

MEERKATS AT THE MELBOURNE ZOO

Meerkats love to dig, and humans love to watch them!

Meerkats are not a threatened species, and it is unknown whether wild populations are increasing or decreasing.

MEETING THE MEERKATS

Meeting the meerkats at Melbourne Zoo is an important way to connect with the animals of Africa, and to learn about the Zoo's conservation programs.

There are three subspecies of meerkat: red, grey and slender-tailed, the subspecies at Zoos Victoria.



ABOUT MEERKATS

Meerkats live in southern Africa, which is dominated by the Kalahari Desert. Countries where they are found include Angola, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

They are small: 26–28cm (with a 22cm tail).

Finding safety in numbers, meerkats live in groups of 10–30, with a female in charge of each smaller family unit. Meerkats spend most of the day foraging for food. A lookout stands on a high viewpoint until relieved by another meerkat. Danger can come from threats such as jackals, vultures, snakes, servals or hawks. Meerkats have a wide range of vocalisations, and warning calls are specific to each form of danger. The pack may band together to threaten a predator or rival pack with much hissing and jumping.

Meerkats are omnivorous, and their diet includes pupae and larvae of moths, butterflies, beetles and flies; termites; crickets; spiders; scorpions; and other invertebrates that they excavate. They also eat lizards, small snakes, birds, eggs and mice. In dry areas they get moisture by chewing local melons, roots and tubers.



Meerkats are not cats, they are a member of the civet family, which includes the otter and mongoose.