

# Meerkat Mob Rules

## Australasian House



**Tropical World has a growing collection of meerkats. How much do you know about this Mongoose from the deserts of Africa?**

Now you can be a genuine scientific researcher whilst having fun watching our meerkats. Try to fill in as many blanks on this sheet as possible, just by observing what the meerkats do.

Meerkats are mammals that give birth to their young - called kits - in burrows dug into the sandy soil of the desert. Adults also sleep in burrows and retreat there when danger threatens. They live in very harsh conditions and have tough lives.

Meerkats live in social groups, often described as, clans, mobs or gangs.

How many meerkats can you count in Tropical World's Meerkat Mob? .....

How many are adults? ..... How many are juveniles? .....

Early in the morning, when it is very cold, meerkats stand in a huddle, facing the sun. They have an in-built solar panel: the skin on their bellies is darker, which helps them absorb heat more efficiently from the sun.

How many meerkats are facing sun lamps or a heat source? .....

Meerkats do a lot of digging, and are specially adapted for doing so! They have flaps of skin around their ears which they close to keep sand out while they are digging.

Watch one meerkat for 2 minutes. How many times does it start digging in the earth during this time?

Meerkats have really good eyesight and can see an eagle flying hundreds of metres above them, or a snake crawling in the undergrowth. These animals are their main predators in the wild. Meerkats take it in turns to be on guard duty and will warn each other if danger is near.

Look at the meerkats. How many meerkats are on guard duty? .....

What do you think our meerkat guards are watching out for? .....

What does a Meerkat use to help it stand upright? It uses its .....

What does an alarm call sound like? .....

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Listen for two minutes to the different sounds made by our Meerkat Mob. Can you work out how many different calls they make and can you try to describe them? In the wild, Meerkats make at least 10 different calls – including a distinct alarm call.

The words below are used by researchers in Africa to describe the communication noises meerkats make. Put a ring around any of the words when you hear that sound. Do they make any other sounds?

purr    whistle    chitter    whine    yap    yawn    chirp

Meerkats exhibit a variety of anti-predator behaviours. Using the words provided, fill in the gaps in the sentence below to describe what a meerkat might do if it comes face to face with a predator.

hiss    hind    fur    growl    bigger    up    backwards    forwards    arched

It stands upright on its ..... legs, with its back ..... and its tail sticking ..... .  
It makes its ..... stand on end to make itself look ..... . It begins to  
rock ..... and ..... and will ..... and .....

A Meerkat that is being attacked will lie on its back with its teeth and claws facing upwards to protect the back of its neck.

Study the meerkats for a few minutes. Did any of them exhibit this behaviour? What 'predator' might have triggered it?

Meerkats rub millipedes in the sand before eating them. Doing this removes the toxins from the millipede's skin. Circle the other things that a meerkat might like to eat.

Spiders    Beetles    Lizards    Scorpions    Snakes    Mice    Birds    Birds Eggs

Meerkats will actually attack, kill and eat scorpions in the wild. The scorpion senses the meerkat through special sensors on the underside of its body, which pick up the slightest vibration. The scorpion knows the meerkat is getting close and raises its tail over its back ready to strike.

The meerkat stands on its hind legs, checks out the potentially deadly threat and closes in for the kill. Is this the end for the meerkat? Not this time! As fast as lightening, the meerkat grabs the scorpion with its front paws, bites off the sting, drags it through the sand and chomps into the body. After a few bites, the scorpion stops wriggling and the meerkat finishes its dinner. Yum yum!

**Well done! You have completed some genuine scientific research. Let us know your findings by sending a letter from your class with any pictures to :**

The Education Officer, Parks & Countryside, Farnley Hall, Hall Lane, Leeds LS12 5HA. Thank you!

T.W.  
KS:2

