

March 2019

Individuality:

Discovering who you are meant to be so you can make a difference



Okapi

The okapi (oh-COP-ee) is so secretive that only the people of Central Africa's Ituri Forest knew it existed until about 1901, when the strange-looking animal was discovered by British explorer Sir Harry Johnston.

With its striped hindquarters and front legs, you might think "zebra," but what about its head and neck? Hmm. It has dark reddish-brown fur, large ears which hear even the smallest sounds, and a long tongue to strip buds and leaves from branches. Would you believe the okapi is the only living relative of the giraffe?

While the giraffe is perfectly proportioned to browse tall trees out on the savanna, the okapi is built for the forest. Its neck is long enough to reach tropical trees there. Velvety fur has

oil to repel water – perfect for a rainforest! And the male's horns slant backwards to keep from getting tangled in branches.

Okapis travel about a half mile each day, browsing for food. They are most active in the afternoon and evening. Unusual markings provide good camouflage when sunlight filters through dark vegetation, and their stripes might also help a calf keep up with its mother.

Giraffes often form loose herds, but the okapi is solitary, except when a mother is traveling with her calf. Okapis communicate with vocalizations and can make sounds too low for humans to hear. Even if you visited their tropical rainforest, it would probably take you days or weeks to see one! Okapis are masters of staying out of sight.

People often don't know what to make of an okapi the first time they see one!