Giant Anteaters
By Guy Belleranti

The volunteer guide at the zoo points out a long-snouted animal to several visitors. “That’s a giant anteater,” he says. “Look closely and you'll see a much smaller but look-a-like animal on its back. That’s the mother’s pup. The pup’s coloring and dark shoulder stripe matches up with its mother’s. That helps hide the pup from predators. The pup spends much of its first year riding on Mom’s back. At two years it will be full grown and able to live on its own.”

Giant anteaters live in Central and South America. Adults weigh from 75 to over 100 pounds. They are solitary animals, coming together only to breed.

anteater! An adult giant anteater eats up to 35,000 ants and termites each day, so it visits many mounds.

Because the giant anteater has no teeth, it can’t chew its food. Instead, insects are smashed in the anteater’s mouth and in its muscular stomach. Sand, soil, and other things swallowed also help smash up the insects.

The giant anteater isn’t an aggressive animal. However, it can stand on its back legs and defend itself with its claws. These claws can rip open any attacker, so predators usually look for other prey. The anteater keeps its claws protected and sharp by walking on its knuckles.

The giant anteater has one of the lowest body temperatures of all mammals. It uses its long, bushy tail as a blanket and sunshade. It is a good swimmer and uses its long nose as a snorkel.
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1. Camouflage is any markings, coloring, or other physical features of an animal that help it to blend in with its surroundings, either to hide from predators or prey. Give two examples of camouflage on a giant anteater.

1. ______________________________________

2. ______________________________________

2. What is unusual about a giant anteater’s mouth?
   a. It has no teeth.  
   b. It has a two-foot tongue.  
   c. It has a long snout.  
   d. a, b, and c

3. Give two examples of how a giant anteater uses its claws.

1. ______________________________________

2. ______________________________________

4. What helps a giant anteater digest its food?
   ________________________________________
   ________________________________________
   ________________________________________

5. According to the information in the article, an anteater has a great sense of what?

   a. sight  
   b. smell  
   c. taste  
   d. hearing
The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. ___________________________ y s i l t r a o  
   hint: living alone

2. ___________________________ m i r t s e e t  
   hint: tiny bugs that live in large mounds and feed on wood

3. ___________________________ g s a e s i g r e v  
   hint: likely to attack; hostile

4. ___________________________ k n s e l o r  
   hint: a tube that allows a swimmer to breathe while his or her face is underwater

5. ___________________________ r v t i e c n i o e  
   hint: an animal that feeds mainly on insects

6. ___________________________ a v i s a l  
   hint: a watery liquid made by glands in the mouth that helps an animal or human chew, swallow, and digest

7. ___________________________ f e d n d e  
   hint: protect from harm

♦ Now Try This: Find each vocabulary word above in the article and highlight it.
In the article, “Giant Anteaters,” you learned many fascinating facts about these gentle mammals from Central and South America, especially their unusual eating habits.

With an adult’s permission, use the Internet to research another animal that is considered an insectivore. On the lines below, tell what class of animal it is (fish, bird, reptile, amphibian, or mammal), where the animal lives, and what types of insects it eats. Be sure to provide the website address you used for information at the bottom of the page.

_______________________________________________________________________________________  
_______________________________________________________________________________________  
_______________________________________________________________________________________  
_______________________________________________________________________________________  
_______________________________________________________________________________________  
_______________________________________________________________________________________  

Research source I used: _______________________________________________________________
1. Camouflage is any markings, coloring, or other physical features of an animal that help it to blend in with its surroundings, either to hide from predators or prey. Give two examples of camouflage on a giant anteater.

1. Its coloring

2. What is unusual about a giant anteater’s mouth?
   a. It has no teeth.
   b. It has a two-foot tongue.
   c. It has a long snout.
   d. a, b, and c

3. Give two examples of how a giant anteater uses its claws.
   1. A giant anteater uses its claws to tear a hole in ant or termite mounds.
   2. A giant anteater uses its claws to defend itself from predators.

4. What helps a giant anteater digest its food?
   Saliva and tiny spikes on its tongue help a giant anteater capture ants and termites. Insects are then crushed in its mouth and by its muscular stomach, aided by sand and soil.

5. According to the information in the article, an anteater has a great sense of what?
   a. sight
   b. smell
   c. taste
   d. hearing

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ANSWER KEY

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. solitary
   y s i l t r a o
   hint: living alone

2. termites
   m i r t e s e t
   hint: tiny bugs that live in large mounds and feed on wood

3. aggressive
   g s a e g r e v
   hint: likely to attack; hostile

4. snorkel
   k s n e l o r
   hint: a tube that allows a swimmer to breathe while his or her face is underwater

5. insectivore
   r v t i e c s n i o e
   hint: an animal that feeds mainly on insects

6. saliva
   a v i s a l
   hint: a watery liquid made by glands in the mouth that helps an animal or human chew, swallow, and digest

7. defend
   f e d n e d e
   hint: protect from harm

Now Try This:
Find each vocabulary word above in the article and highlight it.

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