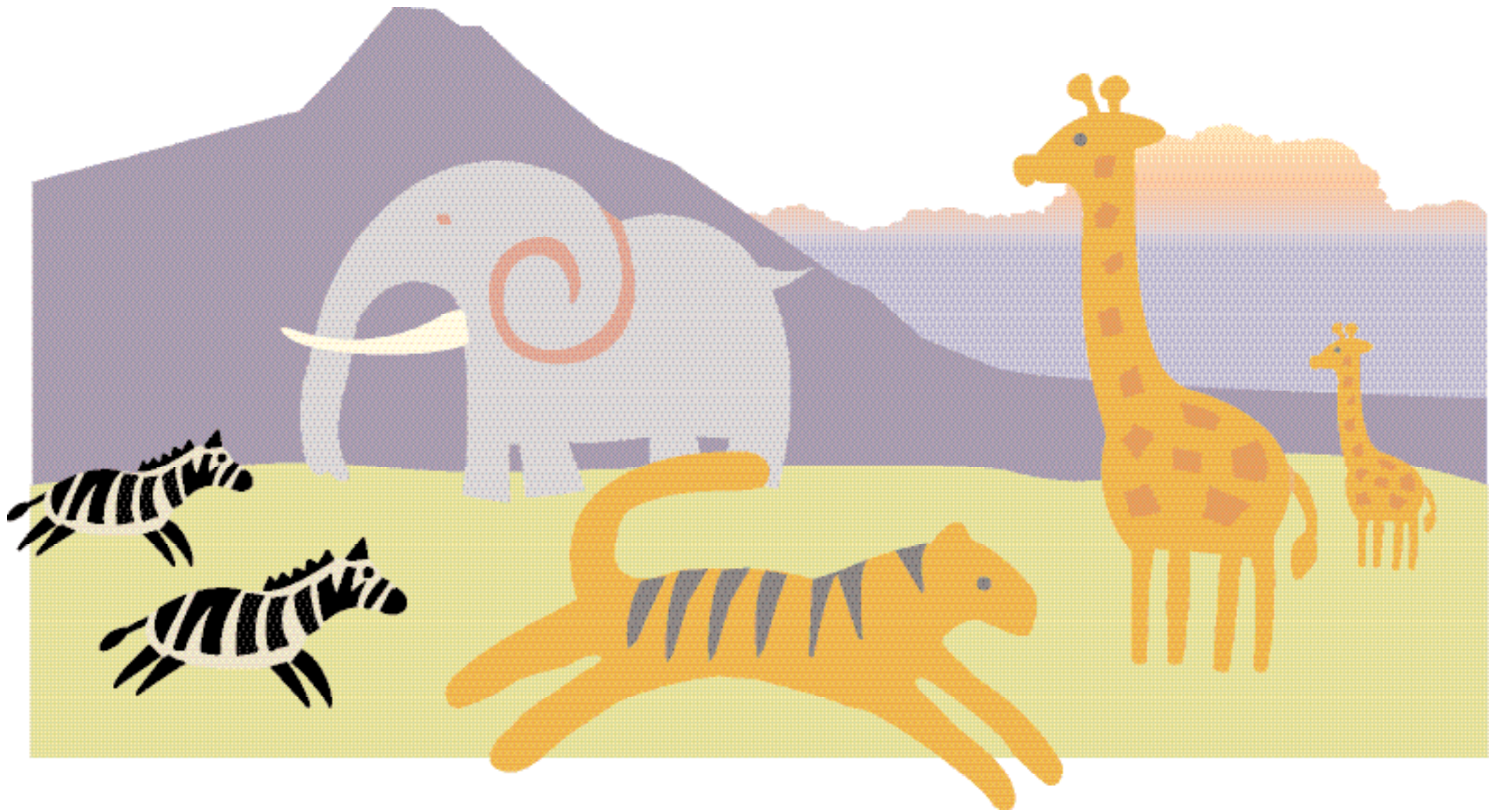


Survival on the savannah



Lions and tigers and giraffes, oh my!

