

# STRIPED SKUNK

CARD 26

GROUP 1: MAMMALS



ORDER  
*Carnivora*

FAMILY  
*Mustelidae*

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Mephitis mephitis*



The striped skunk is a night-time hunter, conspicuously colored to deter its enemies. Skunks live in small groups, often sharing a burrow with the species that dug it, such as a fox or a raccoon.

## KEY FACTS



**SIZES**  
Length: Males, 13-18 in.; females slightly smaller. Tail, 7-10 in.  
Weight: 2-10 lb.



**BREEDING**  
Sexual maturity: From 11 months.  
Mating: February and March.  
Gestation: 59-77 days.  
No. of young: Usually 5-8.



**LIFESTYLE**  
Habit: Nocturnal, sociable. Adult males solitary in summer.  
Diet: Mainly insects and small mammals. Seasonal berries, nuts, fallen fruit, and birds' eggs.  
Lifespan: 7 years in the wild, 8-10 years in captivity.



**RELATED SPECIES**  
The western spotted skunk, *Spilogale gracialis*, is common over large areas of North America.



Range of the striped skunk.

### DISTRIBUTION

Widespread throughout Canada and the United States, except in Alaska.

### CONSERVATION

Striped skunks are common throughout their range, and are hunted only by those with a license. Every year, however, many skunks are run over by cars, often because they stand their ground rather than running away.

## THE SKUNK'S UNPLEASANT SPRAY

The skunk is best known for its ability to cause an extremely unpleasant odor. It emits a strong-smelling fluid from its anal glands when it is threatened. The skunk aims its spray, which can travel 12 feet, at the victim's eyes.



The skunk warns that it is ready to spray by turning its rear end toward the intruder, raising its tail, and pattering its front feet.



If the warning fails to deter the intruder, the skunk hisses, spreads its haunches, and sprays, seldom missing. It can spray repeatedly seven or eight times.

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*Of all the animals that have warning coloration, the striped skunk's easily recognized white stripe makes it one of the most successful at deterring its predators. Its marking serves as a warning to intruders that they will be sprayed with foul-smelling fluid if they do not retreat.*



Left: Skunks may be active throughout the winter.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The striped skunk's scientific name comes from a Latin word meaning "poisonous vapor."
- Striped skunks do not use their spray on each other, even in the fiercest fight.
- The only predator that appears to be immune to the skunk's spray is the great horned owl, which hunts the striped skunk at night.
- Skunks are resistant to snake venom. They can survive 10 times the amount of venom needed to kill another animal of similar size.

### BREEDING

The breeding season for the striped skunk is February and March. Males begin to range widely at this time, often leaving their own territories in search of a mate.

During mating season, the males are very excitable and

spray large animals and humans at random.

The female skunk carries her young for just over two months. Litter sizes range from three to 10, although the average number is four to five. The young skunks, called

kits, are born blind and without fur. The female suckles the kits for six to eight weeks until they can hunt for themselves. The young stay with their mother, often sharing a den with several families until the next mating season.



Left: Baby skunks in Alberta, Canada. They begin exploring early, but they stay in the family unit for their first winter. They will be ready to mate at 11 months.

### FOOD & FEEDING

Striped skunks are meat eaters, feeding mainly on large insects, such as crickets and grasshoppers, and on small mammals. They also forage in the soil and among dead leaves, using their long front

claws to dig up beetle grubs, earthworms, roots, and fungi. Skunks hunt by scent, slowly sniffing over the ground.

Striped skunks also eat nuts, fallen fruit, and the eggs of ground-nesting birds.

Right: The striped skunk's underside is mainly dark, but the white stripe on its back serves to warn would-be predators, rather than providing camouflage. Because of the skunk's highly offensive spray, it fears few other animals, including man.

Left: Skunks can swim well, but do so only to save their lives. They never go willingly into the water.



### HABITS

Striped skunks spend the day in small groups, sleeping in dens that they dig themselves or borrow from other animal species. They often share dens with foxes or raccoons. The den is usually occupied in summer by females and their young.

At dusk, the skunks emerge from their dens to forage for food. In towns and cities,

skunks live in woodpiles, sheds, or under houses. In the country, they are often found in the forests.

