

BEACH BUMS

Hippos can be bad tempered; that's for sure. But they have another, more peaceful, side to their personalities, too.

The name *hippopotamus* means "water horse" or "river horse" in Greek. Hippos aren't actually related to horses. Their closest living relatives are whales. But hippos *do* live up to the other part of their name: They really love water! In their hot, sunny African home, they'll spend up to 18 hours a day chilling out in rivers or lakes.

Hippos are specially built for life in the water. Their eyes, ears, and nostrils are on the tops of their heads. That lets them get almost all the way under the water for maximum cooling, while still being able to see, hear, and breathe.

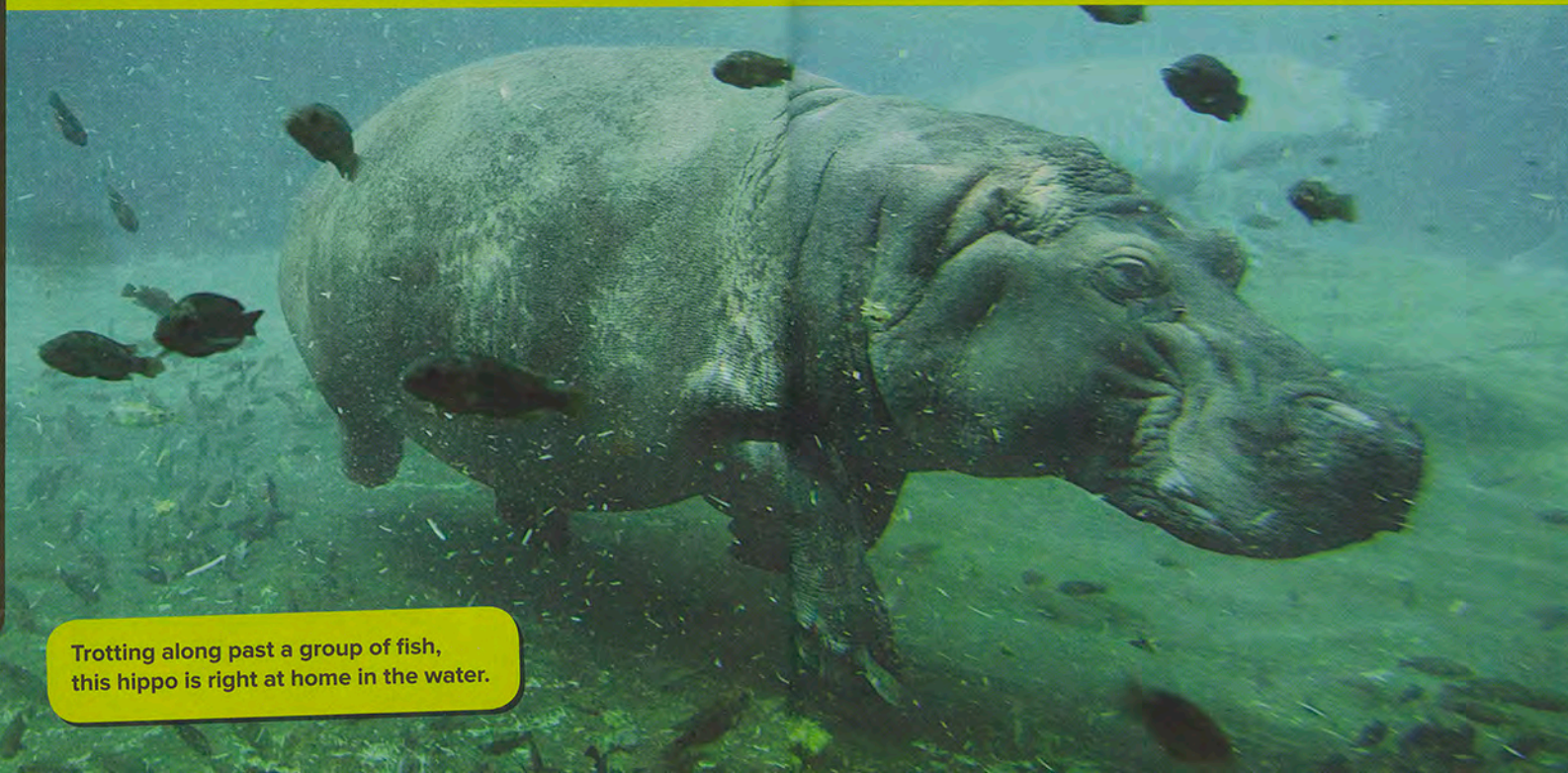
When they want to, though, hippos can go completely underwater. And they often do. A hippo will stroll along a lake or river bottom, looking for water plants to eat. Its toes are connected by webbing, which helps it push through the water. Special, clear eyelids act as built-in goggles to help it see. And its nostrils close up tightly to keep water from getting inside its nose. A hippo can stay underwater for about five minutes before it has to come up to take a breath.



Hippos don't mind a crowd. They like to hang out in big, squashed-together groups in the water or in mud near the shore.



Water spurts from this male hippo's nostrils as he surfaces with a threatening snort.



Trotting along past a group of fish, this hippo is right at home in the water.

NOISE MAKERS

Hippos hang out in herds of 10 to 30 members, though some herds can be bigger. A herd is made up of mostly adult females and their calves, but also some adult males. One of those males is the boss of the whole group. He protects the herd by attacking any intruders that trespass in his territory. That includes animals, people, or even boats!

Hippos aren't quiet animals at all. Herd members "talk" to each other with all kinds of sounds, including bellows, snorts, honks, grumbles, squeaks, and clicks. They make these sounds both in the air and under the water. Some of the sounds are almost as loud as noise you'd hear at a rock concert!