

# Bigger Than an Elephant

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What is the world's largest living thing? You might think it would be an elephant or a whale. However, think about what a living thing is. The largest living animals

are blue whales. They weigh up to 150 tons, or 300,000 pounds. The largest living land animals are African elephants. They're much smaller than whales. They only weigh 7.5 tons, or 15,000 pounds. Animals are not the only living things on Earth, though. Plants are living things, too.

Most scientists agree that the world's largest living thing is not an animal. Instead, it's a mushroom that is 3.5 miles wide. This honey mushroom lives in the Blue Mountains in Oregon. It covers some 2,200 acres, or more than 1,500 football fields. Its only above-ground signs are patches of dead trees and the mushrooms that form at the base of these trees. The honey mushroom, in fact, kills the trees. Scientists estimate that this mushroom might be 2,400 years old. Like other

mushrooms, it grew from a single spore and sent out threads of cells called hyphae. These hyphae joined and formed a mass that eventually spread for miles underground. The word hyphae is from a Greek word that means "web."

Another massive living organism is named Pando, which is a Latin word that means "I spread." Pando is a group of 43,000 aspen trees that grow together in Utah on 106 acres of land. Scientists estimate that Pando weighs about 6,500 tons, or about 13,000,000 pounds. They also estimate that it could be 80,000 years old. The trees have become able to clone themselves, which means that all of the trees came from the same plant. They are connected at their roots, and they all change the color of their leaves and lose their leaves at the same time.

Even though the honey mushroom and Pando have lived for thousands of years, scientists have only discovered them recently. Even larger living things may still be discovered.



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