

# Slender-Tailed Meerkat

**Scientific Name:** *Suricata suricatta*

**Class:** Mammalia

**Order:** Carnivora

**Family:** Herpestidae



The slender-tailed meerkat has a head and body length of 24.5 to 31 centimeters and the tail is 20 to 24 centimeters. Slender-tailed meerkats weigh between 620 and 960 grams. They have a yellow-grey round body that is muscular with long claws on their hands. Their head is broad at the back with a pointed muzzle. The tail is thinly haired, tapered and shorter than the body. The eyes are surrounded by "masks" of black skin and fur in sharp contrast with white brows and cheeks. The Meerkat is highly social. Groups usually have 2 or 3 family units and a total of 10 to 15 individuals. Each family contains a pair of adults and their young. The female may be larger than the male and may dominate him. At least 10 vocalizations have been identified, including a threatening growl and an alarm bark.

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## Range

Southern Africa, south of the Orange River, including Angola, Namibia, South Africa, and Southern Botswana

## Habitat

Open dry areas and savannas, often rocky

## Gestation

Approximately 11 weeks

## Litter

Typically 2-5

## Behavior

The Meerkat is an efficient digger. Colonies on the plains may excavate their own burrows or share the holes of African ground squirrels. Colonies in stony areas live in crevices among the rocks. Outside activity is almost entirely diurnal. Meerkat society is highly regimented, and duties are taken seriously. The jobs are strictly defined: sentry, babysitter, hunter, teacher. While on "active duty" Meerkats do not eat or sleep. Around-the-clock security is provided in shifts. While on his post, the sentry remains poised on hind legs, sensitive nose constantly sniffing the air. Territories are fiercely defended by the homeowners. The Meerkat seems to enjoy basking in the sun, lying in various positions or sitting up on its haunches like a prairie dog. If food supplies run low, a colony may establish a new den ½ to 1-1/4 miles from the original site. Individuals generally forage near the burrow, turning over stones and rooting in crevices.

## Reproduction

Slender-tailed Meerkats normally have a single annual litter. Mating generally occurs in September and October, and births in November and December. The gestation period is 77 days, possibly less. The number of young per litter is 2 to 5, usually 4. The young weigh 1 to 1-1/2 ounces each at birth, open their eyes at 10 to 14 days, and are weaned at 7 to 9 weeks. Sexual maturity is attained by 1 year. Young Meerkats are closely protected within the group. Within 3 days of giving birth the female returns to foraging with her communal partners. The young are cared for by a babysitter who plays with them and feeds them, remaining ever alert to danger.

## Wild Diet

Insects, mainly beetles and beetle larvae and butterfly larvae; Rarely spiders, mice, reptiles