Aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*)

**Conservation Status:** Least Concern

Aardvarks are the last survivors of a group of primitive ungulates. They have a stocky body with thick skin that ranges in color from yellowish to pinkish and is sparsely covered with bristly hair. Aardvarks have short, powerful legs with sharp claws (four on the forefeet and five on each hind foot), a prominently arched back, a short neck, long pointed ears, and a long muscular tail that tapers to a point. Their head is elongated with a long snout. They are well adapted to feed on termites and ants with nostrils that can be sealed and a protractile tongue.

**Fun Facts**

1. An aardvark’s tongue can reach lengths of 30.5 cm—that’s as big as a school ruler!
2. The name “aardvark” comes from South Africa’s national language, Afrikaans, and means “earth pig.”
3. Aardvarks are cited as being able to dig up to 62 cm or 2 feet in 15 seconds!
4. The aardvark is the only living representative of an entire order of animals, the Tubulidentata.
5. Aardvarks can eat up to 50,000 insects each night!

**Habitat**

Aardvarks live in a wide range of habitats, from dry savannas to rain forests. Aardvarks are absent from hyperarid habitats and generally avoid extremely rocky terrain, which makes it difficult for them to dig for their main food source (termites and ants).

**Diet**

Aardvarks are specialized eaters, feeding almost exclusively on termites and ants.

**Predators**

Humans, lions, leopards, hyenas, pythons

**Behavior**

Aardvarks are primarily solitary nocturnal animals, spending most of the day asleep in their burrow. At night aardvarks leave their burrow in search of food, traveling in a zigzag pattern and using their elongated snout to help them locate prey. Once they find a termite mound, aardvarks use their well-adapted claws to dig into the earth and their long, sticky, protractile tongue to easily gather prey. An individual aardvark can eat over 50,000 individual termites in a single night!

**Breeding**

Aardvarks are solitary, coming together only to breed. Female aardvarks give birth to a single hairless young after a gestation period of about seven months.

Young aardvarks stay with their mothers until they are reared. They will not leave the mother’s burrow during the first two weeks of life. After three months of nursing, they begin to eat insects. By six months, the young can dig and forage for themselves, and by 12 months they will have reached the size of a mature adult. Sexual maturity is reached at about two years of age.

**Size:**

Length: 1.03-1.3 m

Height: 60-65 cm

**Weight:**

40-65 kg

**Life Span:** 23 years

**Gestation Period:** 7 months

**Average number of offspring:** 1