



GIANT ANTEATER

PILOSA

Family: *Myrmecophagidae*

Genus: *Myrmecophaga*

Species: *tridactyla*



Range: Southern Mexico, Central America, South to Paraguay & Northern Argentina, & Trinidad

Habitat: savanna, parkland, thorn Scrub, Steppe; montaine & tropical rainforest

Niche: terrestrial, nocturnal, insectivorous

Wild diet: ants, termites, and soft-bodied grubs

Zoo diet: ant chow

Life Span: (Wild) unknown

(Captivity) 25 yrs 10 months recorded

Sexual dimorphism: None

Location in SF Zoo: Puente al Sur

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Giant anteaters are quite distinctive, and are the largest of the anteaters. The snout is long (up to 45 cm in length) while the skull is streamlined with small eyes and ears. The tail is bushy and nearly as long as the body. These anteaters have thick coarse fur that is longer towards the tail (reaching up to 40 cm in length). Their coat is straw-like, brown with black and white stripes on the shoulders and a crest of hair along the middle of the back. Forelegs are white with black bands at the toes, while their hind feet have 5 short claws, and their forefeet have five claws with the inner three being very long and sharp. They shuffle while walking and move slowly but are capable of running quickly if necessary. Their weight is born on the knuckles and wrist to protect the claws. These front limbs provide some defense against its natural predators, the puma and the jaguar.

Weight:	39.6 to 85.8 lbs
HRL:	3.28 to 3.94 ft
TL:	3.5 ft

Giant anteaters have long, tubular snouts, well adapted for working its way into the anthills and termite nests it rips open with its large front claws. The tongue, measring up to 24 in. has backward pointing spine-like protrusions and is covered in sticky saliva, which helps gather the tiny insects it eats. The tongue can be flicked in and out up to 150 times/min. Giant anteaters have no teeth so prey are ground up in its muscular stomach.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Habitat destruction is the primary threat to giant anteaters. They are listed as Appendix II by the (CITES). Appendix II lists a species not necessarily threatened to extinction but one that should be controlled in trade to avoid overuse. They are listed as vulnerable by the (IUCN). 'Vulnerable' is defined as an estimated population reduction of 20% in the next 10 years.

Population reduction in the form of an observed, estimated, inferred or suspected reduction of at least 80% over the last 10 years, or three generations based on a decline in area of occupancy, extent of occurrence or quality of habitat and actual or potential levels of exploitation.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Giant anteaters are usually solitary, except for mother-young pairs, or only coming together for brief periods for courtship and agonistic encounters. They may have large, defined home ranges up to 9,000 ha in area, but they also wander extensively. When giant anteaters encounter each other in the wild they often simply ignore each other or run away, Giant anteaters will become nocturnal in areas of high human density or during certain kinds of weather. They are terrestrial but are good swimmers as well and, though they don't often climb in the wild, they are reported to be skilled at climbing out of enclosures in captivity. Sleeping occurs in abandoned burrows, dense vegetation, or depressions in the ground. Although they have the ability to dig well, they do not construct burrows. When fights do occur, individuals will rear up into a bipedal stance using the tail as balance and forelimbs to fight.

Most communication occurs between young and their mothers or during fighting. It consists of snorts, sniffs, and hisses, as well as roaring during fights. Sight and hearing are diminished. Smell is highly developed (40 times that of humans).

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Giant anteaters can breed year round or seasonally depending on region or as often as every 9 months, though it is often longer. Female gives birth standing up and immediately the young anteater climbs onto her back. Young are born with a full coat of hair and adult-like markings. A mother will carry the baby on her back until it is almost half her size, at about 6 to 9 months. Young suckle for 2 to 6 months, and then become independent after about 24 months (average), or when the mother becomes pregnant again, which may be sooner.

Gestation: avg 190 days

of Mammas:

of Young: 1

Sexual Maturity: M 2.50 to 4 years / F 2.50 to 4 years

Weaning Age: 6 months (average)

Weight at birth: 56.32 oz

MISCELLANEOUS

Of all the Edentates, the anteaters are the only toothless members.

It has been estimated that they can consume up to 30,000 ants and termites a day and their tongue can move in and out 150 times a minute.

The order Pilosa, meaning "hairy", is part of the superorder Xenarthra, meaning "strange joints", with the armadillos. Earlier still, both armadillos and pilosans were classified together with pangolins and the armadillo as the order Edentata meaning "toothless".

Sources:

MacDonald 1984 p 770 - 775

Ill. Ency. Of Plants & Animals © 1979 p 323

http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Myrmecophaga_tridactyla.html

<http://animals.about.com/cs/mammals/p/giantanteater.htm>

<http://www.endangeredandrareanimals.com/edentates.htm>

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