

# MEERKAT

*Suricata suricatta*

The Meerkat is in the mongoose family with a slender body, tapering tail & long thin legs equipped with powerful claws. The face is pointed with a rounded forehead & dark eye patches & crescent-shaped ears. Meerkats have light brown fur with a grey & brown tint to it with stripes on their back. They live in groups of up to 50 individuals.

## DISTRIBUTION & HABITAT

The species is widely distributed in southern Africa. They prefer to live in open country, characterised by short grasses and sparse woody growth. They are expert diggers & their burrow systems have multiple entrances and can be 5 m deep. Within their territory the 'clan' usually have up to 5 different burrows that they sleep in at night.

## DIET

Their diet is comprised mainly of insects & other invertebrates dug up from the ground but they will also kill small vertebrates, take eggs & plant matter. When foraging for food 1 or more members of the group will act as a sentry, standing on its hind legs keeping a lookout for predators.

## LIFE EXPECTANCY & BREEDING

In each group, the dominant male & female are the only ones allowed to successfully breed. The gestation period is



around 11 weeks, after which 2 to 5 young are born. The pups remain in the burrow for 3 weeks, where they are 'babysat' by helpers. Meerkats mature at about 1 year of age; males will voluntarily disperse at around 24 -30 months old to form a new group with unrelated females, or replace a dominant male in another group. Meerkats live about 8 years in the wild (up to 13 years in captivity).

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