

CHINCHILLA

RANGE:

Before extensive hunting, they lived in Andes of Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. Now they are found only in northern Chile in the high mountain region where it is cold and dry.

HABITAT:

Shelters in burrows and crevices between boulders or at bases of spiny chaguales plants. Several pairs may share a den.

SIZE:

About ten inches long with a weight of 1 to 1 3/4 pounds.

LIFE EXPECTANCY:

10 years

REPRODUCTION:

- Mate in winter and give birth in spring.
- Gestation period is 115-125 days depending on altitude; higher altitude increases the gestation.
- Litter Size 3-6
- Young are born fully furred. After a few hours the kits are able to move around but will remain between parents for warmth.
- Young eat solid food at one week, but are not fully weaned until 7-8 weeks.
- Sexually mature in less than a year
- In good years, female may raise a second litter

DIET:

Wild: Coarse grass and herbs

Zoo: Alfalfa cubes, raisins and chinchilla chow

BEHAVIOR:

- Nocturnal
- Live in groups and mate for life
- Female is the larger and more dominant member. Courtship begins when the male or female pulls tufts of fur from the other's body.
- Nibbling is a way of social bonding. Mates often chew on each other's ears, around the eyes and under their chins.
- Food is held in forepaws and eaten while on haunches.
- Do not drink water but depend on moisture obtained from plants and dew
- Releases its fur if caught by a predator
- A healthy animal will eat a few of its own droppings once in a while to keep a proper level of "good bacteria" in its digestive system. This behavior is called coprophagy.

STATUS:

Threatened in the wild with extinction, fewer than 10,000 survive. Wild populations are on the U.S. Endangered Species list and are protected by the Chilean government.

theZOO
LOUISVILLE

PHOTO
COMING
SOON

Order:	Rodentia
Family:	Chinchillidae
Genus:	Chinchilla
Species:	laniger

CHINCHILLA



POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Soft blueish-gray fur is 1 to 1 1/2 inches long. Up to 60 hairs growing from each hair follicle.
- Long squirrel-like tail, ears are almost hairless, whiskers are long and eyes large.
- Small feet have weak claws on four toes. Soles of feet are rubbery.
- After being handled, must be given a "dust" bath in pumice. This is because the oil from our fingers and hands would quickly cause its fur to mat.
- Takes 80 pelts to make a hip length jacket.
- The Inca Indians used chinchilla fur for winter clothing. The rich used the pelts while the poor used the hairs as thread for clothing.
- In the 1990's the South American government put a tariff on the export of skins which led to smuggling. A few years later, because so few chinchillas were left, there was a ban placed on all hunting.
- In the 1920's government farms were started which prevented extinction. These farms were so successful that poaching was no longer profitable, although poaching still exists.
- Another species of wild chinchilla is the short-tailed chinchilla. It lives at 10,000 to 15,000 feet and has never been as numerous as the long-tailed species perhaps because of the harsher conditions of its high-altitude home.
- Two males or two females cannot be housed together.