

Red River Hog

Potamochoerus porcus

Mammal

Scientific Name

Potamochoerus porcus

Other Names

None

Range

Western and central Africa

Habitat

Rain forests, wet savannas, forested valleys and near slow waterways

Average Size

Height: 2 – 3 ft.

Body length: 3 – 5 ft.

Tail length: 1 – 1.5 ft.

Weight: 100 – 270 lbs.

Description

A shaggy, red coated pig with a crest of white hair running the length of its back, and contrasting black and white markings on the head.

Lifespan

In the wild: 10 – 12 years

In captivity: 20 years

Diet

In the wild: Grasses, berries, roots, insects, small invertebrates and carrion

In captivity: Hay, fruit and vegetables

Gestation

120 – 127 days

Sexual Maturity

18 – 21 months

Offspring

1 – 4 piglets

Predators

Leopard, lion, hyena, snakes and humans

Population Status

Not Threatened



Behavior

Like most porcine (pig) species, Red river hogs are very social animals, living in small groups of six to 20 members. Each group is led by a male (boar) and filled out with adult sows and piglets. Different groups will sometimes merge to form larger groups of 60 or so individuals and maintain a fairly large territory of over two square miles.

Mostly nocturnal, these hogs hide in dense bushes during the daytime. If they are in an area with few predators and the group feels safe, they can be seen grazing during the daylight hours. More commonly, Red river hogs set out in groups in search of food once the sun sets. Omnivorous by nature, these pigs will eat most anything they come into contact with. They have an excellent sense of smell, paired with a strong snout, giving them the ability to find the smallest garden and do much damage.

Reproduction and Breeding

For Red river hogs in captivity, there appears to be no seasonality associated with breeding. In the wild, however, the breeding season begins in September and runs until April, with the peak season being in the wetter months of November through February. In the wild, drought conditions appear to have an effect on the number of females breeding, decreasing the number when water levels remain low.

With only one dominant male present in the social group, mating rituals are minimized in this species. The male will mate with the females in estrous throughout the breeding season.

The female makes her own nest, a fairly large and deep depression hidden deep in the grasses, and lines it with vegetation. Although the female is the primary caregiver for the piglets, they do receive a fair amount of attention from the dominant male, who will waste no time defending the offspring. After a few days, the young are able to leave the nest, and the female and her piglets rejoin the group.

Young males may form small bachelor herds while they wait their chance at becoming the dominant male of a group, but the young females often remain in their natal group. Once the adult female is ready to reproduce again, the younger females' offspring are pushed aside.

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Conservation

Strangely enough, the conservation issues facing many other African animals can sometimes be beneficial to this pig species. As leopards and other large carnivore predators become increasingly rare in sub-Saharan Africa due to loss of habitat and competition with humans, Red river hogs have increased in numbers. In other areas of their range, however, their distribution is described as patchy, with hunting for subsistence purposes very common. In southern Gabon, for example, hunting has led to drastic declines in the Red river hog population.

With growing agricultural areas and a lack of constant predation, Red river hog groups can grow almost exponentially. But, because of the damage they inflict on crops, many farmers shoot these pigs whenever they are seen in hopes of exterminating them.

Amazing Facts

Although they cannot hold their breath for long periods of time, Red river hogs are great swimmers.

A group of wild pigs is called a "sounder".

Pigs are very communicative, using grunts, squeaks and chirrups.

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