

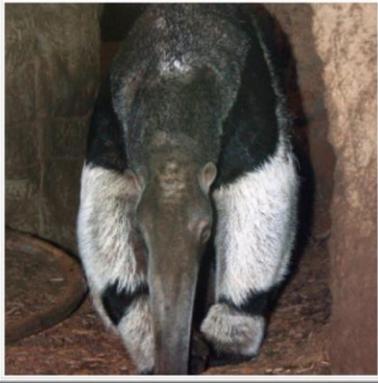
Giant Anteater

Scientific Name: *Myrmecophaga tridactyla*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Xenarthra

Family: Myrmecophagidae



The Giant Anteater has a head and body length of 40 to 48 inches; the tail is 26 to 36 inches; and the weight is 40 to 85 lbs. The body is narrow and the fur is gray with black and white coloring along the shoulders. The hair is coarse and thick, longest on the tail. The head is elongated and tapers to a tubular mouth. The long tongue is covered with a sticky secretion that entraps the ants which the anteater feeds on. They swim well and will readily go in water. They sleep curled up with the head between the forelegs and the tail covering the body. Their main predators, pumas and jaguars, are very careful to avoid the front claws which can kill them. Anteaters probably have weak vision, but a good sense of smell. Once a termite or ant nest is opened the anteater will eat until the stings from the insects become too frequent and painful, then move on to another nest. For this reason, they are not territorial, but rather nomadic. One anteater can consume 35,000 to 50,000 insects per day.

Range

Southern Belize to northern Argentina

Habitat

Savannas, grassland, swampy areas and humid forests

Gestation

Approximately 190 days, but as few as 142 days have been observed

Litter

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Behavior

Giant anteaters are normally diurnal but they can become nocturnal where persecuted. They swim well and will readily go in water. They sleep curled up with the head between the forelegs and the tail covering the body. Their main predators, pumas and jaguars, are very careful to avoid the front claws which can cause serious injuries or death. Anteaters have weak vision, but a good sense of smell. Once a termite or ant nest is opened the anteater will eat until the stings from the insects become too frequent and painful. For this reason they are not territorial but rather nomadic. One anteater can consume 35,000 to 50,000 insects per day. As a result of habitat loss and hunting it has disappeared in many parts of its former range. It is hunted mostly for sport. Unlike other anteater species, the giant anteater does not climb trees.

Reproduction

In giant anteaters, breeding occurs throughout the year. The young weigh 2.2 to 4.4 pounds at birth. They can open their eyes at 6 days and are weaned in 4 to 6 weeks. A young anteater may be carried on its mother's back for as long as a year, by which time it is nearly grown. The young are very playful and the mothers are extremely protective. Sexual maturity is reached at 2.5 to 4 years of age. The young remain with the mother until she is pregnant again. They are fully grown at 2 years and can feed independently.

Wild Diet

Ants, termites and grubs; larvae and adult insects, some fruit