

Red-Rumped Agouti

Scientific Name: *Dasyprocta leporina cayana*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Rodentia

Family: Dasyproctidae



Red Rumped Agoutis are approximately two feet long, with a short tail, and weigh 4 to 5 pounds. Their long legs are adapted for fast running. Although their ears are small, they have excellent hearing. The coat is coarse and glossy, and the coloration is brown to black with a yellow to white under-belly. The agouti is diurnal, although if threatened it will not come out to feed until dusk. They live in excavated burrows under rocks, between tree roots, or in sloping banks. They can jump vertically nearly six feet. They often sit with their bodies erect and their ankles flat on the ground so they can dart off at full speed if threatened.

Breeding is seasonal when fruit is in abundance. In captivity breeding is continuous. Newborns are fully furred with their eyes open, and are able to run

in their first hour after birth. Agoutis are reported to live as mated pairs until death.

There are a number of high-pitched squeaking vocalizations, and an alarm bark similar to that of a small dog. Although they are not currently listed as endangered, there is concern, as they are hunted as a food source.

Range

Southern Mexico to southern South America

Habitat

Forests, thick bush, savannas, Amazon rainforests

Gestation

104-120 days

Litter

Average: 1 to 2

Behavior

Red-rumped agoutis live close to water and construct burrows among limestone boulders, river banks and under tree roots. Each has several sleeping areas -- hollow logs, under dense vegetation, among tree roots -- and well defined paths radiate from the shelters. Basically diurnal, they have become nocturnal where hunted. They walk, trot, and gallop on their toes and can jump up to 6.5 feet. They often sit erect with ankles flat on the ground ready to dart off at full speed. The basic social unit is the mated pair that bond until death. The male aggressively chases off intruding agoutis and severe wounds result from this vicious fighting. When disturbed, they may thump the ground with their hind feet. They have many vocalizations, most notable an alarm bark as they runs from danger. They are important agents of seed-dispersal, as they will often bury fruits and nuts in a cache when food is plentiful.

Reproduction

In red-rumped agoutis, both seasonal and continuous reproduction takes place in captivity. Most births occur between March and July when fruit is abundant. The male sprays the female with urine, causing her to go into a "frenzy dance" which allows the male to approach. Newborns are precocial and are on their feet and can run within an hour of birth. Nursing lasts for 20 weeks.

Wild Diet

Fruits, vegetables, nuts, various succulent plants.