

# AARDVARK

Phylum:Chordata Class:Mammalia Order:Tubulidentata Family:Orycteropodidae  
*Orycteropus afer*

**Fact File:** Aardvark is an Afrikaan word meaning “earth pig”

Size: Height at shoulder is 24”, length is 60”, tail is 24 to 28”, girth is 3’

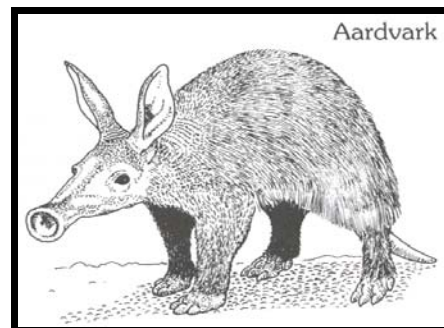
**Weight:** 132 to 176 pounds

**Life Span:** 23 years in captivity

**Habitat:** Dry savanna and rainforests

**Range:** Africa, south of the Sahara Desert

**Status:** Not endangered



**Diet:** Eats only insects; termites being its main food but is also fond of ants

## Special Features:

- ◆ This order contains only one family, Orycteropus, with the single living genus and species.
- ◆ Armadillos resemble a large pig. It has short but sturdy legs. The armadillo’s hind legs have five toes and are longer than the front ones which have only four toes.
- ◆ Its tongue, about 12” long, narrow, flat, and worm shaped, is used for gathering and eating its food.
- ◆ It does have an excellent sense of smell.
- ◆ They are nocturnal animals with eyes only the size of a rabbit; hence they have poor vision - at times crashing into shrubs and bushes.
- ◆ The armadillo’s teeth are unusual. In fact its name tubulidentata - tube teeth - is derived from the unusual structure of them. They are rootless molars that have no enamel, just covered with cementum, and continue to grow all their lives. The teeth are actually columns that contain a central pulp chamber filled with cells, nerves and blood vessels. In addition, there are usually five functional teeth on each side of the upper and lower jaws.
- ◆ They are tremendous diggers. Armadillos have powerful claws on their feet. The front ones are used for digging and the back ones for pushing dirt away. They sometimes use their strong kangaroo-like tails to throw soil from the entrance. They can dig a yard of new tunnel in five minutes. They avoid rocky terrain where they can’t dig and wetlands where the water table is too high. They also shun high elevations because fewer termites live there.
- ◆ Armadillos are good swimmers.

## Habitat:

They are not often seen in the wild because they are nocturnal animals; they spend the day sleeping in their underground tunnels. During their lifetime armadillos apparently dig many underground tunnels, some very extensive with numerous openings. One was found to have 27 entrances, though probably not all connected underground. Other wildlife benefit greatly from the deserted burrows. Many creatures take refuge in them during bush fires that would otherwise cost them their lives while numerous others use them to escape from predators. However, it is mainly the warthogs that use the abandoned burrows for their homes with whole families of these animals found living in them.



**Enemies:**

Predators of the armvark include lions, leopards, and hyenas, and occasionally pythons that eat the young in their burrows. In addition, humans sometimes kill them for meat.

**Breeding:**

They reach sexual maturity at about two years of age. The gestation period is 7 months with generally a single offspring being born. The young armvark follows its mother on the hunt for food at about three weeks of age, but does not eat termites until it is three months old.

At six months the young males leave their mother's tunnel to dig their own burrows a short distance away, but usually continue to forage for food with their mother. When the mother conceives again the young male leaves the area.

However, a young female will remain in her mother's tunnel until the mother conceives again. Then she moves out, but chooses to live close by. For this reason an armvark mother can be seen foraging for food with two young offspring of differing ages.

**Territorial:**

Although armvarks are not considered to be territorial, the females seem to attach themselves to a particular location whereas the males wander. They are solitary animals coming together only for mating.