Skunks deter enemies by spraying a very offensive-smelling fluid (see back page). It can cause temporary blindness, but its main purpose is to stop the intruder from breathing for a few seconds while the skunk escapes.



# SACRED BABOON

CARD 29

GROUP 1: MAMMALS

ORDER  
Primates

FAMILY  
Cercopithecidae

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Papio hamadryas*



The sacred baboon lives in large groups among the rocky hills of northeastern Africa. The mature male grows to twice the size of the female and sports a distinctive, silvery mane.

## KEY FACTS



### SIZES

Length: Head and body, 24-30 in.  
Tail, 15-24 in.  
Weight: Males, 40 lb., Females, 20 lb.



### BREEDING

Sexual maturity: Males, 7 years.  
Females, 5 years.  
Breeding season: Year-round.  
Gestation: 170-173 days.  
No. of young: Usually 1.



### LIFESTYLE

Habit: Sociable, day-active.  
Diet: Fruits, grasses, roots, lizards, insects, and occasionally, small mammals.  
Lifespan: Maximum in captivity, 37½ years.



### RELATED SPECIES

The five other species in the genus *Papio* include the olive baboon, *P. cynocephalus*, with whom *P. hamadryas* interbreeds.



Range of the sacred baboon.

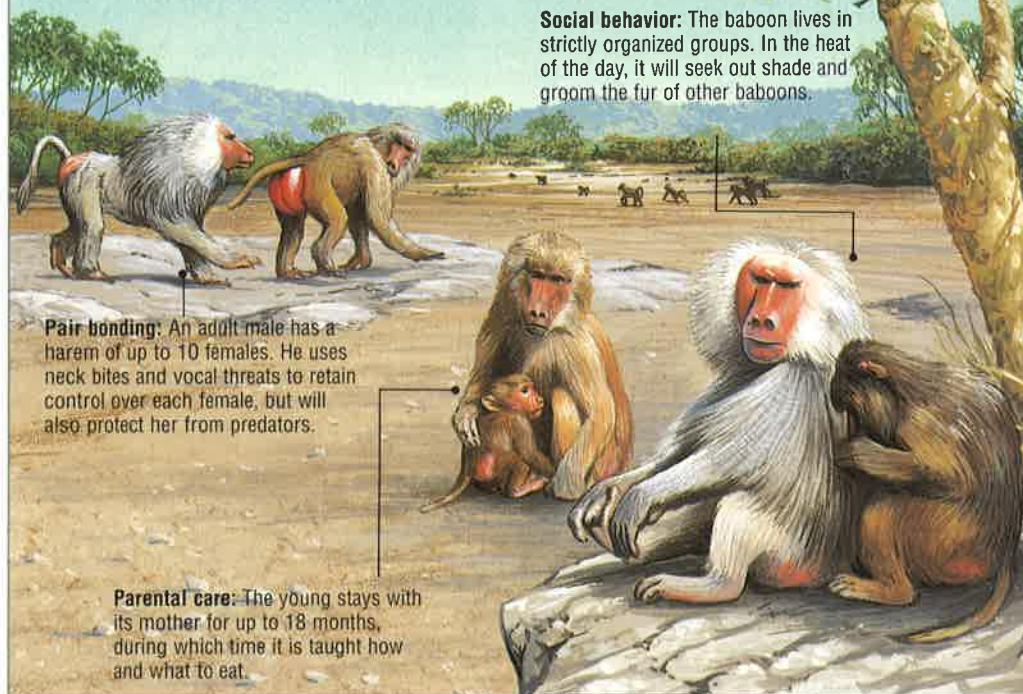
### DISTRIBUTION

Found chiefly throughout eastern Ethiopia, northern Somalia, and on both sides of the Red Sea in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and South Yemen.

### CONSERVATION

Although direct conflict with man and the loss of some habitat has reduced its range somewhat, it is still numerous and widespread.

## BEHAVIORAL HABITS OF THE SACRED BABOON



**Social behavior:** The baboon lives in strictly organized groups. In the heat of the day, it will seek out shade and groom the fur of other baboons.

**Pair bonding:** An adult male has a harem of up to 10 females. He uses neck bites and vocal threats to retain control over each female, but will also protect her from predators.

