

Rock hyrax songs are complex and use syntax

Rock hyraxes have at least 21 different vocalizations, including trills, yips, grunts, wails, snorts, twitters, shrieks, growls, and whistles. Males also sing complex songs that can last for several minutes and serve a territorial purpose, like bird song. When researchers looked at how males put together different syllables (wails, chucks, snorts, squeaks, and tweets) to compose a song, they found the order of the syllables was significant; that is, hyrax songs make use of syntax, the manner in which different elements are combined. They also found hyraxes from different regions used different local dialects in their songs.

Hyraxes have dedicated bathrooms

Odd as it may seem, hyrax colonies actually demarcate particular spaces for toilet areas. There are specific places, usually under rocky ledges, where urine and faeces are deposited. Generations of the colony use the very same spot over thousands of years, which has offered fascinating insight into the lives of hyraxes over time.

Predator enemies

In the wild, eagles, lions, leopards and other larger predators feed on hyraxes. Hyraxes can be fierce biters, though, so they're not the easiest of prey. The Verreaux's eagle feeds on hyraxes almost exclusively.



Sources:

Africafreak.com, Britannica.com and wired.com



Want to learn more about the exciting environment of the Greater Woodmead Estate?

**Join our WhatsApp info group...
Email your details to Chelsea to be added to the group:
chelseak@ccj.co.za**



Join us on WhatsApp



THE COUNTRY CLUB
JOHANNESBURG



Rock Hyrax

**No.3 in a series:
Mammals of the Country Club Estate**



At Country Club we are very fortunate to have resident Rock hyrax, also referred to as dassies or rock rabbits. They are frequently seen at Castle Rock or at the entrance and exit points of the nearby drainage pipe. Here are some fascinating facts about these furry bundles:



Rock Hyraxes spend a lot of time sun-bathing

In fact, they spend about 95 percent of their time resting. This can involve 'heaping', in which animals pile on top of each other inside a den, or basking in the sun. Both behaviours are compensations for the hyrax's poor thermo-regulation. They tend to stay in their burrows until the sun is high in the morning and may not leave their dens at all on cold, rainy days.

They have multi-chambered stomachs

Although not ruminants, hyraxes have three-chambered stomachs filled with symbiotic bacteria that help break down the plants they eat. Baby hyraxes are not born with this bacteria, so to obtain it they eat the poop of adult hyraxes.



They're related to elephants and manatees

Their closest genetic relative (in terms of species) is the elephant. Modern hyraxes are members of the Procaviidae family and during the Eocene era (54-48 million years ago), hyraxes of all sizes filled the plains of Africa: from a mouse-sized species to one the size of a small horse. While some evolved into the hyraxes we know today, others appear to have given rise to the elephant and manatee families. Evidence supporting a common ancestor for hyraxes, elephants and manatees comes from some unusual shared characteristics: Elephants, manatees and male hyraxes lack a scrotum and their testicles remain nestled in their abdominal cavity. Hyraxes have tusks, though they may look like the animal's main teeth. This also makes them a relative of the manatee. Males have larger, sharper tusks than females.



Rock hyraxes have padded, sweaty feet

Rock hyrax feet have black, rubbery pads that are moistened by numerous sweat glands. The pads lift up in the centre for a suction cup-like effect that helps them keep their grip on rocky surfaces.



Their testes change with the seasons

Rock hyraxes live in colonies usually dominated by a single male who aggressively defends his territory and females from rivals. During the breeding season, the dominant male is especially territorial and aggressive and his testicles can grow 20 times larger than their non-breeding season size.

They have a special claw for grooming

Hyrax toes have rounded, hoof-like nails, except the inside rear toe, which has a long nail called a grooming claw. The grooming claw is used to pick through hair and scratch itchy spots.