



RED-RUMPED AGOUTI

RODENTIA

Family: *Dasyproctidae*

Genus: *Dasyprocta*

Species: *leporina*



Range: Northeastern South America; in Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, northeastern Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago and Lesser Antilles; introduced to the Virgin Islands

Habitat: Large range of forests including rainforest and secondary forest

Niche: Terrestrial, mainly herbivorous, diurnal but nocturnal if severely hunted in areas

Wild diet: Fruits, nuts, seeds. Occasionally consume fungi, foliage and insects.

Zoo diet:

Life Span: (Wild) 17 years

(Captive) 15 - 20 years

Sexual dimorphism: Females are larger than the male

Location in SF Zoo: Exploration Zone

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Agoutis are related to guinea pigs and look quite similar, but are larger and have longer legs. The agouti has coarse hair that is covered with a water-repelling oily substance. The red-rumped agouti is brownish with darker spots on the upper body with whitish underbelly. The fur becomes more orange as it goes past (going down) the middle area of the animal. The hair is longest on its rump, covering its small or non-existent, hairless tail. The agouti has four front toes and three hind toes, which resemble small hooves; the first toe is very small. They walk on their toes, traveling swiftly when pursued or threatened, and are capable of leaping vertically to 6.5 feet from a standing position.

Weight: 6.6-13.2 lbs
SH:
HRL: 19-25 in
TL:

Agoutis have sharp incisors grow throughout their lifetime; they are used to chew through tough items like nutshells including the Brazil nut;

Agoutis are one of the few species that can open Brazil nuts without tools, as do Macaws. They have a single lateral fold of enamel on their teeth making them much stronger. Agoutis use their molars to grind food items. Dental formula is I1/1, C0/1, P1/1, M3/3 = 22

They are fast runners and good swimmers with long legs and hoof-like claws, which help them to avoid predators. Their sharp hearing and a keen sense of smell help the agouti prepare when a predator is near. They can also hear the fallen fruit and nuts hitting the ground. This same sense of smell and can sniff out food they buried months before.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

In some areas agouti populations have greatly declined because of both hunting and habitat destruction. All agouti species are intensively hunted because their flesh is prized as food by indigenous peoples. Many farmers also regard them as a pest. Despite this, their conservation status is of least concern.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Agoutis are generally wary and elusive. They live in pairs or family groups of the parents and little ones. They need large areas for food, breeding, and territory. Agoutis mark their territory with urine as a form of communication. Adult males defend their territory to ensure the paternity of their offspring. They will fight fiercely among themselves when challenged. Their main defense is to flee from predators, as they repeat high-pitched barks to warn family within the territory. They will raise the hairs on their rump to appear larger. This rodent can jump up to 6 feet straight up in the air from a standing position, spin around, land, and dash off in the opposite direction.

Agoutis den up at night in burrows among boulders, tree roots, hollow logs, or brushy tangles on the forest floor. They will follow troops of monkeys through the forest and eat fruits that they drop. The agouti often eats upright, holding its food with the front feet, just like a squirrel. They bury nuts in the ground for times when food becomes scarce, and, as a result, agoutis are one of the most important mammalian seed dispersers for many species of tropical trees.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Agoutis pair bond for life. During courtship, males will spray the females with urine who then respond with a “frenzy dance”. The female agouti digs separate dens for her young and for herself; burrows are lined with leaves, roots and hair. Baby agoutis are born in one of their mother's several sleeping spots. They are born extremely developed, and are very active soon after birth. Early in the morning on their first day, the mother takes them to potential nest sites dug by other animals, often consisting of crevices or burrows. The babies choose one site and prepare their own nest with leaves and twigs. Agoutis nest in homes too small for predators to enter, but this means the mother is also too large to enter the nest site. Instead, she calls the young in the morning and evening to feed. As the offspring grow, the mother relocates the litter to a larger den. Fathers are barred from the nest while the young are very small. Young stay with their parents until the next litter is born.

Estrous: cycle 34 days

Gestation: 104 - 120 days

of Mammae: 4 pair

of Young: 1 – 3

Sexual Maturity: F 1.5 yrs

Weaning Age: 20 weeks

Weight at birth: 6.8 oz

MISCELLANEOUS

There are 13 different species of agouti and their scientific name “*Dasyprocta*” means “fuzzy butt.” The red-rumped agouti (*Dasyprocta leporina*) is also known as the golden-rumped agouti, orange-rumped agouti or Brazilian agouti. The “common agouti” designates several rodent species of the genus *Dasyprocta* and is the most frequently found diurnal mammal in low-to-middle elevation rain forest. Animals with the common name “agouti” such as the red-rumped agouti (*Dasyprocta leporina*) are not the same as those with the scientific name Agouti (family, Agoutidae).

Sources:

Walker's Mammals of the World Vol II © 1999 by Ronald M. Nowalk, Johns Hopkins University Press, p 1674-1676
<http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Dasyproctidae/>
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