



African Pygmy Hedgehog

Fast Facts



Photo © Denise Soden

Common Name: African Pygmy Hedgehog

Scientific Name: *Atelerix albiventris*

Family: Erinaceidae

Order: Erinaceomorpha

Class: Mammalia

Range: Sub-Saharan Africa



Habitat: Dry grasslands, scrubland, open woodlands

Lifespan: 3-4 years in the wild;
4-6 years in captivity

Conservation Status: Stable



What do they look like?

African pygmy hedgehogs have been domesticated from the African four-toed or white-bellied hedgehogs (*Atelerix albiventris*) and may also have breeding influence from the Algerian hedgehog (*Atelerix algirus*). They are 5-7in long, oval-bodied mammals, covered in a coat of spines. They vary in color from light tan to dark brown. Their faces and bellies are covered in soft fur that is usually white. Spines range between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long and unlike porcupine quills, they do not have barbs on the tips. They have short legs, long snouts, and beady eyes.

How do they behave?

Hedgehogs are solitary, nocturnal animals. They have poor vision and rely highly on smell, touch, and hearing to navigate and hunt. Hedgehogs can cover miles in a single night foraging for food. They have a high tolerance for toxins and have been seen consuming toxic plants, poisonous amphibians, and even scorpions! If they encounter a predator, hedgehogs roll tightly into a ball, protecting their head, belly, and legs. If further harassed, the hedgehog is likely to jolt and hiss in attempt to ward off the predator. Hedgehogs prefer moderate temperatures and will often burrow and enter either a state of estivation (in the summer) or hibernation (in the winter).

What's on the menu?

Hedgehogs are opportunistic omnivores. Their main diet consists of insects, supplemented with small snakes, amphibians, bird eggs, snails, worms, fruit, and grass roots. They require a diet high in protein, low in fat, and must also consume chitin, found in the exoskeletons of insects. At the Zoo, hedgehogs are fed insectivore diet, hard boiled eggs, fruits, vegetables, crickets, and mealworms.

How are they born?

Hedgehogs do not have a specific breeding season. The female will ovulate when conditions are adequate and a male is present. This typically occurs in the rainy season when food is plentiful. The pups are born after a gestation period of approximately 35 days. Typical litter size is usually three to four pups. The young are born helpless and blind, but are reared quickly. Pups reach their adult size by the time they are approximately two months old. Females generally have one or two litters each year but may abandon or cannibalize some or all of the litter if stressed.

What is a fun fact about them?

Hedgehogs display a strange habit of self-anointing or “anting” when introduced to a new or particularly strong-smelling substance. This behavior produces frothy saliva which they then spread onto their spines. This behavior is not fully understood, but it is believed to be a protective behavior, as hedgehogs have been known to self-anoint with poisonous toads, providing their spines with extra defense.

What should you know about them?

Hedgehogs are illegal to keep as pets in California. Temperate climates here could provide all the necessities for hedgehogs to create viable populations if released by irresponsible pet owners. If this were to happen, hedgehogs would become an invasive species. Regulations on hedgehogs also protect wild populations so more are not removed from their natural habitat to be kept as pets.