



African Pygmy Hedgehog

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Subphylum: Vertebrata
 Class: Mammalia
 Order: Erinaceomorpha
 Family: Erinaceidae
 Genus: *Atelerix*
 Species: *albiventris*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** African pygmy hedgehogs are found in scattered populations from Senegal in western Africa to southern Somalia and Tanzania on the continent's eastern edge. Their habitats are semiarid areas and dry savannas.
- **Exhibit Location:** Zoo to You Collection

Characteristics

- Length: 6-8 inches; Weight: 18-25 ounces
 Females are typically larger than males.
- African pygmy hedgehogs have long, rather pointed pinkish-brown snouts, with moist, dark noses. They have round, dark eyes, oval brownish ears, and short, white hair on their brows, cheeks, and bellies. The hairs on their backs and sides are modified into ½-1 inch long, un-barbed spines.
- Their back feet have only 4 toes; their front feet have 5.
- Though they have reasonably good eyesight with some degree of color vision, they depend far more on their excellent hearing and sense of smell that can detect prey 2 inches or more below ground.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 2-3 years; **In Captivity** 8-10 years

Behaviors

- African pygmy hedgehogs are solitary and territorial. They find shelter in and under logs, rocks, roots of trees and brush piles, in termite mounds, in burrows, and under buildings.
- They start foraging at dusk and continue through most of the night, then return to their burrows for the day.
- Hedgehogs have a unique muscle, called the orbicularis panniculi, circling their body under the edge of their spiny coat. A frightened hedgehog can roll into a ball and draw the edges of its spiny coat together like a drawstring purse, with its head, belly, and feet tucked inside.
- Vocalizations include chirps, chuffs, hisses, and growls that increase with agitation. When fighting or angry they twitter loudly, and if hurt or badly frightened they scream.
- When encountering a predator, its standard defensive reaction is to tense up all the muscles on its back to cause its spines to stand erect, and then roll into a ball protecting its limbs and head. If it is harassed further, it will twitch in an attempt to jab spines into the predator and make snuffling/grunting noises. Its spines are not released into the skin of an attacker, as those of a porcupine.
- During the dry season when insects are scarce, they aestivate, or become dormant, and live off their stored fat.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** exercising in playpen, handling by keepers

Reproduction

- Hedgehogs become sexually mature at 2 months of age.
- Females ovulate when the conditions are right --- which is typically during the rainy season when food is abundant.
- The male courts the female by running circles around her, twittering, growling, and snorting. During copulation, he secretes a waxy plug that prevents other males from mating with her.
- Gestation is 30-40 days. In the spring after hibernation, usually 3-4 (sometimes up to 10) young are born alive. The mother licks them clean and eats the afterbirth.
- Newborns are blind and weigh about 0.35 ounces. They have soft, white spines at birth. Born with edema (excessive amount of watery fluid in their cells, tissues, or body cavities), their skin is swollen and covers the soft spines. After a few days, the young reabsorb the fluid, exposing the spines. Their eyes open in 8-18 days.
- At 2 weeks, they can roll up. At 6 weeks, they can travel short distances with mom. Nursing stops at 40-45 days, and they leave mom and siblings shortly thereafter.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** worms, snails, arthropods, frogs, lizards, snakes, eggs, nestling birds, small mammals, carrion, fruits, seeds, peanuts, fungi, roots
- **At the Zoo:** dry hedgehog food pellets, mealworms, crickets

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status** Lower Risk; **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- Due to their popularity as pets, collecting them from the wild is no longer allowed.
- Due to their extensive range and stable wild population, the species holds no particular conservation status.
- Predators: Verreaux eagle owls, honey badgers, jackals, wild dogs

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Hedgehogs consume about 1/3 of their body weight at night.
- They lick and chew objects with unfamiliar odors or that possess bothersome substances, producing quantities of foamy saliva that they spread over their spines. This is believed to deter predators and is known as “self-anointing.”
- African pygmy hedgehogs are also known as “4-toed hedgehogs.”
- Researchers at 2 universities have discovered that the blood of both the European and African hedgehogs contains a lipoprotein identical to one of those found in human blood. This lipoprotein contributes to the formation of clots that cause heart attacks. Hedgehogs may eventually contribute a solution to a human health problem.

Sources:

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