



Guanaco

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Subphylum: Vertebrata
 Class: Mammalia
 Order: Artiodactyla
 Family: Camelidae
 Genus: *Lama*
 Species: *guanicoe*



Photos courtesy of Kate Woodle

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** Guanacos can be found in several regions in South America, from the north of Peru to southern Chile, including Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay, as well as on the islands of Tierra del Fuego and Navarino.
- Their habitat ranges from arid to semiarid, including desert grassland, savanna, shrub land and sometimes forest. They can be found at elevations from sea level to over 2 miles.
- **Exhibit Location:** Wildlife Trail

Characteristics

- Height: 3-4 feet at the shoulder; Body Length: 5-6.5 feet; Weight: 250-300 pounds. The male is larger than the female.
- Slightly smaller than and similar in appearance to the llama, the guanaco is the largest wild member of the South American camelids.
- Their woolly coat is a light brown on top with white undersides and grey to black head. They are white around their lips, edges of the ears and insides of the legs.
- Guanacos have short tails, large heads, very long necks and big pointed ears. They have thick skin on the neck to protect it. The upper lip is split in two and is used like fingers to draw in food. Their stomachs have 3 chambers and they are ruminants (an animal that chews a mass of food that is regurgitated from the first stomach chamber and swallowed a second time for thorough digestion).
- They walk on enlarged sole pads, with only the tips of the hooves touching the ground. These pads are moveable and help give grip on rocky and gravelly terrain.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild:** 20-25 years; **In Captivity:** about 28 years

Behaviors

- Guanacos have 3 types of social groups: Family groups - composed of a single breeding male, several females and offspring. The male defends its territory which is marked by large communal defecation piles called latrines. When young males reach 13-15 months of age, they are forced out of the group and will join a bachelor herd, helping limit the size of family groups. Male troops - composed of young males. The young males learn fighting ability through play fights. Solitary males - These are mature males looking for females or herds to take over.
- Adult guanacos can run up to 35 miles per hour.
- When threatened, they alert the herd to flee with a high-pitched bleating call. In the family groups, the male usually runs behind the herd in order to defend them. They also use body language for communication. Ears forward means the guanaco is alarmed, ears laid back is aggression. Tail straight out is alarm and straight up is aggression.
- Males challenge each other in fights to establish dominance. They try to bite each other's front legs, twisting their necks together in the process and try to push each other down to their knees. They may spit when they are fighting. The loser has to leave; the winner becomes leader of the herd.

- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** Boomer balls, logs, browse, sand

Reproduction

- Guanacos reach sexual maturity at about 24 months.
- Mating season is between November and February. The gestation period is about 340 days.
- The female gives birth to a single calf (chulengo) that weighs 17-30 pounds. The female will mate again within 2 weeks but may wait to become pregnant until environmental conditions are right.
- The chulengo is able to graze and run shortly after birth and will nurse for 6-8 months.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** grasses and plants
- **At the Zoo:** Grass hay and herbivore pellets. Kale, lettuce, and carrots are used as treats.

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** Least Concern ; **CITES Appendix:** II
- When Europeans first arrived in South America, there were about 30 million guanacos living there. Today it is estimated that there are about 600,000 and more than 90% live in Argentina. The numbers have drastically reduced due to range degradation and habitat encroachment caused by overstocking with domestic livestock.
- A number of protected areas have been established to help the guanaco to survive.
- Predators: man, mountain lion, fox, puma

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- This bachelor herd of 8 was acquired from the Bronx Zoo in 2009. All were born at the Bronx Zoo, except Archie, who was born at the Detroit Zoo. Ages range from 18 (Gino) to 3 (Willie). Other names include Alfred, Gilbert, Cusco, Pichu, and Fred.
- Guanacos have a calm attitude, so people started to domesticate them, resulting in llamas as pack animals and alpacas as producers of soft wool.
- To help the guanaco survive at high altitudes, its blood is able to carry more oxygen than other mammals. A teaspoon of their blood contains approximately 68 million red blood cells – 4 times that of humans.
- They are excellent swimmers.

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