**Parental care:** The young stays with its mother for up to 18 months, during which time it is taught how and what to eat.





*The sacred baboon lives in an extremely complex group divided into bands, where each male has a harem. Within each band, there are recognized leaders who make decisions about where to look for food and how to deal with predators.*

### HABITS

The sacred baboon inhabits the rocky hill country of Ethiopia. Baboons spend more time on the ground than any other type of monkey. Its limbs are specially adapted to life on the ground, and it can run quickly when on all fours. It does not climb very well, but it will do so to reach fruit.

The sacred baboon spends much of the day searching for food. At noon, it may seek out a shady spot to rest.

Adults nap or pick dirt from each other's fur; the young baboons wrestle and play.

At dusk, the baboon retreats to its sleeping site located up on a high, steep cliff. Cliffs with suitable ledges are favored resting places because they provide some protection from the baboon's main predator, the leopard. Suitable ledges are not easy to find, however, and each night as many as 750 baboons may gather to sleep.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- An old male whose harem is stolen will lose his silver hair and grow brown fur like the female's.
- The sacred baboon's colorful, furless buttocks are believed to help group members keep sight of

- each other when moving through thick vegetation.
- Sacred baboons will raid a crop field in which women are working, but not those in which men are working since the men may be armed.

Left: *Grooming and playing are daily activities of the baboon group.*



Below: *The baboon prefers a fruit-based diet, but it will eat grass if nothing else is available.*

### BREEDING

The sacred baboon lives in a male-dominated group, which is exceptional among baboons. Each group is divided into small bands consisting of one leader

male and one to 10 females. The male becomes sexually mature at 7 years of age. But before he can breed, he must first establish a harem of

females. Finding available females is difficult because every mature female in the group already belongs to another male, who will fight fiercely to protect his harem. So the young male will either court an immature female or try to steal females from the male of another band.

If a male finds an available young female, he teaches her to follow him by walking between her and her mother. Eventually, the female will begin to follow the male instead of her mother. Once a bond is formed between the pair, the male will bite the female's neck to maintain his control over her. Once a male has acquired a mate, the bond between them is recognized by other males in the band. Male band members will

defend each other against attacks from males of other bands intent on stealing their females.

Mating occurs throughout the year, although in the drier part of the baboon's range, most young are born after the rainy season, when food is more plentiful. The young baboon is born with fur and with its eyes open. It spends the first few weeks of its life clinging to its mother's breast. As it grows and becomes more confident, it will ride on her back.

The young sacred baboon matures slowly, during which time it usually remains within the family group. Young are weaned at 18 months; then, the mother will either give birth to new young or become pregnant once again.

### FOOD & FEEDING

Early each morning, the baboon group breaks up into small foraging parties, which climb down the cliffs and set off in search of food. The baboons must forage in small groups because the land is barren and food supplies are scattered.

The sacred baboon feeds

mainly on fruit, which it picks from bushes and trees with the use of its relatively long thumbs. When fruit is not available, the baboon will eat large quantities of grass, which it tears up by the handful. During the dry season, the baboon may also dig up the tuberous roots of various desert grasses and flowers.

The sacred baboon's long, doglike jaws are packed with large molars, which it uses to grind up tough and fibrous vegetation. The baboon also eats insects, lizards, snails, and other small invertebrates, and it will occasionally catch small mammals, such as young

gazelles and hares.

When searching for food, the young baboon stays very close to its mother. It learns from observation how to find food, how it should be broken apart or peeled, and which parts

should be eaten. The mother will prevent her offspring from eating anything that could be potentially harmful.

