



Atelerix albiventris

Common name: **Four-toed Hedgehog**Latin name: **Atelerix albiventris**Local name: **أبو القنفذ**

ECOLOGY

Type:

Wild

Role in Ecosystem:

It plays an important role in their ecosystems as pest control.

HABITAT

Atelerix albiventris occupies a variety of terrestrial habitats including grassland, scrub, savannah, suburban gardens, woodlands, bush, thickets, agricultural land (plantations, fields, and gardens), plains, hills, and mountains 2,000 m in elevation. It frequently occurs in suburban areas where it may occupy stables, food stores, and other buildings. These animals live in areas with dry soils and are absent from deserts, marshes, and dense forests. *A. albiventris* generally requires dry shelters in matted grass, leaf litter, a rocky crevice, or a hole in the ground.

Atelerix albiventris occurs most commonly on sandy, well-drained soils in areas where it can sleep in termitaries, rock crevices, buildings, or under tangles of brushwood or dry leaf litter. These animals show a predilection for relatively open, dry, or seasonal habitats with sparse or patchy grass cover, especially overgrazed regions with dense populations of ungulates. These requirements are well met in suburban gardens and in many heavily grazed rangelands where there is an abundance of trampled herbage and dung to support termites and other insects.



Food

Carnivore

Atelerix albiventris is omnivorous but primarily insectivorous. It feeds primarily on invertebrates such as spiders and insects, occasionally also consuming small amounts of plant matter or small vertebrates.

Lizards, mice, and snakes are seized and shaken to death before being eaten. Snakes are approached with caution and are bitten severely and repeatedly by *A. albiventris* while it protects its face with spines to avoid being struck; it will continue the attack until it has broken the spinal column or disembowelled the snake. *A. albiventris* will readily consume carrion and will scavenge roadkills at night.



Movement and Communication

Relaxed *Atelerix albiventris* generally has an oval shape. The limbs are short and the animal's round body is low to the ground, and it has a very short tail. When threatened, the animal can contract a series of muscles, rolling itself into a compact ball shape, forcing its quills out in all directions. The quills lie flat against the animal's body in a relaxed state.

Atelerix albiventris creates a twitter vocalization with a closed mouth that can be heard at a distance of 20 cm but hardly heard at 2 m (Gregory 1975). The twitter is heard from both sexes. A twitter might be heard when the hedgehog is picked up or moved, but it also can be heard at other times. Hisses and snorts sometimes are heard when the hedgehog is intruded upon by domestic dogs or humans, the stronger the stimulus, the louder the hiss or snort. *A. albiventris* will scream when attacked or held by its feet. Males serenade females during courtship with a birdlike call. This sound is not produced by females or by males in the absence of females. Females respond to serenading males with hisses, snorts, or evasive movements.



Social Habits

Solitary

It is nocturnal and solitary except during courtship or when a female has young. When approached by a conspecific in the wild, growling, snorting, and butting of heads occurs. The intrusion of a strange animal into the territory results in hissing and spitting. Around predators, spines are erected, and an individual curls into a ball to protect its head and ventral surface.

The courtship of *Atelerix albiventris* is ritualistic. When a female is in search of a mate, she calls with a whine. Males court females by persistently following them. A male walk around a female in estrus with his snout pointed toward her, puffing, sometimes for several days; the female vigorously butts the male as she snorts and rejects him. The male mounts the female from behind after she has flattened her spines and pressed her hindquarters out.

Self-anointing behaviour occurs when *A. albiventris* comes into contact with an irritating substance. *A. albiventris* will take the substance into its mouth to create a saliva mixture that it rubs onto the spines. The reason for self-anointing is unknown but it may be used to attract mates or may be used by juveniles to get the attention of their mother. Self-anointing is fully innate because it is performed before young open their eyes.

Reproduction

Viviparous

Atelerix albiventris generally breeds once or twice a year. As spontaneous ovulators and primarily solitary animals, this species mates when the primaries are right and they encounter the opposite sex. They typically mate in rainy, warm seasons, when food is plentiful. The young are born with spines already present, but covered with a membrane. Within a few hours of birth this membrane dries up and the spines immediately start growing. Weaning begins around the 3rd week and ends between the 4th and 6th weeks. The young leave their mother soon thereafter. The young are sexually mature around two months of age.

Attributes

Weight

600 grams

length

17 to 23 centimeters

INTRODUCTION

This species is widespread in West Africa, Central Africa and East Africa. One of 4 members of the genus *Atelerix*, *A. albiventris*, it is the smallest of the African hedgehogs. These nocturnal insectivores are sexually dimorphic and widespread and are not a species of special conservation concern. Native to equatorial Africa, they inhabit steppes, savannas, grasslands, and agricultural fields. *A. albiventris* has been domesticated and is widely used in biomedical research and sold in the exotic pet trade.

LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

Human interaction

It is used for medical purpose. It has become popular as an exotic pet in many countries.

Cultural value

Hedgehogs are caught and sold as pest control for snakes and scorpions in Sudan.

Cultural expression

In some areas of Sudan, people called this animal "Kharof Alkhala".

THREATS

There are no major threats to this species as a whole.

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