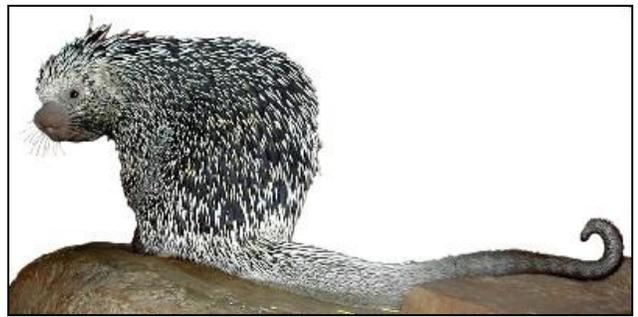


Coendou prehensilis

Brazilian Porcupine

Class: Mammalia. **Order:** Rodentia. **Family:** Erethizontidae.

Other names: Prehensile Tailed Porcupine.



Physical Description: Brazilian porcupines are large rodents with two large teeth and a long, muscular, prehensile tail. They are well adapted to live and move in trees. They are grayish to yellowish brown with a whitish face. Color variations are individual with some even appearing to have mottled patterning. Adult Brazilian porcupines have skin varying in hue from yellow-orange rust to brownish-black; and are covered with long quills on the dorsal side. The yellow-orange hue is due to a pungent waxy substance exuded from the sebaceous glands of both males and females. The back is covered with 2-4" semi-hollow quills that are tricolored with white, barbed end. The tail is long, *prehensile* and has no quills. The feet are modified for grasping and have long-clawed digits, which are ideal for moving and foraging among trees. Brazilian porcupines have small ears, long whiskers, wide nasal openings, and specialized procumbent upper incisors. The eyes are encircled by a thin band of bare skin in the coat of spines that extends all the way to their fleshy noses. Head and body typically 12-24" in length with the tail being 13-19" long. Weigh 9-12lbs.

Diet in the Wild: They are strictly vegetarian, eating leaves, flowers, shoots, roots, fruit, and under layers of bark. They get at the cambium layer of trees by peeling away the bark. They also have been found to raid guava, bananas and corn from plantations.

Diet at the Zoo: Primate diet, kale, mustard greens, green beans, apples, papayas, carrots, sweet potatoes.

Habitat & Range: They live in South American (Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela and Guyana) forests and low lying jungles. Though they mostly occupy old growth forests where trees for foraging and dwelling are abundant, they also inhabit humid mountainous highlands, tropical grasslands, and even a few croplands, especially near water sources.

Life Span: About 15 years, up to 27 years in captivity.

Perils in the wild: Main natural perils come from large carnivores—including jaguars and ocelots. People also kill them for food and pest control.

Physical Adaptations:

- Both hind and forefeet have four digits with long curved claws for climbing.
- If threatened they will sit on their haunches, shake their spines, and chatter their teeth while emitting deep growls. They are not shy and will attack, biting and hitting when provoked.
- The barbed quills are effective at penetrating the flesh of predators, and are difficult to remove.
- Although near-sighted, they have excellent senses of touch, hearing and smell. They have a bald, bulbous nose which aids their excellent sense of smell.
- Use their tail as a fifth hand that helps them for stabilization and grasping while climbing through the forest canopy. The last third of the tail is spineless on the upper surface and has a callus pad near the ventral tip which gives the animal a better grip. They spiral their tail around branches for a firm grip.

Behavioral Adaptations:

- Nocturnal and solitary.
- There are times when the males and females are together, but they sleep and forage separately.
- Spend the day sleeping in a hollow tree or curled up in the fork of a branch. At night they move around foraging for food in the treetops.
- Generally move slowly, but are surprisingly agile and can climb quickly when necessary.
- They stamp their hind feet when excited and curl up in a ball if caught.
- They cannot jump and must descend to the ground if they need to cross a gap between trees.
- Their defenses are so formidable that porcupines can have the luxury of a long lifespan and slow reproductive rate, unlike many other rodents.
- These porcupines, like others in their family, have a gland near the base of their tail which secretes hormones used to mark their territory. This contributes to their musky odor, strengthened by the fact that they rarely bathe or groom their quills.

Reproduction and Development:

- They have been observed displaying unusual courtship behavior, including rubbing noses and 'dancing' on their hind limbs. Males have also been observed urinating on females while courting
- There is no breeding season; female can mate again almost immediately after giving birth.
- Only 1 pup (or porcupette) is born at a time, after a gestation period of about 6.5 months. The infants are about 14oz, covered with a dense coat of guard hairs and natal quills up to .5" long; quills will reach adult length after about 10 weeks.
- The *precocial* young are born with their eyes open, tail strongly prehensile, and claws well-developed. Despite being able to move and climb, the young does not wander far for the first 2-3 weeks of life, besides climbing trees when disturbed.
- Weaning occurs between 10 and 15 weeks- complete nutritional independence occurs around 15 weeks, foraging for its' own food.
- Maturity is reached from 1.5-2 years.
- Prolonged maternal dependence; females may lactate for 70+ days during infant development.
- From birth-4 weeks, the young is completely dependent on the mother for nutrition. From 4-15 weeks, the young are introduced to outside food sources. The young suckles in addition to foraging.
- Excluding suckling, there is little maternal care. Neither parent has been observed defending or removing their young from potential dangers. Young are often left to fend for themselves by climbing trees to escape danger.

Additional Information:

- They are the only rodent with a prehensile tail and one of the smallest porcupine species.
- They are currently still being killed by native people of S. America for food and by farmers. They often ruin a lot of crops getting to the choice morsels, so the farmers consider them pests.

Conservation Status: Least Concern

Conservation Efforts: Prehensile-tailed porcupines are in danger from habitat destruction. The forests where they live are being cleared to provide land for agriculture and urban growth. What you buy can help protect forest habitat. Buy wood products that are sustainably harvested, coffee which is shade-grown, and produce grown locally to you.

Glossary: List of definitions of the most important recurrent technical terms used in the text.

Precocial – referring to young that are active and able to move freely soon after birth, requiring little parental care (as opposed to altricial). Pertains especially to birds whose young are covered with down and are able to run about when newly hatched.

Prehensile – adapted for grasping.

Sources:

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