Below: *When they are not with their parents, the young spend their time wrestling or playing.*





# GIANT ANTEATER

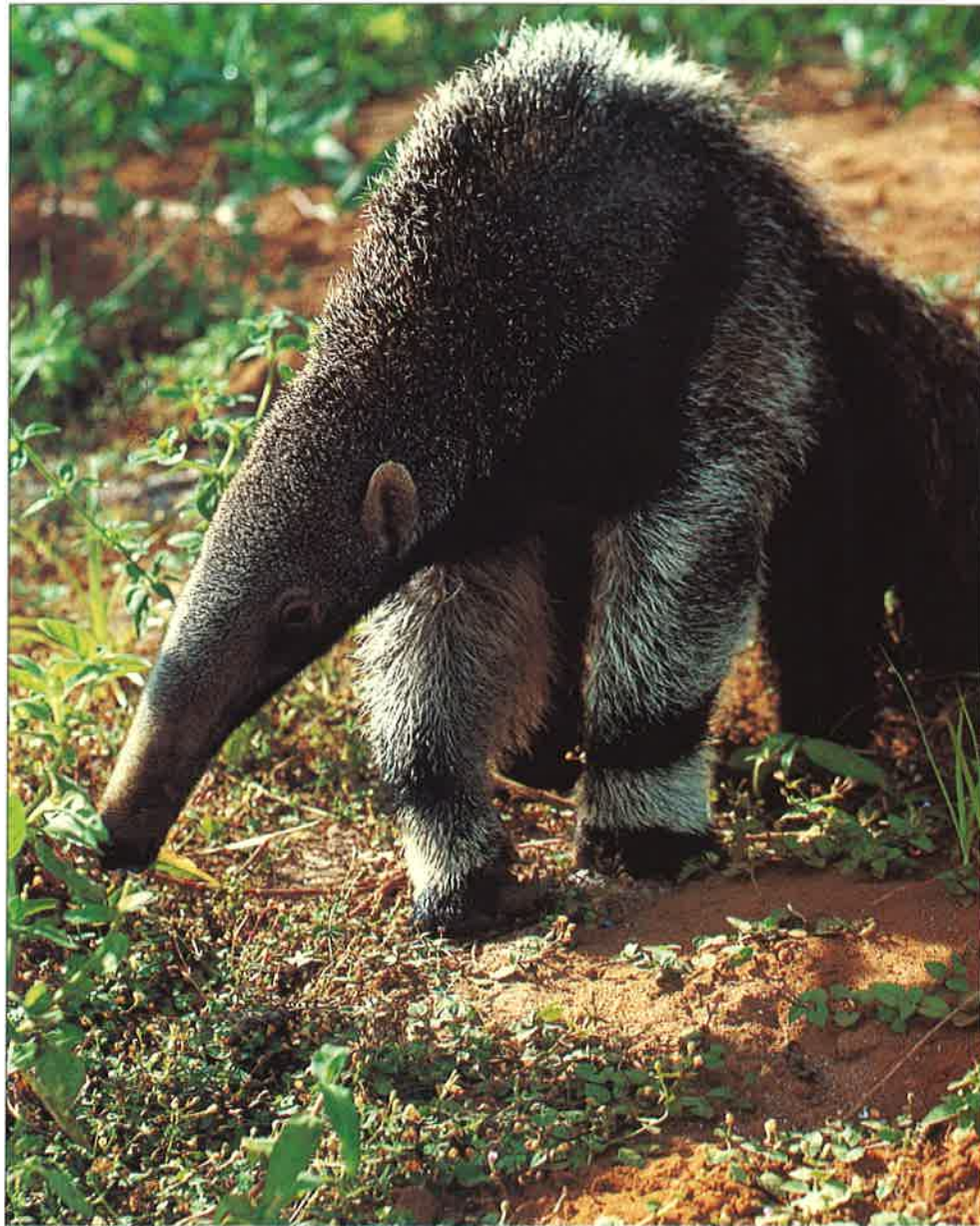
CARD 30

GROUP 1: MAMMALS

ORDER  
Edentata

FAMILY  
Myrmecophagidae

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*



**The toothless giant anteater, found only in Central and South America, spends its day shuffling awkwardly along, sniffing the ground with its long snout in search of ant nests.**

## KEY FACTS



### SIZES

Body length: 40-48 in.  
Tail length: 28-35 in.  
Weight: 44-90 lb. Males slightly heavier than females.



### BREEDING

Sexual maturity: 2-3 years.  
Mating season: March to May.  
Gestation: 190 days.  
No. of young: Usually 1.



### LIFESTYLE

Habit: Solitary; nocturnal near towns, but a daytime feeder in remote areas.  
Diet: Ground-dwelling ants.  
Lifespan: 26 years in captivity.



