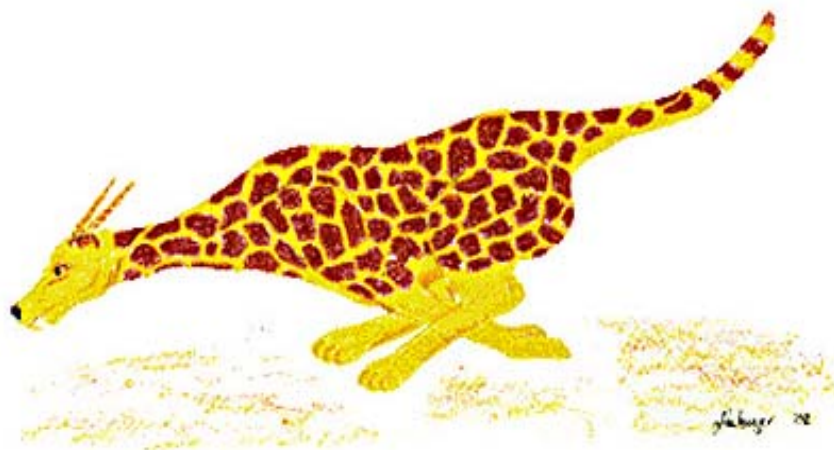


Wind Hunter

Large Animal

HD:	4d8+16 (34 hp)
Initiative:	+5
Speed:	60 ft.
Armor Class:	16 (-1 size, +5 Dex, +2 Natural), touch 14, flat-footed 11
Base Attack/Grapple:	+2/+10
Attack:	Claw +7 melee (1d6+4)
Full Attack:	2 claws +7 melee (1d6+4) and bite +1 (1d8+4) melee
Space/Reach:	10 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Trip
Special Qualities:	Scent
Saves:	Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +1
Abilities:	Str 18, Dex 20, Con 18, Int 3, Wis 13, Cha 10
Skills:	Hide +8, Listen +5, Spot +5,
Feats:	Alertness, Weapon Finesse (claw)



Range:	Grass Desert
Habitat:	Open grasslands
Organization:	solitary (EL 3), pride (2-8) (EL 5-9)
Challenge Rating:	3
Treasure:	None
Alignment:	Always neutral
Advancement:	5-12 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment:	+2 (cohort)

Special Qualities:

Trip (Ex): A wind hunter that hits with a claw attack can attempt to trip its opponent as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity (trip check +8, including +4 bonus for size). The opponent cannot react to trip the wind hunter if the attempt fails. Tripped opponents are prone.

Scent (Ex): Wind hunters can detect opponents by sense of smell, generally within 60 feet. For opponents that are up-wind, the range is 120 feet. If it is downwind, the range is 30 feet. Strong scents can be detected at twice this range and overpowering scents can be detected at three times this range.

Training a Wind Hunter

Training a wind hunter as a mount takes three months and requires a successful Handle Animal check (DC 24 for juveniles, DC 28 for adults) and that the creature is

willing. Wind hunters are usually captured as cubs and raised and trained away from their packs, though they are never considered domesticated. Once broken, the handler or rider treats the animal with a deep respect. Simple rope and leather saddles with stirrups are used, but no bridles or halters are ever used; the animal is instead guided by touch and spoken words. Wind hunters never require additional training to be used in battle. Their natural instincts and weaponry make them ideal war mounts. A wind hunter can attack while carrying a rider, but the rider cannot also attack unless he or she succeeds at a Ride skill check (DC 10).

Carrying Capacity: Light Load: 300 pounds, Medium Load: 600 pounds, Heavy Load: 900 pounds.

Wind hunters are swift carnivores that inhabit the grassy steppe of the Grass Desert.

The wind hunter looks like no other predator in the steppes of the Grass Desert. They are tall, standing 18 hands (6 feet) at the withers. They have long necks and long tails that resemble that of a cat. Their heads are dog shaped with short ears and large saber-like canines. They have two horns that extend from the back of the skull. The horns are about 18 inches long and are twisted like a corkscrew. Wind hunters have massive paws with retractable claws used to grab and trip prey. Adult wind hunters weigh between 1500 - 2000 pounds. Their coats are spotted like a giraffes' with dark brown spots covering the neck, body, tail, and the tops of the legs. The face, head, undercoat, and lower legs are a light yellow to golden color. The tip of the tail is usually ringed with three to four stripes of dark brown. Each wind hunters' coat pattern and tail rings are unique, making it easy to tell individuals apart.



Wind hunter paws: rear (left) and fore (right)

Wind hunters are swift predators, hunting horses, cattle, wind runners, and other large animals. They prefer to hunt in packs, with several wind hunters running through a herd of animals seeking the weak and defenseless, then running the animals to the ground. Their fast speed allows them to chase down nearly all animals except healthy adult wind runners and axaoktarock.

A wind hunter is a very fast and graceful animal, resembling a cheetah in its form. Their normal walking speed is around 6-7 miles per hour (10-11 km/hour). They can trot at speeds up to 12-14 mph (20-22 km/hour) for durations lasting as long as twelve hours, and can gallop at speeds in excess of 20 mph (32 km/hour) for upwards of five hours. When needed, the wind hunter can sprint at near 50 mph (80 km/hour), though usually this burst of speed is for only short distances.

