



## GIANT ANTEATER

Phylum: Chordata, Class: Mammalia, Order: Xenarthra, Family: Myrmecophagidae  
*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*

The Giant Anteater is one of three subspecies of Edentata. The other two genera of Edentata are the arboreal collared anteater (*Tamandua*), and the arboreal two-toed Anteater (*Cyclopes*). The main difference between these three species is their size. The tamandua is less than half the size of the giant anteater and the cyclopes is only about the size of a squirrel.

**Weight:** 86-140 lbs - Male is approximately 20% larger than the female.

**Height:** 7 feet (nose to tail)

**Lifespan:** Unknown in wild yet may live up to 26 years in captivity.

**Habitat:** tropical savannas, forests and swamp areas

**Range:** various areas ranging from Mexico through Central and South America



**Status:** Giant Anteaters are listed as vulnerable under CITES Appendix II.

**Threats to survival:** Giant Anteaters are threatened and hunted primarily by puma and jaguars. Humans hunt them for their meat. Poachers also kill these animals to show as a “trophy”. At one time, anteaters were believed to be extremely dangerous and were accused of killing dogs and cattle. It was later recognized that this was a false accusation. Anteaters are harmless unless threatened by predators.

**Diet in the wild:** The giant anteater’s diet consists strictly of ants, termites and other insects. Anteaters do not drink directly from a water source, but obtain the water they need from the insects they eat and by licking the moisture from fruits and plants.

**Diet in captivity:** While in captivity at RHR, the giant anteater’s diet consists of a mixture of small leaf eater biscuits, dry dog food, shrimp meal, honey and water.

### Appearance and Physical Characteristics:

Giant anteaters are large mammals with a thick coat of coarse gray hair and a white bordered black strip on both of its shoulders. The tail is long and bushy and can be used as a camouflage shield in the wild. They are four-legged animals and each forelimb consists of 5 fingers while each hind limb consists of 4-5 toes. They tend to walk on the knuckles of their forelimbs due to the extreme length of their claws. These claws are used primarily for scratching open anthills and termite mounds, as well as for defense against predators. These animals are well known by the appearance of their elongated snout, which is used for sniffing and burrowing for food.

All giant anteaters have an extremely long tongue that reaches an amazing 24 inches in length. The tongue is coated with large quantities of saliva, which enables them to consume large amounts of insects in one meal.

### Special Features:

- Anteaters are thought to be one of the first groups of mammals to have reached South America.
- By their external anatomy alone, males and females are hard to tell apart from one another.
- Anteaters are mainly diurnal but are found to be nocturnal in densely populated areas.



- Anteaters do not have teeth.
- The tongue of an anteater has been found to move at the rate of 160 strokes per minute during a single feeding.
- The best sense of the anteater is its sense of smell, as a fact, their sense of smell is 40 times more acute than that of humans.
- Giant anteaters are land animals, yet they can occasionally be found in the water. It is a fact that they are actually good swimmers.
- Because of their large bodies and slow manner, anteaters generally stay on the ground, however, they may climb trees when cornered by a predator.
- These large mammals spend the equivalent of 15 hours a day sleeping.
- Out of all terrestrial animals, anteaters have one of the lowest recorded body temperatures. Their average temperature only reaches 32.7 degrees Celcius/91 degrees Fahrenheit.
- These amazing creatures travel around 46 feet per minute.
- In order to conserve their food supply, the anteater will eat only 140 insects from each mound at a time.

### **Social Organization & Behavior:**

- Giant anteaters are mainly solitary. You will rarely see two anteaters together unless a male and a female are mating, or when a female is with her young.
- They are extremely docile creatures and are inoffensive unless threatened.
- Anteaters are non-territorial and have large home areas that may span up to 9,000 hectares.
- Anteaters are particularly quiet animals and will usually only vocalize when approached by predators.

### **Breeding and Care of Young:**

- Giant anteaters reach sexual maturity at 4 years of age.
- While in the wild, they generally mate in the fall. However, while in captivity, they will more than likely mate in the fall and spring.
- Anteaters have a low reproductive rate.
- Contact between a male and a female anteater only occurs during estrus.
- The gestation period for females lasts anywhere from 145-190 days.
- When giving birth, the female will stand upright using her tail as a balance.
- Anteaters bear a single young at a time.
- As soon as she gives birth, the young will climb directly onto the mother's back where it will remain for up to one year while it continues through its growth process. The young will remain here even though they are able to walk and venture out on their own at 4 weeks of age.
- The mother will suckle her young for up to 6 months.
- Young anteaters do not feed independently until they are 2 years of age.

### **References:**

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