### RELATED SPECIES

The northern and southern tamanduas (*T. mexicana*, *T. tetradactyla*), and the silky anteater (*Cyclopes didactylus*).



Range of the giant anteater.

### DISTRIBUTION

The giant anteater and the other three species of anteater live only in Central and South America.

### CONSERVATION

The giant anteater is the most vulnerable species of anteater and is likely to become in danger of extinction in the next few years unless measures are taken now.

## SPECIAL ADAPTATIONS OF THE GIANT ANTEATER



**Tongue:** Covered in tiny spines and housed in the snout, it can be pushed 2 feet out of the mouth and down into the ant nest. The spines point backward and are covered in a sticky substance during feeding, making escape impossible for the ants.



**Claws:** Each forepaw has five fingers. The second and third fingers have very strong, sharp claws used for protection or to dig into the ground for ants. The anteater walks on its knuckles to protect its claws.

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*The giant anteater is a solitary animal, spending most of its day searching for its favorite meal—ants.*

*The largest of the four types of anteater, it lives and feeds on the ground. Its smaller relatives spend much of their time in trees.*

### HABITAT

The giant anteater's life is a solitary one. It is rarely seen with another anteater. When two of the animals come together, it is either for the purpose of mating or it is a mother with her young.

Its habitat includes the rainforests, grasslands, and mixed forest and semiarid regions of Central and South America. It spends its day searching for food with the help of its exceptional senses of smell

and hearing. Its range usually covers about one-half square mile. In areas in which food is less abundant, its range could extend for one mile.

At night, the giant anteater will either scrape out a hollow in the soil in which to sleep, or it will use the existing burrow of another animal. When it sleeps, it curls its bushy tail around itself to keep warm. The giant anteater's tail is almost as long as its body.

### FOOD & HUNTING

The giant anteater's diet consists mainly of ground-dwelling ants, although it will occasionally eat termites and army ants. The anteater's acute sense of smell detects the ants. Its long claws are used to get into the nests. It catches the ants with its long, sticky tongue. It gets most of the moisture it needs from its food, which also includes fruit and larvae.

The giant anteater is prey to jaguars and other large cats, although its coat of dense hair gives it good camouflage. It will use its long claws to defend itself, and with them can inflict serious wounds on a predator.



Far left: Grassland is one of the anteater's varied habitats.

Left: Despite its poor eyesight, the anteater can locate ants with its sharp senses of smell and hearing.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The giant anteater's sense of smell is 40 times more powerful than man's.
- The giant anteater is from the order *Edentata*, which means "without teeth."
- The body temperature of the giant anteater is only 32-35°C,
- which enables it to survive on the relatively low caloric content of its diet.
- An early form of anteater is known to have existed some 20 million years ago.
- A giant anteater may sleep for up to 15 hours a day.

### BREEDING

Little is known about the courtship and mating habits of giant anteaters. It is believed that males and females come together only to mate. The mother carries the young inside her for 190 days. The mother gives birth while standing and will use her long tail like a third leg for support.

At birth, the baby immediately scrambles onto its mother's back. It has a complete coat of fur that is so similar in color to its mother's that the youngster is often difficult to recognize when it is with its mother. The mother suckles her young for about six months. During this time, the baby will cling to its mother's back, although it is able to walk a month after its birth.

Giant anteaters are usually silent, but a youngster will whistle shrilly when it is left alone. The offspring is slow to mature; it does not become independent until the mother is pregnant again, and will not feed on its own until it is 2 years old.

Right and below: Mating is one of the few times that anteaters will meet. The offspring is a perfect minature of its parents.





# RACCOON

CARD 31

GROUP 1: MAMMALS

ORDER  
Carnivora

FAMILY  
Procyonidae

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Procyon lotor*



Recognizable by its striped face and ringed tail, the raccoon has invaded almost every habitat and is commonly found even in towns and cities.

## KEY FACTS



**SIZES**  
Head and body: 18-30 in.  
Tail length: 8-13 in.  
Weight: Up to 46 lb.



**BREEDING**  
Sexual maturity: Males, 2 years.  
Females, 1 year.  
Mating: Usually in winter, peaking February-March.  
Gestation: 60-73 days.  
No. of young: 1-7, usually 3-4.



