

Giant Anteaters

As you can probably guess, giant anteaters are animals that eat ants! They also eat termites as well as fruits that have fallen from trees. You can identify giant anteaters by their long thin snouts, which they use to dig into ant mounds to retrieve their favorite food. Giant anteaters are found throughout Central and South America. They are the size of large dogs and they have bushy, thick hair that makes them look even bigger than they are. Giant anteaters also have big, bushy tails that they use to cover themselves so they can keep warm in cold weather.

Giant anteaters have heads that look like long tubes. They have tiny black eyes and small noses at the end of their long snouts. They are truly unique looking animals! Anteaters shuffle along on their four fists with their claws curled up and their snouts to the ground. They keep their claws retracted so they will stay sharp until the anteater needs them to dig into a mound of ants. Anteaters also use their claws to defend themselves from enemies. While anteaters are usually very laid back and mild-mannered, they can become ferocious in order to protect themselves from attackers such as jaguars and pumas, which are their main predators. When anteaters are attacked, they stand up on their hind legs and roar and slash at their attackers with their very sharp claws and powerful forelegs. This will often send predators away in search of prey that is easier to catch.

Anteaters have an excellent sense of smell for finding food inside trees and underground. These animals do not have teeth. Instead of chewing, they grind their food between bumps inside their mouths. Anteaters also have special tongues that they can use to scoop up as many as 30,000 ants and termites each day! An anteater's tongue is about 2 feet long and very thin. It has small spines that point backward and are covered with sticky saliva for grasping ants. The animal's tongue darts in and out of an ant mound up to 150 times per minute. After about one minute at a mound, an anteater will move on to another mound so as not to wipe out its food supply. This way, some ants are left behind to breed more ants.

Most giant anteaters are solitary animals. That is, they keep to themselves except to mate and raise young. Females usually give birth to only one baby at a time. Baby anteaters are called pups, and they are born with a full coat of hair and all of the features of an adult. Pups spend about a year or two riding on their mothers' backs before beginning life on their own.

Giant Anteaters Questions

1. Anteaters
 - a. do not really eat ants.
 - b. eat only ants.
 - c. eat other food besides ants.
 - d. eat only ants and termites.

2. Anteaters have
 - a. long tongues.
 - b. long snouts.
 - c. long tails.
 - d. All of the above

3. Which of the following characteristics make anteaters look bigger than they are?
 - a. They have long tails.
 - b. They have long tongues.
 - c. They have thick bushy fur.
 - d. All of the above

4. Why do anteaters keep their claws retracted?
 - a. It's easier for them to walk that way.
 - b. It keeps their claws sharp.
 - c. They can trick their enemies into thinking they don't have claws.
 - d. None of the above

5. Anteaters are found in
 - a. Africa.
 - b. North America.
 - c. Mexico and Central America.
 - d. Central and South America.

6. Anteaters
 - a. are usually mild mannered but sometimes fierce.
 - b. usually fierce but friendly to humans.
 - c. always very slow and easy going.
 - d. very social animals.

Giant Anteaters Questions (Cont'd)

7. Describe how anteaters defend themselves from predators.

8. Which two animals are mentioned as the main predators of anteaters?

9. Which is not true of anteaters?
 - a. They have very sharp teeth.
 - b. They have no teeth at all.
 - c. They scoop up food with their long, sticky tongues.
 - d. They have a strong sense of smell.

10. Female anteaters
 - a. do not raise their young.
 - b. usually give birth to a litter of several pups.
 - c. usually give birth to only one baby at a time.
 - d. live in large groups while the males hunt for food.

Name _____

Date _____

Giant Anteaters Answers

1. c
2. d
3. c
4. b
5. d
6. a
7. They stand up on their hind legs and roar and slash at their attackers with their very sharp claws and powerful forelegs.
8. jaguars and pumas
9. a
10. c