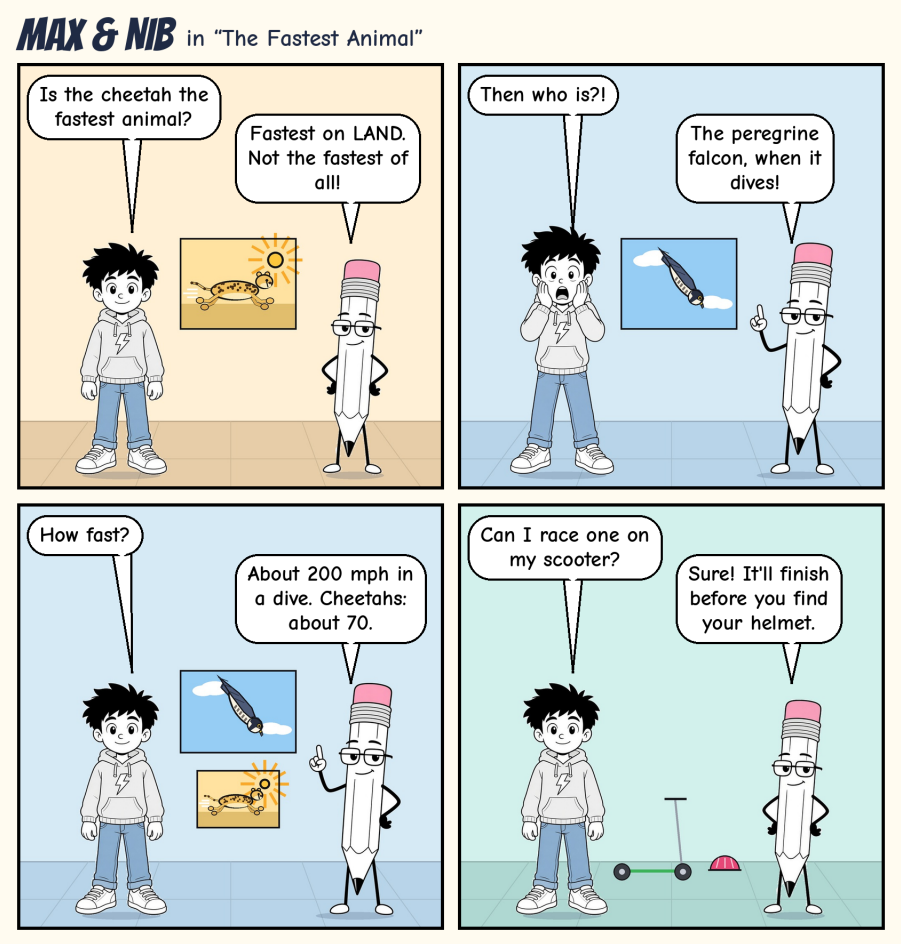


Name: _____ Date: _____

What's the Fastest Animal in the World?

Animal Science · Grades 3–6 · About 15 minutes · Max & Nib

Cool facts

Which animal do you think is the fastest? Most people guess the cheetah. Cheetahs really are the fastest animals on land. They can sprint about 60 to 70 miles per hour, but only for a short distance. The fastest animal of all is a bird: the peregrine falcon. When a peregrine spots a smaller bird to catch, it climbs high in the sky, tucks its wings close to its body, and dives. This super-fast dive is called a stoop. In a stoop, a peregrine can reach about 200 miles per hour! One trained falcon was measured going 242 miles per hour. Its pointed, bullet-like shape helps it slice through the air. When it is just flying along, a peregrine is much slower, about 25 to 40 miles per hour. So the falcon holds the record for diving, and the cheetah holds the record for running.

Questions

1. What is the fastest animal in the world?

2. What is the fastest animal on land?

3. What is a stoop? Explain how a peregrine falcon gets so fast.

4. A diving falcon goes about 200 mph. A cheetah sprints about 70 mph. How much faster is the falcon?

Show your work

Write about it

If you could borrow ONE falcon skill for a day (diving speed, sharp eyes, or flying), which would you pick? What would you do?

Cool Fact Peregrine falcons live on **every continent except Antarctica**. Some even nest on tall city buildings and bridges!

Word Record **Peregrine** comes from a Latin word meaning “to wander” or “travel abroad,” because some peregrines migrate thousands of miles.



What's the Fastest Animal in the World? — Answer Key

Grades 3–6 · For teacher or parent use

Answers

1. What is the fastest animal in the world?

   The peregrine falcon (when it dives).

2. What is the fastest animal on land?

   The cheetah.

3. What is a stoop? Explain how a peregrine falcon gets so fast.

   A stoop is the falcon's super-fast hunting dive. It climbs high, tucks its wings close to its body, and dives, so its pointed, bullet-like shape slices through the air.

4. A diving falcon goes about 200 mph. A cheetah sprints about 70 mph. How much faster is the falcon?

   About 130 mph faster (200 − 70 = 130).

Writing prompt: If you could borrow ONE falcon skill for a day (diving speed, sharp eyes, or flying), which would you pick? What would you do?
Accept any reasoned answer for the writing prompt. For adults: a peregrine's dive is usually given as about 200 mph (320 km/h); the fastest recorded dive was 242 mph by a trained falcon in 1999 (some experts say that test started higher than wild dives). Level flight is about 25 to 40 mph. Cheetahs reach about 60 to 70 mph for only about 300 yards (Smithsonian's National Zoo).

Sources

- Smithsonian Magazine: The World's Fastest Animal Takes New York — https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-worlds-fastest-animal-takes-new-york-12317871/
- Smithsonian Air & Space: Falling with the Falcon — https://www.smithsonianmag.com/air-space-magazine/falling-with-the-falcon-7491768/
- U.S. National Park Service, Zion: Peregrine Falcon — https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/nature/peregrinefalcon.htm
- Smithsonian's National Zoo: Cheetah — https://www.nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/cheetah

Cool Fact Some peregrines that nest on the far-north tundra may fly up to about **15,000 miles** in one year of migrating!

Cool Fact Peregrine falcons were once close to disappearing. Thanks to **conservation efforts**, they are now one of the most widespread birds in the world.