

PORCUPINE, PREHENSILE TAILED

RANGE:

Venezuela, Guiana, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Trinidad, and some extreme northern sections of Argentina

HABITAT:

These porcupines live in forests between 150-2500 meters in elevation.

SIZE:

Body length is between 300-600 mm. Dorsal side is covered with short spines. Coloration of dorsal side varies from yellow to black. Feet are reflective of their arboreal lifestyle, with long-clawed digits. They weigh 4 to 11 pounds, and their bodies are 300 to 600 millimeters long. Their tails are almost as long as their bodies, adding another 330 to 485 millimeters.

LIFE EXPECTANCY:

The record longevity is just over 17 years.

DIET:

Wild: Leaves, flowers, shoots, roots, and the cambium layer found beneath the bark of some trees

Zoo: The porcupines' Zoo diet includes a fruit and vegetable mix, and monkey biscuits.

REPRODUCTION:

Gestation lasts 203 days, after which one young is born. Young weigh 415 grams at birth and can climb almost immediately. Weaning occurs after 10 weeks, adult size is reached in less than a year, and sexual maturity (for females) is achieved in 19 months. Females mate right after young are born.

BEHAVIOR:

- These porcupines use their prehensile tails for grasping and hanging. These tails have no spines, and the upper side near the end has a callus pad.
- Otherwise solitary or paired they can be found in small social groups during the day.
- They sleep during the day in the upper canopy of trees, but they have also been found resting on lower limbs and in hollow trunks and lower burrows.

FUN FACTS:

In the wild, prehensile-tailed porcupines can be pretty tough. They have been known to bite and hit those who attack or try to capture them. They stamp their hind feet when excited and curl up in a ball if caught. They also sit on their haunches, shake their spines, and emit both deep growls and high-pitched cries.

Prehensile-tailed porcupines are used as food in many parts of South America.

STATUS:

Not currently endangered, although habitat destruction affects them adversely.

REFERENCES:

University of Michigan Museum of Zoology:

http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Coendou_prehensilis.html

Smithsonian: <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/SmallMammals/fact-porcupine.cfm>

Roger Williams Park Zoo: http://www.rwpzoo.org/what_to_see/tropical_america/tropamerica_porcupine.cfm



photo: Kara Bussabarger

Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Rodentia
Family:	Erethizontidae
Genus:	Coendou
species:	prehensilis