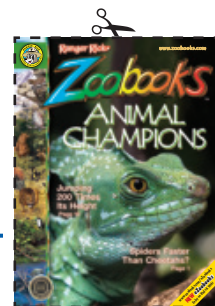
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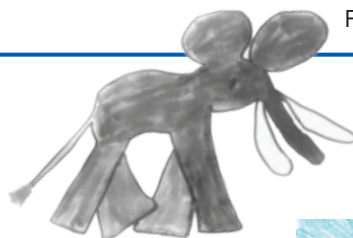
Zooworks®



Sam Ensing, age 7



Elliot Hodges, age 10



Iris Fink, age 8



Maryam Elkhaldi, age 9



Kennedy Boal, age 7



David Kitano, age 8

My eagle is high and small, way up in the sky. But when he is hungry he dives faster than an airplane. My eagle sees and hears everything. When he is in our trees he looks like a king. Sometimes I see him looking at me. He is tall and straight and official and important.

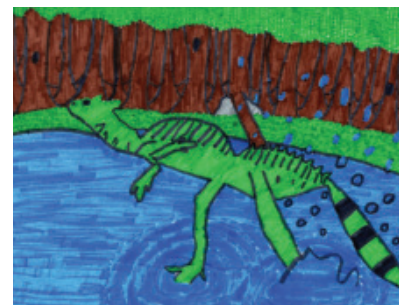
Ben G. Thompson, age 6

The tick's relative, the flea,
Is always seemingly jumpy.
It seems to soar through the sky,
Jumping (to bugs) miles high.
It's so cool fleas have this power.
They can jump very far and high within an hour.
I wish I had power like the fleas,
Jumping over a building of fifty stories.

Max Cheng, age 10



Emilee Foxworth, age 10



Rebecca Peeters, age 9

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Would you like to see your work published in **Ranger Rick Zoobooks**?

Here's what to do:
Visit www.zoobooks.com and click on the "Zooworks Contest" box for complete entry information.



We want to see your original poem, story, or drawing by March 25, 2020 for "Ducks, Geese, or Swans"

Winners

Runners:

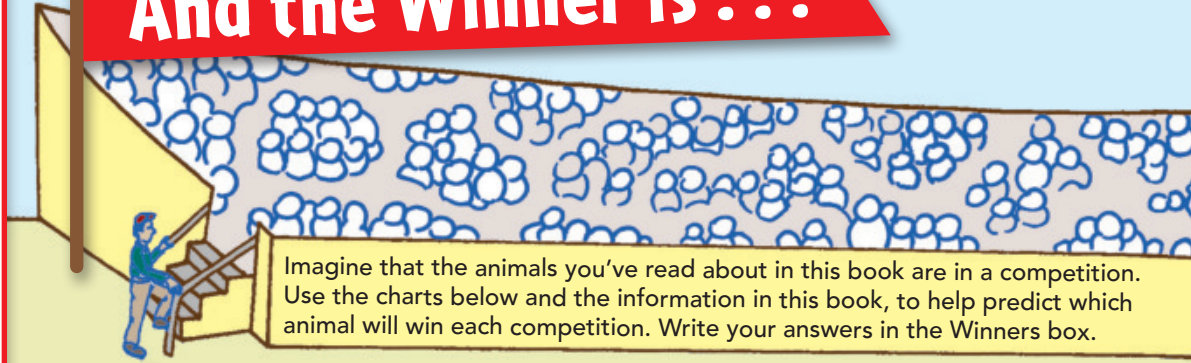
High Jumpers:

High Flyers:

Weight Lifters:

Long Distance Travelers:

And the Winner is . . .



Imagine that the animals you've read about in this book are in a competition. Use the charts below and the information in this book, to help predict which animal will win each competition. Write your answers in the Winners box.

Help this man work his way through the crowd to his seat in the viewing stand.

Which runner will place first in this race?