By Benjamin Mendiola
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One hot summer day in July, my family and I went to the Mombasa Savanna. Savannas cover almost one-fourth of the earth.

The tour guide seemed very friendly. First he took us around the city, and then he took us out on a dirt path. When we got to a certain spot, he asked us to get out and enjoy the wildlife.

"Wow," I whispered. The tour guide explained the rules: don't ride the zebra or gazelle, don't disturb the giraffes, and above all, don't wake the lions.

It was breathtaking! We looked into a pond. A school of cichlids were swimming about. You could see a wonderful view of Mount Kilimanjaro. A juvenile Verreaux eagle was sitting in a nest on a rock cliff. Verreaux eagle nests are used for centuries.

We walked to an open space filled with birds. A secretary bird was eating a cobra. Another was stomping on another cobra. An ostrich was sitting on its eggs. The African ostrich can weigh up to 300 pounds.

After we looked at the birds, I decided to go back to see the giraffes.

When we had walked back, there were no giraffes. I wondered, "That's funny, there were hundreds of giraffes here earlier!" I wandered over to a eucalyptus tree. I watched a serval sit on a rock. Servals are similar to cheetahs, but hunt smaller animals.

It suddenly leaped from the rock and caught a mouse. I looked back at the giraffes. I saw that a baby giraffe was being born. "Everybody! Over here!" I exclaimed. Since the baby giraffe was getting its first breath of air, I could again see hundreds of giraffes. Only one didn't come to see it. It was longingly staring at an acacia tree. There was an ankle deep river right in front of it. Giraffes refuse ankle deep water, even if there are some very tempting acacia trees on the other side. I looked back at the giraffes where the baby was. The baby giraffe was finally born! Someone had brought his measure tape, so he started measuring the baby giraffe. "Six and a half feet!" he announced. Everyone looked amazed. I wasn't. What did they expect? The giraffe was the tallest animal in the world.

We hiked up a hill. On the other side we saw a large number of elephants grazing in the grass. One was

using its trunk to knock down a tree. Elephants have 60,000 muscles in their trunk. It was the acacia tree that the giraffe was longing to eat. It finally gave up and went to search for more leaves to munch.

I looked for more elephants. I saw a young elephant with its mother. Female elephants are pregnant for two years. They are pregnant longer than any other animal. Two other elephants were swimming, using their trunks as snorkels. Three more were grazing in the grass for the 14th hour of their normal 18. Then I saw lions.

One was eyeing a giraffe. Lions avoid giraffes because their kick can kill one of the top predators. Then I saw a tiger. It was creeping up on an antelope. Then I heard a snap! The tiger was caught in a steel trap! I ran to go help it. The trap seemed impossible to get open. Then an idea popped into my head. I would need a zebra and a lion. No, a lion wouldn't work. It would eat the zebra right off the bat. I needed the best patch of grass in the whole savanna.

Well, those things were very hard to find, but I got them. It was very hard to manage, too. I had to drag the tiger over to the patch of grass. I learned

that it is very hard to tie a rope onto a zebra. I'd have to make a trap. I had to lure the zebra over to the rope, and then quickly tug on it when its leg was in the loop. Too bad it got away.

This time I really did do it. I tied it to the trap, and grabbed a handful of grass. The zebra started dashing to it. The trap held it back, so it tried again.

This time the trap sprung open. It was too overjoyed to speak. The tiger licked its paw, and then limped away. The moment the tiger disappeared into the jungle, a poacher drove past me. I stood paralyzed in fear. He stepped out and looked me over. After what seemed like a million years, he got back into his jeep and drove off, leaving me dazed and unharmed. Then I thought about the tour bus. Had it left me here? I dashed back to the dirt road.

Back at the tour bus, which had not left yet, a few people were waiting in line. I finally got a seat with my family. Then, after a long wait, we took off into the sky.

The author was a third-grader when this entry was submitted last year to the Solano County Reading Association competition.

Meet the Students of Reporter U

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