



Strange but True Mammals

→ questions & answers book



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Written by The Good and The Beautiful Team



STRANGE mammals

question: Are there really mammals with strange features that look like something imagined in a story?

answer: A number of characteristics define most mammals:

- ✦ They are vertebrates (have a backbone).
- ✦ They are endothermic, or warm-blooded (able to regulate their body temperature).
- ✦ They are covered with hair or fur.
- ✦ They give birth to live young.
- ✦ They provide milk for their babies through mammary glands.



Any animal classified as a mammal can have these characteristics, but some mammals have unique traits that seem so unusual, it is hard to believe they are real!



Let's take a look and investigate these strange but true mammals.

pink fairy armadillo

question: Where does the pink fairy armadillo get its name?

answer: The pink fairy armadillo is covered with soft white fur and has pink armor on its back. The armored shell, or carapace, runs from its nose along its back and offers the animal protection as well as temperature regulation. Throughout the carapace are blood vessels that give the armadillo its distinct pinkish color and help shed excess heat. The “fairy” part of the animal’s moniker comes from its elusive lifestyle. They are found only in Argentina, and like all species of armadillos, they are shy and nocturnal, making sightings of them quite rare. Scientists have very little data about their population and habits because they are solitary and evasive in the wild and seldom survive in captivity.

question: What is the purpose of those huge claw feet?

answer: The pink fairy armadillo’s comically disproportionate claw feet are highly functional for shoveling through sandy soil to find ants, larvae, worms, roots, and plants. Its tail looks somewhat like a spatula dragging behind when the armadillo walks, but when all four powerful claw feet are engaged in digging, it provides balance for the rear part of the body. When the pink fairy armadillo senses danger, it can bury itself in mere seconds and use the hard, bony plate in the tail section of its shell like a plug to block off the entrance to the burrow.



SOUTH
AMERICA

Argentina

question: Aside from being pink and furry, what makes these armadillos special?

answer: Pink fairy armadillos are the smallest species of their kind, measuring only about 16 cm (6 in) in total length, including their head, body, and tail.



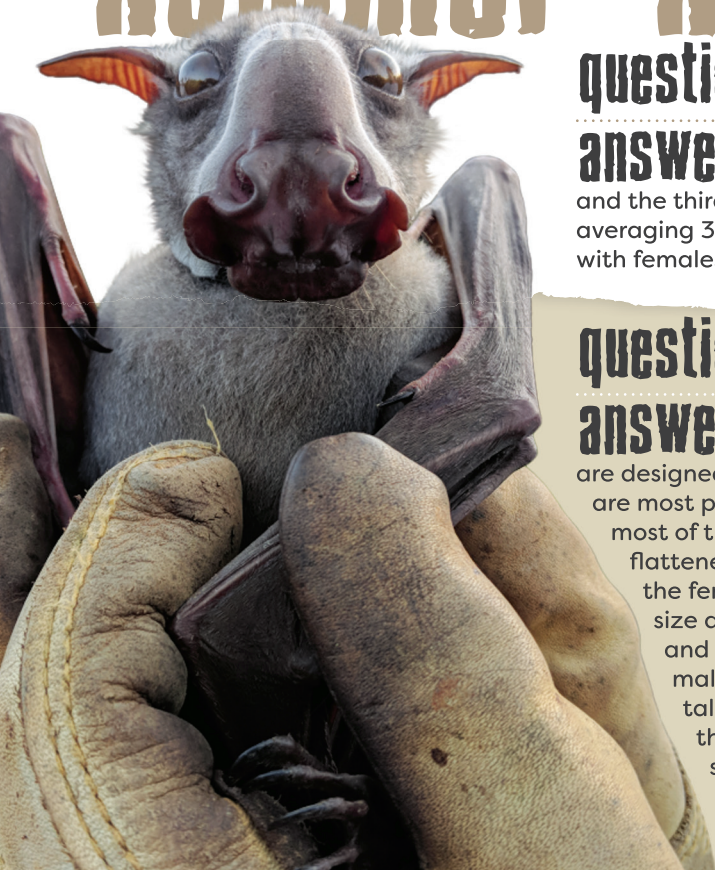
hammer-headed bats

question: How big are hammer-headed bats?

