

## Animal species in this issue

### **Egyptian Tortoise (*Testudo kleinmanni*)**



Kingdom: Animalia & Phylum: Chordata & Class: Sauropsida & Order: Testudines &  
Suborder: Cryptodira & Family: Testudinidae & Genus: *testudo* &  
Species: ***T.kleinmanni***

Although the word turtle is widely used to describe all members of the order Testudines, it is also common to see certain members described as **terrapins**, **tortoises** or **sea turtles** as well. Precisely how these alternative names are used, if at all, depends on the type of English being used.

- British English normally describes these reptiles as turtles if they live in the sea; terrapins if they live in fresh or brackish water; or tortoises if they live on land. However, there are exceptions to this where American or Australian common names are in wide use, as with the Fly River turtle.
- American English tends to use the word turtle for all freshwater species, as well as for certain land-dwelling species (e.g. box turtles).

Female tortoises dig nesting burrows, in which they lay from one to thirty eggs. Egg laying typically occurs at night, after which the mother tortoise covers her clutch with sand, soil, and organic material. The eggs are left unattended, and depending on the species, take from 60 to 120 days to incubate. The size of the egg depends on the size of the mother and can be estimated by examining the width of the cloacal opening between the carapace and plastron. The plastron of a female tortoise often has a noticeable V-shaped notch below the tail to facilitate passing the eggs.

Female tortoises are larger than the males; males are more slender and have a longer tail. Their shells have high domes, and range in colour from ivory to pale gold to dark brown. This colouring helps to regulate the impact of sunlight.

## Animal species of this issue

### The Greater Cane Rat or the Grass cutter (*Thryonomys swinderianus*)



Kingdom: Animalia & Phylum: Chordata & Class: Mammalia & Order: Rodentia & Family: Thryonomyidae & Genus: *Thryonomys* & Species: *T.swinderianus*

The **Greater Cane Rat** (*Thryonomys swinderianus*) is one of two species of cane rats, a small family of African hystricognath rodents. It inhabits Africa, south of the Saharan Desert. The cane rat lives by reedbeds and riverbanks.

Cane rats can grow about two feet long in the longest individuals and weighs a little less than 19 lb (8.6 kg). It has rounded ears, short nose, and coarse bristly hair. Its forefeet are smaller than its hindfeet and supports its weight on only three toes. Cane rats live in small groups led by a single male. They are nocturnal and make nests from grasses or burrow underground. The oldest cane rat can live more than four years.

In the country of Ghana and other regions of West Africa, the Greater Cane Rat is usually called a **grasscutter** or **cutting grass**. In both West Africa and Southern Africa, it is considered a delicacy. As a consequence, "grasscutters" are beginning to be raised in cages for sale, and so are sometimes referred to as micro livestock.

## Animal species in this issue

### **Donkey (*Equus asinus*)**



Kingdom: Animalia & Phylum: Chordata & Class: Mammalia & Order: Perissodactyla & Family: Equidae & Genus: *Equus* & Subgenus: *Asinus* & Species: *E. africanus* & Subspecies: *E. africanus asinus*

Donkeys or Asses were first domesticated around 3000 BC, approximately the same time as the horse, and have spread around the world. They continue to fill important roles in many places today and domesticated species are increasing in numbers, but the African wild ass and another relative, the Onager, are endangered. As "beasts of burden" and companions, asses and donkeys have worked together with humans for centuries.

Donkeys vary considerably in size, depending on breed and management. Most domestic donkeys range from 0.9 to over 1.4 m tall.

Donkeys have developed very loud vocalizations, which help keep in contact with other donkeys over the wide spaces of the desert. The best-known call is referred to a "bray," which can be heard for over three kilometers. Donkeys have larger ears than horses. Their longer ears may pick up more distant sounds, and may help cool the donkey's blood. Donkeys in the wild can defend themselves with a powerful kick of their hind legs as well as by biting and striking with their front feet.

Donkeys' tough digestive system is somewhat less prone to colic than that of horses, can break down near-inedible vegetation and extract moisture from food very efficiently. As a rule, donkeys need smaller amounts of feed than horses of comparable height and weight. Because they are easy keepers, if overfed, donkeys are also quite susceptible to developing a condition called laminitis.

## Animal species of this issue

### **Water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*)**



Kingdom: Animalia & Phylum: Chordata & Class: Mammalia & Order: Artiodactyla & Family: Bovidae & Subfamily: Bovinae & Tribe: Bovini & Genus: *Bubalus* & Species: *B. bubalis*

The **water buffalo** or **domestic Asian water buffalo** (*Bubalus bubalis*) is a large bovine animal, frequently used as livestock in southern Asia, and also widely in South America, southern Europe, north Africa, and elsewhere.

Buffalo are used as draft, meat, and dairy animals. Their dung is used as a fertilizer and as a fuel when dried. In Chonburi, Thailand, and in South western region of Karnataka, India, there are annual water buffalo races known as Kambala. A few have also found use as pack animals carrying loads even for special forces.

Adult Water Buffalo range in size from 400 to 900 kg for the domestic breeds, while the wild animals are nearly 3 m long and 2 m tall, weighing up to 1,200 kg; females are about two-thirds this size.

River buffalo are usually black and have long curled horns, whereas swamp buffalo can be black or white, or both, with gently curved horns. The largest recorded horns are just under 2 metres long.