

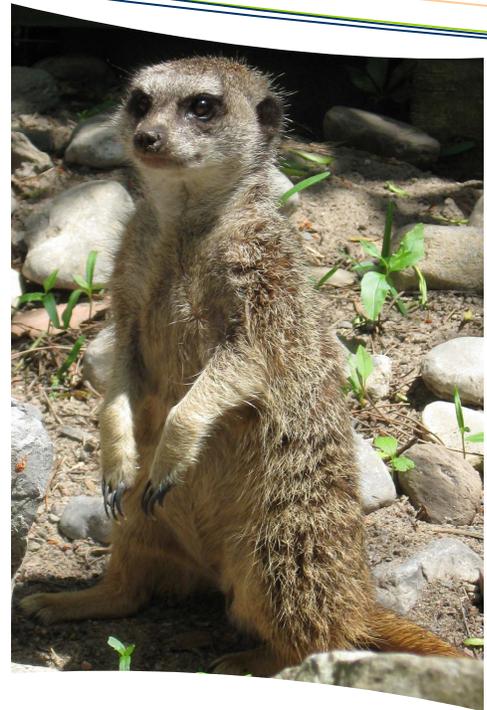
Slender-tailed Meerkat

Suricata suricatta siricata

Kingdom Animalia
Phylum Chordata
Class Mammalia
Order Carnivora
Family Veveridae

Native to: Sub-Saharan Africa

Status: Least Concern



Threats to meerkat populations include predation from wild cats and hawks. Meerkats are a widespread species and are present in many well-managed protected areas in Africa where they are largely protected from threats to their population.

Appearance & Lifespan

The slender-tailed meerkat is a squirrel-sized mongoose with a slim body frame and a pointed nose. It is a small but perky animal that is widely known for its upright posture. The slender-tailed meerkat weighs in at approximately 1 kg (2.2 lb) and is about 25-30 cm (10-12") tall.

The meerkats coat is yellowish brown in colour. Its colouration can vary as each individual hair features alternating bands of light and dark.

Meerkats have long non-retractable claws that are ideal for digging burrows and tunnels.

The lifespan of a meerkat is 10-12 years, in captivity they can live up to 15 years.



Behavior & Reproduction

Slender-tailed meerkats are very social animals who live in colonies. Individuals in the group play different roles within the structured community. For instance, one meerkat may keep guard over the colony from a safe place close by. If a predator is spotted, the entire colony is warned with a shrill call which signals others to run for cover. Other individuals forage for food or group together to hunt while using an array of grunts, purrs and other calls to communicate to one another.

Meerkat family groups dig and use a network of underground tunnels and burrows. This allows the group to stay cool in such a hot environment. Alpha females will give birth to 2-4 young every year and utilize one of the underground rooms to do so.

Family members all take part in raising the young by teaching them to forage and to avoid predators through play.

Ecology & Conservation

The slender-tailed meerkat is widespread in the western parts of southern Africa including Angola, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Within this range the numbers vary and are greatly influenced by rainfall and predation.

Meerkats live in open areas with short grasses and some woody growth and avoid desert and forested areas. They can often be found near the stone koppies (rocky hills) of the African deserts.

They are carnivorous animals who feed on invertebrates. They will eat insects, spiders, grubs and sometimes on small vertebrates like lizards, snakes, birds, fruits and berries.

At the zoo, meerkats feed on a special meat diet provided by the Toronto Zoo, mixed fruit and vegetables, adult-sized mice, crickets and mealworms.

Did You Know?

1. All adult meerkats pitch in to help educate the young in hunting and survival techniques.
2. Young meerkats are so fearful of predatory birds that even airplanes will send them diving for cover.
3. In Zimbabwe and Zaire, the meerkat is known as the "Sun Angel" and protects villages from the "Moon Devil" or werewolf.