**LIFESTYLE**  
Habit: Solitary and nocturnal.  
Diet: Fruits, nuts, insects, reptiles, garbage, crops.  
Lifespan: 10 or more years in the wild. Longer in captivity.



**RELATED SPECIES**  
Related to pandas and coati-mundis. The genus *Procyon* has two subgenera and seven subspecies.



Range of the raccoon.

### DISTRIBUTION

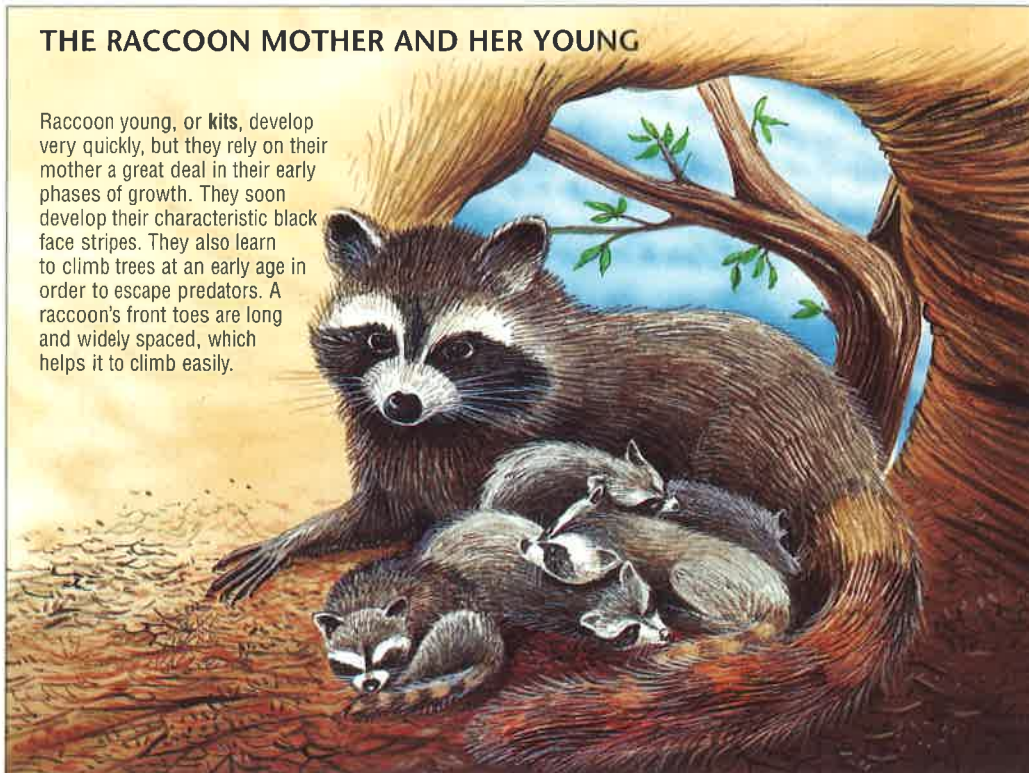
The United States, except for areas of the Rocky Mountains, Utah, and Nevada; parts of Canada, and Mexico to Central America.

### CONSERVATION

Protected in national parks and nature reserves; numbers are strong. Considered a pest in parts of its range, particularly in farming areas.

## THE RACCOON MOTHER AND HER YOUNG

Raccoon young, or **kits**, develop very quickly, but they rely on their mother a great deal in their early phases of growth. They soon develop their characteristic black face stripes. They also learn to climb trees at an early age in order to escape predators. A raccoon's front toes are long and widely spaced, which helps it to climb easily.



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*The raccoon is curious, clever, and solitary—and deceptively cuddly-looking. It owes the success of its population to its ability to live in a wide variety of habitats and to survive on an extremely flexible diet.*



### FOOD & HUNTING

The raccoon normally feeds along waterways and lakes. It hunts as it swims, looking for fish, crayfish, frogs, turtles, and turtle eggs. The raccoon will catch mice and muskrats along the banks of streams and rivers and will also search the woodlands for insects, nuts, fruits, young birds, and bird eggs.

