

READING BIG FEET 2

The young giraffe spent the next week or two within eyesight of the herd. He followed them on the edge of the grazing area but never came closer to risk the wrath of his father, Mombato. As the months went by, Guruto wandered further and further away from the herd until he found himself alone on the great plains of Africa. This, of course, was not a safe place for a single animal. Predators could single out one animal outside the herd, track them down and kill them. Guruto, however, had such large hooves that they scared off the predators because of their noise. Once a lioness tried to attack Guruto, and one kick from his rear hooves sent the hungry lion backwards into the brush. Realizing that this giraffe was too formidable to attack, the other lions kept their distance.

One day when Guruto was drinking from a pond, he noticed a brightly colored head coming out of the side of the mud bank. He had learned to be

very wary of strange things and he watched intently as a bird emerged from an apparent nest. The bird came into full view and Guruto could see it was a young bird with a very long beak. The giraffe stopped drinking as it watched the young bird slowly walk towards him. Before Guruto could move the bird hopped onto his head and held on as the startled giraffe lifted up in surprise. The bird was a juvenile kingfisher. Guruto knew that the bird's parents had not come back to the nest since he was very hungry and frightened. Guruto learned the bird ate small fish, and other living creatures around the pond. The giraffe used his large feet to dig in the water and uncover small animals for the bird to eat.

The young bird stayed for a while on Guruto's head and then slowly walked and slid down his neck to rest comfortably on the giraffe's broad back. The tiny claws tickled as he walked around on his back and it felt good to have another animal that was not dangerous and was to become his friend. As time passed the kingfisher grew and

began flying short flights but could not fly back up to the height of the giraffe. Guruto would lean down and the bird would climb on his head again and soon take his perch on his back. Since the bird ate small fish, frogs and small creatures that resided in and around the watering holes, the giraffe always made sure he was close to ponds so his new friend could eat and drink. They soon began to communicate by gestures and sounds that would indicate their intentions. This unlikely pair had truly developed a unique friendship.

As time went by, both animals continued to grow to young adulthood. Soon the bird would fly off the back of the giraffe and find new watering holes and come back to lead Guruto to a new pond for water and for him to catch fish. The kingfisher would fly swiftly along the surface of the water and spear unsuspecting fish with his long beak, then toss them in the air and catch them with his mouth. The giraffe and bird had now become inseparable. The bird became Guruto's scout and would squawk

loudly, wak, wak, wak, when he saw a dangerous animal in the vicinity. At times he would swoop down and pass over the head of a lion or cheetah and peck him in the head. This sudden attack, along with the large giraffe with big feet, would scare off any predators.

Guruto grew in height and strength and was more than 20 feet tall and weighed over 4000 pounds. Together with his feathered friend, they became very wise in the ways of the Great Plains. He was four years old now and was larger and more powerful than any other giraffe. The kingfisher had matured into a colorful male bird and loyal friend to Guruto. As a team, these two animals were an imposing pair with the large size of Guruto and the speedy, aggressive kingfisher.

One dafternoon the kingfisher was flying in search of a new pond and Guruto was grazing among some tall trees, he sensed the presence of his old herd. At that time, he began to turn away for

fear that he would be spotted and ridiculed again for his big feet. As he turned to move in the other direction, he heard the sudden barking of hyenas, who had apparently circled a giraffe that had fallen behind the herd as they marched off to the watering hole.

At first, he thought he should not interfere, as he was not part of the herd, but then felt he needed to at least investigate who might be in danger. As he walked toward the sound of the hungry hyenas, he sensed that one of his own family members might be in danger. From his tall height, he could see across the plain and realized the giraffe surrounded by the hyenas was none other than his own mother.

Without thinking, Guruto broke into a gallop as he raced across the plain to come to his mother's aid. As he ran faster and faster, his hooves made a thunderous sound that began to shake the earth in an ever-widening pattern across the plain. The kingfisher could hear the rumbling of the giraffe's

hooves and quickly flew back to his friend to assist in whatever danger there might be.

Sensing danger was at hand, the hyenas stopped barking and began looking in different directions to see what this tremor was they felt through the ground. Suddenly a gigantic giraffe appeared on the horizon. The rumbling of the hooves resounded across the plain, vibrating the ground under the hyena's feet. They looked at each other, and even though they were hungry, decided that they had better leave, or they would be trampled to death under the thundering hooves of the enormous animal rapidly approaching them. Guruto ran to his mother as the hyenas scattered into the brush. The kingfisher followed close behind the giraffe, swooping down and pecking the heads of the retreating hyenas.

His mother, who was now a little older, had damaged her leg and fallen into a shallow ravine. Guruto to her side and suddenly she realized this

was her long-lost son that had come back to save her. He nudged his mother back to her feet and then escorted her back to the herd as they were approaching the watering hole. The bird, satisfied that he had helped in chasing off the hyenas, flew back to Guruto and took his perch on the back of the giraffe.

The other giraffes, realizing that Guruto had rescued his mother, came up to him and welcomed him back to the herd. His father, standing aloof and to the side, realized that his son had truly grown into his hooves. Although he still made the thunderous noise when he ran, he knew that his son was meant to be his successor as leader of the herd. All the other giraffes gathered around and rejoiced that Guruto was back. His mother and sister happily welcomed him and rubbed their necks in approval as he proudly walked gallantly through the herd and took his rightful place beside his father, along with his friend the kingfisher.

QUESTIONNAIRE:

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2. What do these birds eat?
3. How tall is Guruto and how much does he weigh?
4. What type of animals did he hear barking?
5. What was it that frightened them?

6. Who did he rescue?
7. What happened when he returns to the herd?

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The thundering hooves of Guruto

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He becomes the leader