

Cape Crested

Porcupine

Hystrix africaeaustralis



Physical Characteristics

- Males and females are often indistinguishable, however females are known to be slightly smaller than males.
- They have long quills (up to 12" long) and a crest of hair on their head and shoulders. They have small eyes and external ears.
- They are mostly brown to black with white on the crest and white bands on their quills.
- Like other rodents, their incisors are ever-growing. The top and bottom jaw each have two incisors, two premolars, and six molars.
- African crested porcupines are the only porcupines that have "rattle" quills. These quills are located at the end of the tail. They are slender for most of their length, but are much wider near the end. The expanded portion is hollow and thin-walled, so several quills vibrating together produce a hiss-like rattle. Unlike the North American porcupine, these quills do not have barbs.
- Their clawed feet have four toes with a regressed thumb on the front feet, five toes on the back, and naked pads.

Average Size

- Length: 22-43 inches
- Weight: 29-60 pounds

Average Lifespan

- Wild: 10-12 years
- Zoo: 15-20 years

Behaviors

- Activity Cycle: Mostly nocturnal
- African crested porcupines are typically terrestrial but are also good swimmers.
- When threatened, the African crested porcupine:
 - 1) Raises their spines and rattles them vigorously to scare off the predator
 - 2) Stamps their feet and whirrs their quills
 - 3) Charges backwards rapidly, presenting its armored rear, hoping to lodge the quills in the predator's flesh. Their quills cannot shoot out.
- They have various vocalizations including grunts, whines, and groans.
- They live in small family groups that may include up to 6 individuals, consisting of an adult pair, juveniles from previous litters, and the current litter. Group members forage on their own but commonly share a burrow. The burrows are in crevices under rocks, in caves, in aardvark holes, in abandoned termite mounds, or dug by the animals themselves.

Diet

- Wild: Roots, tubers, bark, and fallen fruit, as well as cultivated root crops such as cassava, potatoes, and carrots, though they will occasionally eat carrion or invertebrates. They often collect and chew on bones and antlers for calcium.
- Zoo: Cut branches with leaves, leafy greens, fruits, veggies, and herbivore biscuits.

Reproduction

- Gestation Period: Up to 112 days
- Parenting: The pups are born in a grass-lined burrow and are covered with bristles and soft quills which harden a few hours after birth. The young suckle from nipples on the mother's sides (away from quills). Pups leave the burrow for the first time at about two weeks old and begin to

eat solid food. They nurse until about 6-8 weeks of age. At about one year of age they are fully grown.

- **Breeding Interval:** Yearly, the mating season varies with the climate.
- **Litter Size:** 1-4 pups, usually two
- **Breeding Behaviors:** These porcupines are monogamous. Individuals are sexually mature at about 2 years of age. During courtship, the male and female lick each other. When she is ready to mate, she flattens her body and quills close to the ground so she does not injure the male. Mating only occurs at night.

Habitat and Range

- **Habitat:** Variety of habitats including savanna, shrubland, grassland, forests
- **Range:** Southern Africa from southern edges of Kenya, Uganda, and DR Congo then extending all the way to South Africa.

Conservation

- **Status:** Least Concern
- **Threats:** They are often illegally hunted (poached) for their meat and quills. Though they are protected by law, some farmers use poison or dogs to kill them for being agricultural pests. Habitat loss is a large risk factor from human activities such as deforestation, agriculture, and development.
- **Predators:** Lions, leopards, large birds of prey, hyenas, humans

Classification

- **Kingdom:** Animalia
- **Phylum:** Chordata
- **Subphylum:** Vertebrata
- **Class:** Mammalia
- **Order:** Rodentia
- **Family:** Hystricidae
- **Genus:** *Hystrix*
- **Species:** *H. africae australis*

Interesting Facts

- When the porcupine's quills are all fully standing up, this is referred to as being "full skirt."
- The quills were once used as arrow tips and darts by African tribesmen.
- These are Old World porcupines, which are classified not only due to living in Africa, Europe, and Asia, but also because their quills are larger and thicker, and they typically have a crest. New World porcupines' quills are thinner but have barbs that work the quill deeper into the flesh when the attacker moves. New World porcupines are also set apart by living in North and South America and are typically arboreal, or tree dwelling.