RUNNERS

Runners

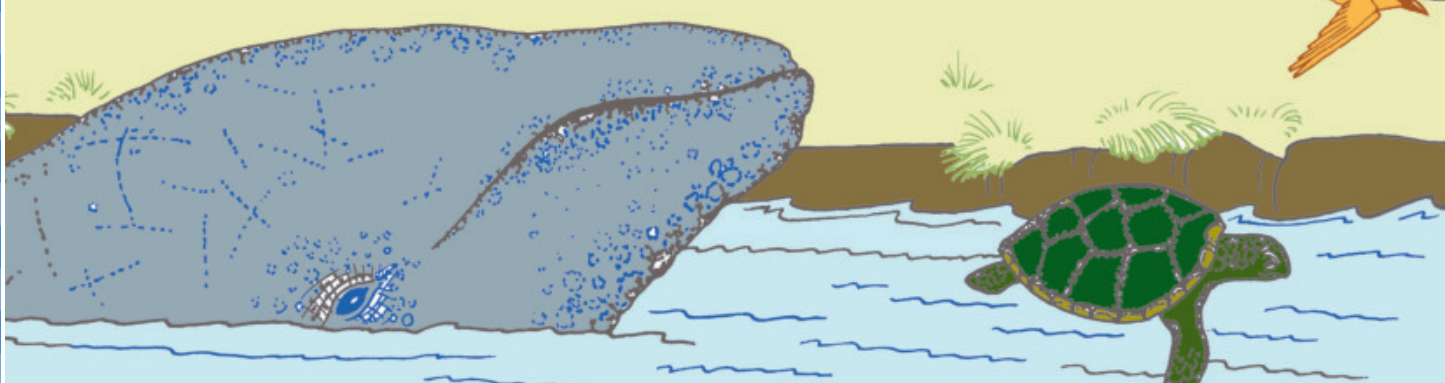
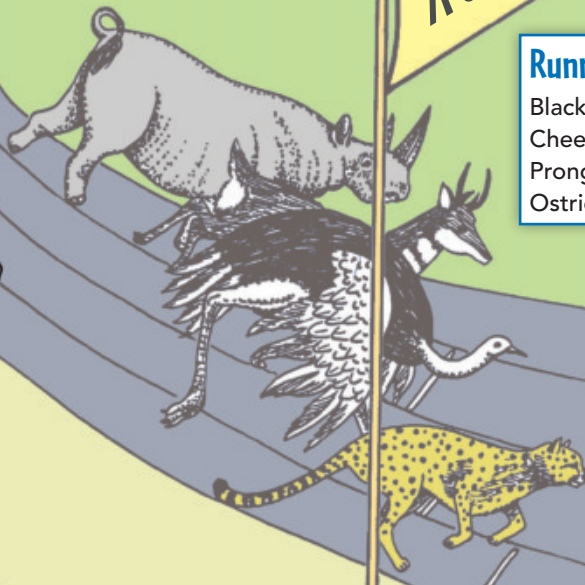
Black rhino
Cheetah
Pronghorn
Ostrich

High Jumpers

Kangaroo rat (48 times its length)
Gray kangaroo (8 times its length)
Puma (3.5 times its length—straight up)
Flea (200 times its height)

HIGH JUMPERS

START



Which one of these high flyers will win the race?



High Flyers

The **honey bee** can fly 20–25 m.p.h. How fast can the **falcon** and **canvasback duck** fly?



HIGH FLYERS

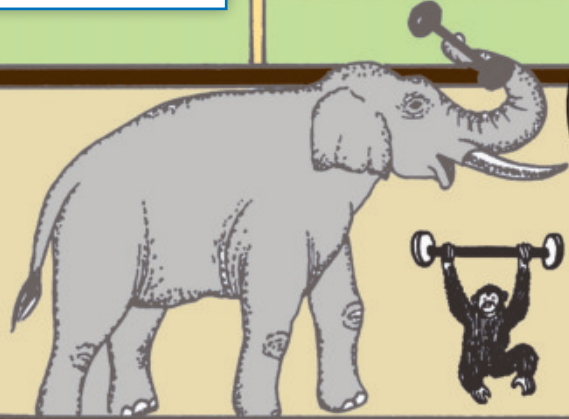
Who is the highest jumper in this group based on size?



Weight Lifters

Asian elephant (1/6 its weight)
Ant (50 times its weight)
Chimpanzee (6 times its weight)

WEIGHT LIFTERS

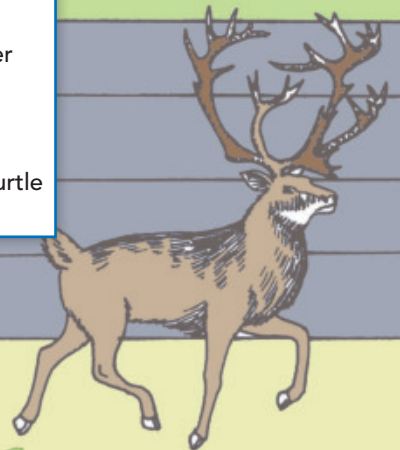


Can I lift the most weight for my size?

Long Distance Travelers

Gray whale
Siberian tiger
Caribou
Salmon
Red bat
Green sea turtle
Arctic tern

LONG DISTANCE TRAVELERS



Which one of these creatures can travel the longest distance?

Hidden Words

Solve this word search. Look up and down, side to side, and diagonally. Use the word list for help.



Word List

Peregrine	Albatross	Kangaroo	Ant	Frog	Elephant
Falcon	Capybara	Puma	Bee	Ostrich	Cheetah
Chimpanzee	Polar Bear	Flea	Gorilla	Whale	Turtle
Hippopotamus	Caribou	Spider	Termite	Donkey	Bat

Bright Idea!

Help your child make the biggest, strongest, and fastest animals out of clay. Here's what you need:

- 1 cup cornstarch
- 1 cup baking soda
- 1¼ cups cold water
- Acrylic paints and paintbrush

Mix the cornstarch, baking soda, and water in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir the mixture constantly until it is thickened, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat. When the clay is cool, your child can shape the clay into the fastest, strongest, and biggest animals. Let the clay dry for about two days. Then, have your child paint the animals realistically or with great imagination!