In some areas, the raccoon is considered a pest. It raids poultry and wildfowl breeding sites and eats corn and other

crops. In more populated areas, a raccoon will frequently knock over garbage cans while scavenging for food.

Raccoons use their hands as well as monkeys do. They pick up their food with them and then place it into their mouths.

**Right:** Some raccoons, usually captive ones, will dip food in clear or muddy water before eating to moisten the food or to remove any sand or grit that might be clinging to it.



### DID YOU KNOW?

- The raccoon's Latin name, *lotor*, means "one who washes."
- The raccoon has very nimble fingers that can twist handles and open doors.
- Raccoon meat is good to eat and tastes like lamb.
- When a film about Davey Crockett was released in 1955, the title character wore a hat made from the skin and tail of a raccoon, which started a fashion trend.

### RACCOON & MAN

Raccoons have long been hunted and trapped for their fur. In the United States, "coonskins" were once so prized that they were used as currency. Raccoons have also been killed because of the

damage they do to crops and poultry. Still, their overall numbers have not declined.

Because of its fur, the raccoon has been introduced into other areas, notably, Europe and Russia.

### HABITS

The raccoon leads a largely solitary life. It is temperamental and will often fight with its own family members, as well as with other raccoons.

Although most raccoons live in the wild, close contact with humans does not bother them. They often nest in empty buildings, garages, sheds, and even the attics of houses.

Raccoons are *nocturnal*, meaning they are most active at night. They do not hibernate in winter, and those in the more southerly ranges are active year-round. But those that live further north, where it is colder, grow thick coats to keep warm and spend long periods sleeping.

### BREEDING

While the male raccoon mates with different females, the female will mate with only one male, avoiding all others that season. Mating usually takes

place in winter, but can continue until June, usually peaking in February-March.

About nine weeks after mating, the young, or *kits*, are

born in a nest of leaves made by the female in a hollow tree or log. The kits are blind for their first three weeks, but they grow quickly.

The female cares for the young exclusively, teaching them to hunt and to climb trees. With such predators as bobcats and cougars lurking, the first weeks are a dangerous time for the young kits.

Although some families break up in the fall, the kits normally stay with their mother through their first winter, after which they gradually leave. The young females begin to breed when they are a year old; the males generally begin when they are about 2 years old.



**Left:** Nine-day-old raccoon kits are still helpless and huddle together in their nest in a hollow tree. The young raccoons do not yet have defined stripes on their faces.

**Far Left:** A mother carries a kit in her mouth. She will defend her young ferociously. Still, this is a dangerous time for the kits.



# BUSH BABY

CARD 32

GROUP 1: MAMMALS

ORDER  
Primates

FAMILY  
Lorisidae

GENUS & SPECIES  
*Galago senegalensis*



M. Gore/Nature Photos

**With its large, round eyes and big ears, the bush baby is one of the most peculiar-looking animals of the African bush. Capable of leaping great distances, it often appears to fly among the treetops.**

## KEY FACTS



**SIZES**  
Length: Body, 6-9 in.; tail, 9-10 in.  
Newborn babies, 2 in.  
Weight: Up to 1 lb. Newborn babies, ½ oz.



**BREEDING**  
Sexual maturity: 8 months.  
Breeding season: End of rains, so depends on location.  
Gestation: 4 months.  
Litter size: 1 or 2.



**LIFESTYLE**  
Habit: Family groups when foraging, larger groups when sleeping.  
Calls: Rasping greeting sounds, "shout" in territorial defense.  
Diet: Mainly insects; also flowers, pollen, honey, seeds, fruits, lizards, mice, nestlings.



**RELATED SPECIES**  
As primates, bush babies share ancestors with apes and humans.



Range of the bush baby.

### DISTRIBUTION

All four species are found in Africa south of the Sahara except in rainforest areas.

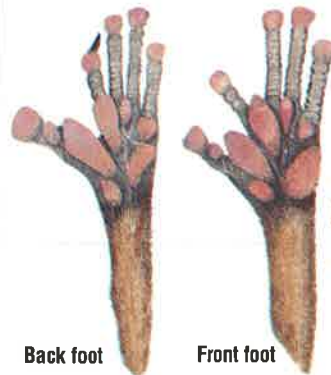
### CONSERVATION

Populations are stable and all species are currently secure; there is no threat to their survival as long as habitats remain stable.

