

Take children on a safari adventure and see some of the most impressive animals on earth! Even though these animals live far away, many children are fascinated by their size, sounds, speed and strength.

Down by the waterhole

The water tray can be a fun way to introduce these wild animals, as they visit the waterhole to drink:

- Create a pool in the water tray with sand or soil around it.



- Use the Safari stones to make footprints in the sand or soil – you might want to begin with just a few of the stones.
- Explain that the waterhole is in Africa and lots of large animals come to drink there – leaving lots of footprints! Which animals might they be?
- Provide some small-world play safari animals so the children can take them to the waterhole to drink as well. Don't be too surprised if the predators start hunting down their prey! Children might also enjoy matching a small-world animal figure to the stone with its footprint on.
- Children can explore the unusual shapes of the footprints some more by pressing the stones into clay – a fun way to develop hand control and fine motor skills, as they learn how much pressure to apply.

Into the wild

Many children will already have some knowledge about safari animals, which you can build on:

- Which of the animals are big cats? Which is a bird – it has wings, but can it fly? Which animals have horns or tusks? Which are good at running fast? Which are tall? Which one lives in water?



- What do the animals eat? Which ones eat plants, other animals or both?
- Look at the shape of the footprints – some are quite unusual. Which animals have four toes? Is the zebra's foot similar to another animal they know? Which feet are hooves and which feet have claws?
- Zebras and elephants leave footprints over a huge area, as they travel a long way to find water. You might like to show a video of a vast herd of zebra migrating – maybe with lions and other predators following them.
- Several of these animals are endangered or vulnerable. Talk about how we can protect them and the habitats where they live.

Biggest and best

Talking about the size and speed of these impressive animals can naturally lead into comparing length, heights and weights, measuring time and using mathematical language:

Giraffe

- Tallest animal on land – can be over 5m tall.
- In an outdoor area, measure out 5m on the ground. If the children lie down, you can mark how tall they are and compare this to the giraffe's height.

Elephant

- Biggest and heaviest animal on land – can weigh over 6000kg.
- Largest footprint – up to 50cm long.
- Cut out a life-size elephant footprint, copying the shape from the stone. Children could use paint to make footprints with their own feet and talk about which is bigger/smaller.

Cheetah

- Fastest animal on land – can get up to 70mph.
- A cheetah can run 10m in about 0.32 seconds. Use a timer to time how long children take to run 10m – are they as fast as a cheetah?

Lion

- Biggest cat, and also one of the loudest animals – its roar can be heard up to five miles away!
- Have fun seeing who can roar the loudest! You could mention a place the children know that is about five miles from your setting, and tell them if a lion was roaring there, they would be able to hear it.



On safari

Children will love safari role-play:

- What will they need to visit an African nature reserve? A sun hat and binoculars are essential! You could make binoculars using toilet rolls and coloured paper.
- A map is always useful – children could stick pictures of the animals (or their footprints) to a map to pinpoint where in Africa they will need to go.
- Moving like a wild animal is great fun! Can they chase like a cheetah, prowl like a lion or waddle like a hippo? You could play, 'The Elephant' from *Carnival of the Animals* by Saint-Saëns and ask which animal it sounds like. Can they move like an elephant to the music?

Get talking – useful words

Africa, savanna, waterhole, predator, prey, hunt, stalk, prowl, waddle, taller/tallest, faster/fastest, bigger/biggest, heavier/heaviest, tusk, horn, claws

Books about safari animals

Dear Zoo by Rod Campbell

Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae

The Ugly Five by Julia Donaldson

The Lion Inside by Rachel Bright