

Guinea Pig (Domestic)

(*Cavia procellus*)

Habitat and Distribution: The wild relatives of the domestic guinea pig can be found in mountains and grasslands of South America: Peru, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay.

Size: 8-16 inches long; Females weigh 1½-2 lbs.; Males weigh 2-2 ½ lbs.

Wild Diet: Vegetation; domestic guinea pigs typically eat commercial guinea pig chow, some fresh leafy greens, vegetables, some hay and a small amount of fruit.

Predators: Raptors, snakes, humans

Life Span: 4-6 years (captive life span)

Reproduction: In the wild, most guinea pigs breed once a year. Domestic guinea pigs begin to breed at the age of two months. They breed a maximum of five times a year, and the litters generally contain 4 animals. Breeding behavior consists of males investigating females by chasing them, sniffing and purring. Females in estrus flatten their backs, raise their hindquarters, and stand with the hind feet apart. Mating usually happens at night. The average gestation period is 65 days and delivery time is about 30 minutes. The young are fully haired at birth, with eyelids and ears open, and teeth erupted. Birth weight is 2-3½ oz. Young guinea pigs begin eating solid food during the first few days after delivery. Weaning occurs at 14-28 days. Female guinea pigs are called sows; males are called boars.

Behavior: Guinea pigs are nocturnal feeders. They shelter in burrows and under dense vegetation. Aggressive behavior can occur between the males of the species or between incompatible females. The aggression is accompanied by threatening vocalizations. Guinea pigs also exhibit play behaviors including jumps, head shaking, hopping, bucking, cavorting, body twisting and running. This kind of behavior occurs more in younger animals. When a guinea pig is curious it will approach and sniff the air, sometimes lifting a paw. Fear causes the Guinea pig to respond by either freezing in place or running away. If they freeze, they can stay frozen in place for up to 20 minutes. Guinea pigs panic easy in response to a new or frightening experience. In addition to these behaviors, the guinea pig also produces various vocalizations including chirping, growling, purring, screaming, whining, whistling etc.

Conservation Connection: Secure

Interesting Facts: Guinea pigs were domesticated thousands of years ago however their wild relatives can still be found in South America. Guinea pigs are a member of the rodent family and display short, rounded ears and no tails. They have four digits on their front feet and three on their hind feet. All four feet have well developed sharp claws. The eyes are located on the side of the head to allow for a wider field of vision. The hair consists of large guard hairs and an undercoat of fine hairs. In some species the hair is long and varies in texture from rough to smooth. Some guinea pigs are solid white, black or tawny; others are white streaked or blotched with darker colors. Guinea pigs have acute senses of hearing and smell.