answer: Hammer-headed bats are the largest type of bat in Africa and the third-largest type of bat in the world. Males are visibly bigger, averaging 377 g (13 oz) in weight and 25 cm (10 in) in body length, compared with females' 275 g (10 oz) and 21 cm (8 in).

question: Why do they have an unusual nose and mouth shape?

answer: The uniquely shaped head and snout of hammer-headed bats are designed that way to help it produce its distinctive sounds. These features are most prominent in the male of the species, whose cheek pouches take up most of the face and lead to a bald snout that splits at the chin in a square, flattened shape. The male's larynx, or voice box, is three times larger than the female's and pushes everything else in the chest cavity aside. The size and shape of the larynx amplify the sound of the male's honking and croaking when he wants to attract a potential mate. Dozens of males may line up in a row to flap their wings and show off their vocal talents. Their scientific name, *Hypsignathus monstrosus*, refers to these features, with the first word meaning "high" and "jaw" and the second word indicating how large and unusual their snouts are.



question: How do hammer-headed bats use their hands and feet?

answer: The bat's scientific order, Chiroptera, which means "hand wing," describes the only true flying mammal. While some bats look similar to rodents or foxes, they are in a scientific category all their own. Look at your own hand and notice the skin that stretches between the bases of each of your fingers (especially your thumb and pointer finger). Now imagine that skin enlarged and extended, and you will get a good idea of how the bat's "hands" are structured.



Hammer-headed bats have a claw on their second "finger" that can be used to cling to fruit, a tree limb, or even a baby bat, called a pup. The thumb part of the hand is very flexible, allowing the bat to encircle itself in its wings to sleep in an upside-down bundle. This hanging ability is one of the greatest wonders of a bat's anatomy. For most of the resting hours of the day, a bat roosts, or hangs, from its strong feet.

question: Are hammer-headed bats harmful? What do they eat?

answer: Bats are more helpful to the world than they are harmful. These aerial mammals have been categorized into two groups: microbats and megabats. These names are not only related to the size of the bats but also to their diet and whether they use echolocation. Microbats feed on insects and use echolocation to hunt in midair. Megabats, or Old World fruit bats, are sometimes called flying foxes for their similarities in head and body to a furry fox. These bats, which include the hammer-headed bat, do not typically attack animals, but are frugivores [FROOJ-ih-vores], or fruit eaters, using their senses of vision and smell to find food. The hammer-headed bat consumes the pulp and juice of figs, as well as mangoes, bananas, and guavas. One of bats' greatest benefits is that they pollinate plants as they eat.



indian or malabar giant squirrel

question: Why are they so colorful?

answer: Aptly nicknamed the “rainbow squirrel,” the Indian or Malabar giant squirrel is quite a sight in the rainforests of India. They are crepuscular, or most active during dawn and dusk. These stunningly colored squirrels are perfectly camouflaged with dapples of different colors to help blend into the forest scenery around them. Imagine their brilliant red, orange, and purple hues against the backdrop of a gorgeous sunrise or a fiery sunset! In contrast to this showstopping appearance, their scientific name, *Ratufa indica*, simply means “rodent of India.”



The Indian or Malabar
giant squirrel measures
about 1 m (3 ft) long!





question: What do such large squirrels eat?

answer: It comes as no surprise that the world's largest squirrel spends about 58% of its waking time foraging and eating. Malabar giant squirrels are omnivores that are able to find all their favorite foods in the trees, so they hardly ever climb down to the ground. They eat a variety of flowers, fruits, and even tree bark. They also enjoy seeds and nuts, which makes them important in planting new trees in their habitat. Sometimes the giant squirrels eat bird eggs and insects as well.



INDIA