## FEATURES OF THE BUSH BABY

The hind legs are longer than the forelegs to aid in jumping. The elongated lower leg bones give greater leverage for moving quickly from a standing start.

Fingers and toes are flattened at the ends, with pads of thick skin to give them a better grip on trunks and branches.

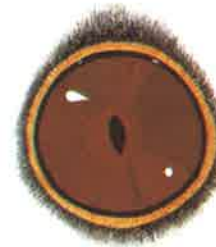


Back foot

Front foot



Large ears can be folded down for safety while leaping.



The eyes are very sensitive. During the day the pupil is reduced to a tiny, vertical slit; at night, it opens into a complete circle to allow for better vision in the dark.

The bushy tail acts as a rudder and stabilizer as the bush baby flies through the air.

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L.Hes/Natural Science Photos

*There are four species of the African bush baby, of which the Senegal galago, or lesser bush baby, is the most widespread. Usually less than 8 inches long, with a tail longer than its body, the bush baby is capable of leaping great distances from tree to tree.*

### HABITS

The bush baby is a nocturnal animal. During the day, as many as 20 of them crowd together to sleep in an enclosed space, such as a hollow tree trunk. At dusk, they wake and split into family groups and go searching for food.

The groups forage separately all night, each group defending its own territory of 15 to 20 acres. They warn off other groups with loud, ringing calls. At dawn, the rivalry ends and they return to their den to sleep together again.

A typical foraging group consists of a single adult male, a pregnant female, and her

young from a previous litter. Adult males do not usually tolerate another male in the group and will fight fiercely if one intrudes.

A family group defends its territory by marking it with the scent of their urine. They mark twigs and branches and any new or unfamiliar object in the area. Other groups recognize the lingering smell and keep away from that family's territory.

Right: *Young bush babies huddle together on a branch.*



R.I.Mo. Campbell/Bruce Coleman Ltd.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Because the bush baby's call sounds like the shouts of an excited child, British explorers gave it its English name.
- Some African tribes catch bush babies by leaving out saucers of palm wine for them to drink.
- The longest recorded leap by a bush baby from one tree to another was 23 feet.
- Bush babies fertilize flowers by transferring pollen as they feed.

### FOOD & FEEDING

During the rainy season, bush babies eat mainly insects, such as caterpillars and dung beetles, which they catch by pouncing on them. They are quick enough to catch mice and lizards. In addition, they raid birds' nests for the eggs. Bush babies eat flowers,

fruits, pollen, nectar, and honey from wild bees as well. In the dry season, their diet changes as food becomes more scarce. They rely on the resin of acacia and albizzia trees, and they can only survive in areas in which these trees grow.

### BREEDING

Bush babies mate at the end of the rainy season. In areas with one breeding season, twins are common, but where there are two breeding seasons, one baby is born at a time. When the female is ready to give birth, she goes into hiding so that the male will not kill the young. For three days, she remains hidden, suckling and protecting her tiny offspring.

Thereafter, she either leaves her young concealed in the nest while she goes to feed or

carries them with her. The youngsters cling tightly to her body, with their tails wrapped around her neck. The young are weaned after six weeks and can feed themselves by eight weeks. At 4 months old, they are fully grown.

In captivity, where they are fed regularly, bush babies breed throughout the year. This suggests that their breeding season in the wild is determined by the availability of food and seasonal changes.

Left: *Leaping through the air, a bush baby gets ready to grab hold of a branch.*

Right: *A tiny bush baby, just 10 hours old, supports its minute body by clinging to a slender plant stem.*



Peter Pickford/N.H.P.A.



R.I.Mo. Campbell/Bruce Coleman Ltd.

### BUSH BABY & MAN

Bush babies are easy to catch, and several African tribes keep them as pets. But in 1940, bush babies were persecuted when a severe outbreak of yellow fever swept across Africa.

Bush babies can harbor the virus without becoming ill themselves. Mosquitoes pick up the virus from the bush babies and pass it on to humans. With the advent of inoculations, the danger of contracting yellow fever is now greatly reduced.