



Volume 1 Issue 1

Online Available at www.entomoljournal.com

Journal of Entomology and Zoology Studies

Pangolin- Zoological Characteristics and Its Uniqueness in Mammalian Group

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A pangolin is a mammal of special category which is included under the order *Pholidota*, also known as scaly anteater or trenggiling. The body of the pangolin remains covered with hard keratinized scales which provide it a distinct and unique characteristic from the others (The Encyclopedia of World Wildlife, 2006). The mammal inhabits the regions of Asia and Africa.

Keyword: Pangolin, *Manis crassicaudata*.

1. Morphological Characteristics

The scale covering present on the body of the pangolin are hardened plate like which hardens up as the animal matures in age. Initially, at birth the scales remain soft. The body of the pangolin is so flexible that it curls up like a ball when threatened from external agencies. The physical appearance of a pangolin is marked by large, hardened, plate-like scales. The overlapping scales act as armor for its body and the face remains covered under the scale. The scales are also blade like edges and sharp for defense. The fore paws of the animal has extraordinarily long claws which make it difficult to walk on ground, so generally it rolls its fore paws to protect the claws. For defense purposes, the pangolins emit obnoxious smelling acid from its anal glands. The sharp claws in the short forelegs of the pangolin are also used for burrowing and climbing trees. They are insectivores and feed on ants and

termites by burrowing with claws on their mounds. The size of pangolin varies from 30 to 100 cm (12 to 39 in). Females are smaller than the male counterparts.

Pangolins are provided with long a tongue which is so long in size that it can extend to its thorax and abdominal cavity ^[1]. Large and adult pangolins have tongue lengths extending to up to 40 cm (16 in), with a diameter of only 0.5 cm (0.20 in) ^[2].

2. General Behavior and Feeding Patterns

Pangolins are nocturnal in their behaviors with a well-developed sense of smell and potential for inspecting for insects for food. Pangolins sleep all day long by curling up like a ball. The long-tailed pangolin remains active during the day time ^[2]. Some pangolins thrive on the tree branches which are arboreal in nature and some dig tunnels

underground to a depth of about 11 ft. Pangolins have also developed swimming capabilities.

As pangolins are devoid of proper dentition, they have their food by their tongue through licking the anthills and termite mounds. The chest glands of the pangolins help them in wetting their tongue with strong ant catching saliva by providing adequate lubrication. The prehensile tails of the pangolins help them remain hanging from the tree branches.

2. Reproductive Status

The gestation period of pangolin is 120-150 days. The females give birth to a single offspring at a time. However, the Asian varieties and inhabitants can reproduce multiparous progenies^[2]. Gestation is 120-150 days. The birth weight of pangolin is 80-450 g. Weaning of the new born pangolins takes place in the first two or four weeks of life, particularly in a burrow. Weaning takes place in around three months of age and by 1 year the pangolins become sexually mature^[3].

3. Population Threats from Human Activities

In African continent, the pangolins are hunted and consumed by the men. It is one popular kind of 'bushmeat'. In China pangolins are highly in demand for their medicinal properties of the scales and their meat characteristics. Human infringements leading to deforestation have led to the extinction in pangolin population. Pangolins are also facing the tragedy of illegal human trafficking and poaching for their human use.

4. Recognition as Endangered Species

In November 2010, the pangolin was included in the list of genetically distinct and endangered animal in the Zoological Society of London (Asian unicorn and scaly anteater make endangered list).

5. Reference

1. The Encyclopedia of World Wildlife. Paragon Books, 2006, 63.
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