



West African Guinea Hog

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Subphylum: Vertebrata
 Class: Mammalia
 Order: Artiodactyla
 Family: Suidae
 Genus: *Sus*
 Species: *scrofa*



Photo courtesy of Jane Patrick

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The Guinea hog originated in the country of Guinea, in western Africa. Now they exist in many parts of the world as a domestic breed (a group of organisms within a species developed by artificial selection and maintained by controlled reproduction). They can survive in a wide variety of environments, from deserts to mountainous terrains.
- **Exhibit Location:** Domestic Animal Barn

Characteristics

- Weight: 90-100 pounds; Height: 15-20 inches
- Guinea hogs are a small breed of black hog. They are not related to guinea pigs. They are not pot-bellied pigs.
- A large, round disk of cartilage is connected to muscle that gives the snout extra flexibility. Smell is by far the most advanced of their senses. They also have an advanced sense of taste and are quick to identify unknown objects by taste.
- It is believed that they have poor eyesight due to the position of the eyes being on the sides of the head, restricting their forward vision.
- The ears are fairly large, erect, and pointed. They have 4 continually growing tusks, one in each quadrant of the jaw.
- Females have 6 pairs of teats (mammary glands where young nurse).
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** average is 10 years; **In Captivity** 10-20 years

Behaviors

- In the wild, in certain parts of the world, Guinea hogs can be found in large herds (sounders) of up to 100, though the herd size is usually 20 individuals. Sounders are made up of females and their young. When males reach maturity, they leave the group and live mainly on their own.
- Sounders may travel together over a large home range, but do not migrate.
- Guinea hogs are hardy grazers and foragers. In captivity, they are social, easy to care for, and are quick learners with substantial memories.
- They are diurnal, being active during the day.
- Guinea hogs like to wallow in the mud or water to maintain a comfortable temperature and to protect themselves against sunburn and insect bites.
- They vocalize mainly by grunts and squeals.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** fruits and vegetables frozen in a bowl, ball with holes filled with cereal, or fruits and vegetables which is pushed around until they fall out, walks, scents, painting

Reproduction

- Guinea hogs reach sexual maturity at 1 year of age. Females have an estrous of about 21 days and are receptive for 3 days.
- If males are allowed together during mating season, violent fights occur for the prize of a sow (female).
- The gestation period is 115 days. Litters contain 1-10 young and are weaned at 3-4 months of age. They are independent at 7 months of age.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** shrubs, weeds, bird eggs, snakes, grasshoppers, mice, roots, tubers, even manure
- **At the Zoo:** grains, fruits and vegetables

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** not listed; **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- Guinea hogs are currently on the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy Critical List. There are fewer than 200 annual North American registrations.
- Guinea hogs are now considered a rare breed because domestic hog growers prefer larger, faster growing breeds, and only limited measures are being taken to preserve the Guinea hog by hobby breeders.
- Guinea hogs are a very old breed. It is important to protect old breeds of livestock from extinction, for they are the closest living relatives of the wild animals from which our commercial breeds of livestock were developed. Many commercial breeds are prone to illness, need assistance in raising young, and require large amounts of food. Minor and rare breeds, on the other hand, tend to be much hardier, foraging well for their own food and consuming less of it, resisting disease, and raising young without human help.
- Predators: humans, brown bears, large cats, wolves, crocodiles, large snakes, large raptors

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Because of their incredible sense of smell, hogs are being used today for drug-sniffing and bomb detection.
- The slave trade contributed to the spread of the Guinea hog from Africa across Spain, France, England, and America. In the early 1800's, Guinea hogs were found throughout the southern United States where they were raised for both pork and lard production. They were also used in people's yards to keep out rats, mice, and snakes.
- Pig breeds were traditionally classified as one of 2 types: lard or bacon. Lard breeds were used to produce lard, a cooking fat and mechanical lubricant. During World War II, there was a great need for lard in the production of explosives. After the war, chemicals replaced lard for industrial and military purposes. Healthy eating habits replaced the need for lard in cooking. Only 3 breeds of traditional lard type breeds exist today, one being the Guinea hog.
- Recently, miniature breeds have become popular pets. We, however, do not recommend them as pets. They are highly intelligent, and if they do not receive proper training, they will outsmart their owners.

Sources:

- Houston Zoo, Inc., (2006). Our world of animals-mammals: guinea hog. Retrieved Feb. 09, 2006, from Houston Zoo Web site: http://houstonzoo.org/Animal/viewAnimalDetail.asp?scriptaction=showanimal&Animal_Preview_Flag=0&animal_ID=76
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