



## **Giant Anteater** *Mymecophaga tridactyla*

**Geographical Range:** Giant anteaters are found in Central South America, from Southern Belize and Guatemala to Northern Argentina.

**Habitat:** Found in swamps, rainforests and grasslands, the giant anteater can also be found in rural and densely populated areas.

**Exhibit Location:** You can visit our giant anteaters in the M & T Bank Rainforest Falls exhibit.

**Physical Characteristics:** The largest of the anteater species, the giant anteater can measure three to six feet long with a 26"- 36" bushy tail. They weigh between 50-80 pounds. Their snout is very narrow measuring as long as 18 inches, while their skull is only 12 inches long with very small eyes, ears and mouth. Their tongue is covered with tiny, backward pointed spines and thick, sticky saliva to catch tiny prey – like ants! They do not have any teeth. They have a diminished sense of sight and hearing but a highly developed sense of smell- 40 times that of humans. Their brown fur is thick and coarse with stripes on the shoulder and crest of hair along the middle of their backs. Their front legs are white with black bands at the toes. Their hind feet have five short claws, while their front feet have five claws with the inner three claws being very long and sharp. They walk on their knuckles with the long claws curled out of the way to protect them. These claws can be used as powerful defense weapons as well as for ripping open ant and termite nests.

**Diet:** Giant anteaters eat termites, ants and soft-bodied grubs. They find their food mostly in tree trunks and open insect colonies. Their salivary glands secrete sticky saliva during feeding that coats the tongue. They use their tongue to collect the eggs, larvae and adult insects. They can consume a few thousand insects in just minutes. Their tongue moves very quickly, flicking 150 times per minute. At the Zoo the giant anteaters are fed mealworms and soaked biscuits.

### **Did you know?**

- Main predators of the giant anteater are the puma and the jaguar.
- Because of their diet, giant anteaters have a tremendous impact on their local insect communities.

**Status:** Giant anteaters are considered vulnerable. While they are widespread geographically, there are reports from parts of their range that they have been locally exterminated. The anteater's dietary specificity, low reproductive rate, body size, and threats (in the form of encroachment by humans on their territory) throughout many parts of their range have proved to be significant factors in their decline.