The nomads of the Grass Desert prize wind hunters for their speed, agility, and natural weapons. The Half-Orcs and Orcs call them *baxarg tacock kanugt*, "hunts the wind". Wind hunters are difficult animals to catch, and even tougher to tame. A skilled animal handler can usually break a wind hunter in several months, allowing the animal to be ridden and controlled.

Combat:

Wind hunters are skilled and clever hunters. They will chase down their prey and then trip it up using their front paws. Their jaws deliver bone-crushing bites, tearing flesh from the prey. Their large size and bulk make them formidable opponents.

Example Encounter: At the Watering Hole (EL 3)

The Setting:

Your party travels through the Grass Desert between the towns of Axa Kovar and Axuudax Kurokt. The journey is long and hot through the endless sea of giant grasses. Watering holes are few and far between and the party takes every opportunity to stop and water their animals and refill their waterskins.

At one watering hole, an unexpected surprise lurks in the grass. A female wind hunter, hunting food for her young, stalks this watering hole for an easy meal. The arrival of the PCs and their animals is the opportunity she needs to feed her young. The tall grass around the watering hole provides the female wind hunter the cover to set up her ambush.

The PCs and their animals should make Spot skill checks (**DC 25**) to see the hidden wind hunter. She has set her ambush downwind so animals with the Scent ability are at a disadvantage.

The watering hole is oval in shape and is roughly 50 feet long by 35 feet wide and it is only 3 feet deep at its deepest. A muddy space, devoid of tall grasses, extends for about 50 feet around the watering hole. A couple of cottonwood trees grow near the waters edge. There are many tracks around the watering hole; most are those of wild horses, wind runners, and other animals. There are some tracks of other travelers, or possibly nomads, though none are fresher than 3 days. There are some old tracks of at least 2 wind hunters; these are at least 5 days old.

Female Wind Hunter (CR 3): Large Animal; HD 4d8+16, HP 42, Init: +5, Speed 60 ft., AC: 16, touch 14, flat-footed 11, Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+10, Attack: Claw +7 melee (1d6+4), Full Attack: 2 claws +7 melee (1d6+4) and bite +2 melee (1d8+4); SA: Trip, SQ: Scent; SV: Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 18, Dex 20, Con 18, Int 3, Wis 13, Cha 10; Skills: Hide +8, Listen +5, Spot +5. Feats: Alertness, Weapon Finesse (claw).

The female attacks from ambush from across the watering hole. She selects one of the PCs animals (either a pack animal or horse) and will attempt to run it down. Unless spotted, the wind hunter will have surprise and will race through the shallow water of the watering hole to attack the selected animal. The wind hunter should reach the animal in the first round and make an attack, including a trip attack. On the second round, the wind hunter will continue to attack its prey unless directly threatened. The female will defend a kill until it has lost about half of its hit points. It will then flee the area, hoping to return later to either finish off the kill or hunt down the wounded animal.

Concluding the Encounter:

There are several possible outcomes to this encounter. The wind hunter may succeed in killing its intended prey; it will defend the kill, but not at the risk of its own life. The PCs may kill the animal or merely try to drive it off. If the wind hunter flees, it will head away from its den where its young are located, not wanting to lure any predators there. If not severely wounded the wind hunter will attempt to return to the kill to finish its meal and take some meat back to its cubs. If the attacked animal is only wounded, the wind hunter may attempt to track the wounded animal to finish it off. If the wind hunter fails in its trip attack, the attacked animal, unless it is a companion animal like a paladins' warhorse, will flee into the grass desert. The wind hunter will chase down the prey (it should have no problem catching most normal animals) and complete the kill.

Adventure Hooks:

1. A race promoter from Nephryn hires the party to find and collect several wind hunter pups to be raised and used in gladiatorial races in Nephryn. Finding a wind hunter den and the pups will be difficult enough, but getting the pups away from a highly protective mother might be more dangerous than the party realizes. **(EL 3)**
2. The party encounters a nomadic tribe of Orcs as they cross the Grass Desert. The Orcs declare to the party that all the land seen from horizon to horizon belongs to their clan and, as payment for crossing their land without permission, the tribe's headman declares that the party must prove its skill and valor in the ways of his people. Their task is simple, he says. They must track down and return with a wind hunter, alive and unharmed. Success in this task will earn the party honorary status within the tribe and passage across their lands. **(EL 3)**
3. A caravan merchant in Axa Kovar has been building a bridge across the Green Serpent River several days' ride north of the city. This bridge will become a vital trade route connecting the tribes of the Grass Desert with people north of the river. The bridges' construction has been delayed by the presence of a pair of 'man-eating' wind hunters. This pair of ferocious beasts has killed several workers and scared off the rest. The merchant wants the party to head to the site to 'deal with the problem' so that his bridge may be built. But are the wind hunters really 'man-eaters' or is there something else that drives them to scare off the workers, and why? **(EL 5)**