



Southern Tamandua

Tamandua tetradactyla

Classification *What groups*

does this organism belong to based on characteristics shared with other organisms?

Class: Mammalia

Order: Pilosa

Family: Myrmecophagidae

Genus: Tamandua

Species: tetradactyla:



Distribution *Where in the*

world does this species live?

The southern tamandua is found throughout much of South America.

Widely distributed in Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, French Guiana, Brazil, and Paraguay. Also found in some parts of Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela. Four subspecies of tamandua tetradactyla have been identified.

Habitat *What kinds of areas does this species live in?*

Active on both the ground and in trees, southern tamanduas are adaptable to a variety of habitats from sea level to 6,500 feet (2,000 m). Habitats include savanna, shrubland, and lowland and tropical rain forests. They are commonly found near streams and rivers.

Physical Description *How would this animal's body shape and size be described?*

- Short dense fur is typically golden or tan but sometimes black in color. Although fur color can sometimes be a solid color, it is typically a light color with markings that look like the animal is wearing a black vest. Markings can also vary in black or in a lighter color on chest, shoulders or back.
- Feet have enormous claws up to 4 inches (10 cm) long – four claws on the front feet with one extra-long claw on the third toe, and five toes on the hind feet. These large claws require them to walk on the outsides of their feet which makes them slow and clumsy on the ground.
- The snout is long and curved downward with a very small opening about the size of a small stick.
- Tongue is long and round, up to 16 inches (40 cm), and covered with small barbs and sticky saliva. The mouth has no teeth.
- Eyes are small, and round ears protrude from the sides of the head.
- Body length is typically between 21 and 35 inches (53 to 89 cm). Tail length is between 15 and 23 inches (38 to 58 cm). The underside of the tail lacks fur.



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- Adult average weight is about 10 pounds (4.5 kg). There is no significant difference in female and male size.

Diet *What does this species eat?*

In their historic range:

Tamanduas are a type of anteater. As such, its diet is primarily ants and termites, avoiding ants with strong chemical defenses such as army ants. They have also been known to occasionally eat honey, bees and fruit.

At the zoo:

As part of their diet, the Zoo's tamanduas get Vitamin K to help their blood clot.

Predators *What eats this species?*

Jaguars, pumas, margays (small wild cat), and large raptors.

Social Organization *How does this animal interact with others of its species?*

Southern tamanduas, also called the lesser anteater or the collar anteater, are solitary animals aside from mating. Tamanduas communicate sexual condition and territories by scent marking from anal glands. Vocal communication, such as between mother and baby, includes hisses, snorts, roars and sniffs.

Life Cycle *How does this species mate, raise young, grow and develop?*

Average life span is 9 years, but they can live longer in human care. Sexual maturity for females is between 2 and 3 years. Mating occurs in the fall, and gestation ranges between 130 and 150 days. Single births are the norm, but twins can occur. Young weigh slightly less than 1 lb. at birth and are a solid color. Babies are cared for only by the mother who will carry them on her back for several months. Young will stay with their mother for about 1 year at which time they are able to feed themselves.

Adaptations *What physical and behavioral characteristics enable this animal to survive and thrive?*

- Equipped with a chemical defense system to detect and avoid ants that sting.
- Dense fur helps to protect skin from biting ants.
- Stomach is specially adapted to digest insects efficiently.
- Primarily night hunters, tamanduas' vision is poor, but hearing and sense of smell are good.
- **Large claws** and powerful forearms can be used in defense against predators. Claws are also used to rip open insect homes.
- Another defense mechanism is the ability to hiss and spray a foul-smelling secretion that smells worse than a skunk's spray. This behavior has earned them the nickname of "stinkers of the forest."
- The hairless **tail** is **prehensile** enabling it to grasp and hold tree branches. The tail is also used to balance on the back feet when standing upright.



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- **Long, sticky, barbed tongue** can get into ant and termite homes and lick them up.

Collection Connection

Winnie (female) DOB 1/2/18. Winnie came to the Zoo in December 2018 from the Staten Island Zoo, NY.

Laird (male) DOB Approx. 1/1/06. Laird came to the Zoo in 2014 from the Greensboro Science Center, SC.

Rio (female) DOB 11/15/04. Rio came to the Zoo in 2005 from the Sedgwick County Zoo in Wichita, KS. She likes to show off her tongue and eat meal worms. She sleeps in a bucket with blankets.

Conservation Status *Is this animal at risk for extinction and why?*

IUCN Status: Least Concern since 2013.

Southern tamanduas are widely distributed with large populations including in several protected areas.

Resources and Where to Learn More

IUCN Red List <https://iucnredlist.org/species/21350/47442916>

Smithsonian National Zoo <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/southern-tamandua>

University of Michigan Animal Diversity Web: https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Tamandua_tetradactyla/66

San Diego Zoo <https://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/tamandua-or-lesser-anteater>