

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Laughing Hyena

by Guy Belleranti

Have you ever heard an animal laugh? Well, if you haven't, you may want to go to your local zoo and visit the hyena exhibit. These large African mammals are known for their loud, chattering laugh!



The laughing hyena is another name for the largest species of hyena, the spotted hyena. While they look kind of like very large dogs they are actually more closely related to cats.

However, the  
their smaller r



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r own along with  
g aardwolves.

Do lau  
wouldn't confuse their voices for human beings. They also make wailing calls, groans, squeals and many other noises to communicate with one another. In fact, spotted hyenas are among Africa's most vocal animals.

gging, but you

Spotted hyenas live in groups called clans. Some clans have over 80 members. Each clan marks out a territory and it defends against other clans. Females, who are slightly larger and more aggressive than males, are in charge of the clans. Females are also great moms.



They usually give birth to two cubs, and are very protective. They provide milk to their cubs for over a year.

Spotted hyenas play an important role as scavengers. They clean up predator's leftovers and even garbage left by humans. With their strong jaws and teeth they can even crush and digest bones. While they are mainly meat eaters, they occasionally eat plants, too.

Spotted hyenas are intelligent and bold hunters. They have good eyesight and hearing and do most of their hunting at night. Sometimes they hunt rabbits, rodents, small reptiles, insects, and birds. They also hunt larger animals such as gazelles, wildebeest, zebras, and antelopes. They hunt in packs, much like wolves. They are fast and agile and can run for miles, much longer than the prey they hunt.



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While some spotted hyenas live high in the mountains, more live in grasslands and semi-desert brushy areas. This brings them into frequent conflict with lions. Sometimes they'll clean up the leftovers lions leave behind. Other times lions steal the food hyenas have hunted or found.

While hyenas are excellent hunters, they still have to be cautious of predators. Lions and leopards will sometimes attack hyenas for food. Sometimes they are even hunted by other hyenas from different clans.



## About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with snakes and teaching others.

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1. Laughing hyenas are...
- a. a type of dog
  - b. a type of cat
  - c. a type of reptile
  - d. neither a dog nor a cat

2. Explain how hyenas' hunting habits are similar to wolves' hunting habits.

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3. Explain how



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4. What is an aardwolf?
- a. a member of the hyena family that eats mostly insects
  - b. a rare breed of Asian hyena with stripes
  - c. another name for a spotted hyena
  - d. an extinct African animal that was related to hyenas

5. Which statement about hyenas is true?
- a. Male hyenas are usually the leaders of the clan.
  - b. Female hyenas are usually more aggressive than males.
  - c. Female hyenas do not live in the same clans as male hyenas.
  - d. Male hyenas are usually larger than females.

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. confuse

a. careful

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. territory

b. mix-up

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. clan

c. deer-like animals

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. p

**PREVIEW**  
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that live

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. s

considers its own

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. digest

f. wanting to keep someone or something safe

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. gazelles

g. animals that feed on dead animals and leftovers from other animals' meals

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. cautious

h. break down of food by the body's stomach and intestines

◆ Now try this: On a sheet of lined paper, use each vocabulary word from above in a sentence.

# ANSWER KEY

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1. Laughing hyenas are... **d**
- a. a type of dog
  - b. a type of cat
  - c. a type of reptile
  - d. **neither a dog nor a cat**

2. Explain how hyenas' hunting habits are similar to wolves' hunting habits.

**Both hyenas and wolves hunt in large packs. They can also chase down sick or injured animals from large herds.**

3. Explain how lions are both dangerous and helpful to hyenas.

**Lions are dangerous because they hunt and eat hyenas. They are helpful because they lead.**

4. What is

- a. **a**
- b. a rare breed of Asian hyena with stripes
- c. another name for a spotted hyena
- d. an extinct African animal that was related to hyenas



5. Which statement about hyenas is true?
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# ANSWER KEY

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

**b** 1. confuse

**a.** careful

**e** 2. territory

**b.** mix-up

**d** 3. clan

**c.** deer-like animals

**f** 4. protect



# PREVIEW

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at live

**g** 5. scavengers

**c.** area that an animal considers its own

**h** 6. digest

**f.** wanting to keep someone or something safe

**c** 7. gazelles

**g.** animals that feed on dead animals and leftovers from other animals' meals

**a** 8. cautious

**h.** break down of food by the body's stomach and intestines

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