

Name: _____

The Honey Badger

by Guy Belleranti

The honey badger likes sweet honey, but it does *not* have a sweet personality.

A member of the weasel family, this mammal was named the “most fearless animal in the world” by The Guinness Book of Records. Why? Not because of its size. The largest male usually weighs less than 30 pounds, and females weigh half of that. However, both have powerful jaws, razor sharp teeth, knifelike front claws and thick, tough, loose skin. If grabbed by an attacker the honey badger can still twist around and bite itself free. In addition, it can make a terrible stink with its scent glands.



The honey badger is also called a ratel. It lives in southern Africa, the Middle East and India. It sleeps in burrows, rock crevices, old termite mounds and the dens of other animals.

The honey badger eats scorpions, spiders, insects, amphibians and reptiles, birds, rodents, hares and other small mammals. Its eyesight isn't the best, but it has a great sense of smell. It digs some prey out of the ground and catches other prey above ground.

It even climbs way above ground into trees to raid bird nests and bee hives. It loves bee larvae and honey, as you may have guessed by its name! You're probably asking yourself: *Don't angry bees attack the honey badger?* They sure do, but the animal's coarse fur and thick skin provides protection from painful bee stingers.

The honey badger is so fearless that it even eats porcupines and venomous snakes like puff adders and king cobras! They have also been known to take young cheetahs out of dens and to steal the food away from much larger animals like lions and leopards! While it uses its tough personality to hunt all types of animals, this fearless predator sometimes eats melons and berries as well.

The honey badger is a solitary animal. This means it lives alone most of the time. However,

females also spend lots of time being good mothers.

The mother gives birth to one, or rarely, two, young in a den she has dug. The father is long gone by this time and takes no part in caring for the cub. Mom carries her cub from one den to another every few days. At three months the cub joins mom on searches for food and begins to learn hunting skills. The cub reaches adult size at eight months and remains with mom for over a year.

Like many wild animals, the honey badgers' numbers have shrunk. Farmers lose sheep, goats and chickens to them, and beekeepers hives are also damaged by the animal. As a result honey badgers have been hunted, poisoned and trapped. However, some beekeepers are now using new ways to protect their hives, ways that don't hurt the honey badger. One is to raise or hang hives out of the animal's reach.

About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with wild animals and teaching others.

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1. How much does a female honey badger weigh?

- a. about 10 pounds
- b. about 15 pounds
- c. about 30 pounds
- d. about 60 pounds

2. Which fact about honey badgers is true?

- a. Honey badgers only eat meat.
- b. Honey badgers have excellent eyesight compared to other mammals.
- c. Father honey badgers help to raise their young.
- d. Mother honey badgers move to a new den every few days.

3. Do farmers usually like or dislike the honey badger? Explain.

4. Honey badgers usually live...

- a. in large groups
- b. alone
- c. high up in trees
- d. far away from snakes, porcupines, and lions

5. Circle the word below that best describes the honey badger.

timid	fearless	cautious	intelligent
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Explain why you chose the word above.

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

_____ 1. razor

_____ 2. fearless

_____ 3. crevices

_____ 4. scorpions

_____ 5. rodents

_____ 6. cub

_____ 7. larvae

_____ 8. porcupines

a. 8-legged creatures with a poisonous sting

b. mammals with long, sharp quills covering their bodies

c. baby insects that have recently hatched

d. sharp tool for cutting

e. young fox, bear, or honey badger

f. small openings in rocks

g. small mammals, such as mice, rats, and gophers

h. not afraid of anything

◆ Now try this: On a sheet of lined paper, use each vocabulary word above in a sentence.

ANSWER KEY

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1. How much does a female honey badger weigh? **b**
- a. about 10 pounds
 - b. **about 15 pounds**
 - c. about 30 pounds
 - d. about 60 pounds

2. Which fact about honey badgers is true? **d**
- a. Honey badgers only eat meat.
 - b. Honey badgers have excellent eyesight compared to other mammals.
 - c. Father honey badgers help to raise their young.
 - d. **Mother honey badgers move to a new den every few days.**

3. Do farmers usually like or dislike the honey badger? Explain.

They dislike honey badgers because they prey on their livestock.

4. Honey badgers usually live... **b**
- a. in large groups
 - b. **alone**
 - c. high up in trees
 - d. far away from snakes, porcupines, and lions

5. Circle the word below that best describes the honey badger.

timid

fearless

cautious

intelligent

Explain why you chose the word above.

An animal that steals food from lions, sneaks baby cheetahs away from their mothers, eats porcupines, and attacks beehives isn't afraid of anything.

ANSWER KEY

Honey Badger

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

d 1. razor

a. 8-legged creatures with a poisonous sting

h 2. fearless

b. mammals with long, sharp quills covering their bodies

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