



# HIS Nature

All the days ordained for me were written in  
your book before one of them came to be.  
PSALM 139:16

## LONGEVITY

**H**ave you ever wondered how long you will live or when you will die? People are unique among God's creatures because we can ponder such questions. No fish or bird or insect worries about death, as far as we know. Elephants mourn the passing of a member of their herd, but there is no evidence that they recognize their own mortality. We alone fear death. It is not surprising, then, that many scientists labor to understand why some organisms live longer than others.

The study of longevity in Christ's creatures has produced a wealth of fascinating information. If we examine the life spans of animals we immediately see a general trend, sovereignly set into place by God. Larger mammals, such as the rhinoceros, the hippopotamus, and the elephant, can all live 40 years or more. On the other hand, the chipmunk, the hamster, and the diminutive shrew—each a relatively small mammal—may thrive fewer than five years. (In the shrew's case, it is often less than a year.) But



*Giant Tortoise*

stature alone does not always predict longevity. The resilient beaver may swim the ponds and rivers of Earth for 30 years, yet a similarly sized opossum usually survives two years at the most.

Scientists have actually found that brain size is a more accurate indicator of life expectancy than body size. Mammals with large craniums, such as whales, dolphins, and apes, tend to live much longer than mammals with smaller brains.

Another very important way of determining a creature's longevity is measuring its metabolism. It seems that our Lord Jesus blesses each of his creatures

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with approximately 800 million heartbeats. In other words, an animal's heart pumps an average of 800 million times in its life. Animals with a high metabolism (and thus a rapid heartbeat) reach the 800 million limit much sooner than those animals with a sluggish disposition. A hummingbird's heart maintains an incredible pace of 600 to 700 beats per minute—while at rest. It has a much shorter life span than a whale, whose pulse average is 20 beats a minute.

Warm-blooded creatures don't necessarily outlast cold-blooded ones. The shy Gila monster endures desert heat up to 20 years—living much longer than a gerbil. The oldest fish known to date is a sturgeon. One of its species managed to evade fishermen for 82 years before being caught. And it is well established that box turtles and sea anemones can live for more than a century.

The world record for all animals, however, goes to the giant tortoise. In 1766, a giant tortoise was caught on the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean by the French explorer Marion de Fresne. At the time of its capture, no one knew the reptile's age, although it was suspected to be a full-grown adult. The tortoise then lived in an army barracks until the year 1918. It survived captivity for 152 years. Only God knows for sure how many decades passed between its hatching and death.

Christ's sovereignty is clearly revealed when examining the life spans of His creations. An earthworm may enjoy 10 full years of wiggling, yet a mayfly dies seven or eight hours after becoming an adult. A common housefly is considered elderly if it survives past a month, yet an ant can live seven years.

Our Majesty's absolute authority is not limited to the animal kingdom either. Individual giant sequoia trees have graced our planet for over 2,000 years, having stretched their leaves and branches toward the sky ever since Jesus walked upon the Earth. Yet, a flower's beauty fades just a few short days after blooming. All this reminds us that it is not how long a plant or an animal lives that is most important, but how God's glory radiates through it during its life span, long or short. The same could be said of man.

One final footnote: Christ Jesus significantly extends our lives, granting us nearly four times as many heartbeats (three billion on average). We need to use this magnanimous gift wisely.

Customer service/subscription number: 1-800-998-0737.  
Published by Jim Kraus, designed by Mary Pappas, edited by Rick Destree. Copyright © 2010 HIS NATURE, issue 03. His Nature is published monthly by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 351 Executive Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188. Printed in the USA. Subscription \$12 per month per 100 copies. Canada: \$14 per 100 per month. Cover photo © WCPmedia/Stockphoto. All rights reserved. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to His Nature, Subscription Services, P.O. Box 464, Mt. Morris, IL 61054.

*For to me, to live is Christ  
and to die is gain.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:21