



## The Collared Peccary aka Javelina

Peccaries are only distantly related to pigs despite some superficial similarities: they have a similar body and head shape, including their snouts, and they share some behaviors, such as wallowing and rooting. However, they developed completely separately. In addition to less noticeable but important biological differences, peccaries have virtually no tails while pigs have no scent glands. Unlike pigs, peccaries have no gall bladder. Peccaries' jaws move only up and down (so there is no chewing motion, just a crushing motion), as opposed to pigs, who's jaws move side to side (grinding their food). The lower and upper canines of peccaries work against each other which results in razor-sharp edges.

The collared peccary, *tayassu tajacu*, can now be found as far north as Flagstaff, Arizona and southwest Texas and southward through much of South America. They share much of Central and South America with another species, the white-lipped peccary. The Chacoan peccary is found only in central South America, in Paraguay and Bolivia. Both the white-lipped and the Chacoan peccaries are endangered. Of the three species of peccaries the collared peccary is the smallest.

Collared peccaries are covered with gray and/or black hairs that are white at the base and have a "collar" of yellow-white hairs around their throats. They have a black mane that extends along the top of their backs from the collar to the scent gland, which is located on the back about six inches forward from the tail stump. Males and females are nearly the same size, usually weighing 30-45 pounds. In urban areas, where they are artificially fed, there have been reports of males weighing as much as 80+ pounds.

The social nature of peccary herds is reinforced through communication and behaviors such as nuzzling or rubbing one another and wallowing or sleeping in huddles. Herds generally travel, eat, and sleep together. If a herd has a dominant member, it is usually a female; there will be a dominant male in the herd, but the female will be dominant over him.

Herds have definite home territories, which are marked by scent. When food and water are plentiful, these territories are not mutually exclusive. In fact, territories may overlap by up to 1/8 mile, especially in areas of established water holes. However, when resources are limited, a herd may aggressively defend its territory.

Although peccaries originated in tropical forests, the collared peccary has adapted quite well to desert living.

Areas with thick, dense vegetation are favored for both the protection and food provided. Herds will lay up in caves and abandoned tunnels or under rocky overhangs, if available. Here in the desert, however, they most frequently lay up in shallow depressions under thick brush. Their preferred food is cactus pads, as they provide water. Fleshy cactus fruits and succulents (such as agaves) also provide water. Seeds and beans, especially from palo verde, acacia, and mesquite trees, are an important part of their diet. They will also eat tubers, hedgehog and barrel cactus, and green leafy material.

Because they developed in dense, tropical forests where vision was not of much use, their vision is very poor. Their senses of hearing and smell are quite strong, however, and are vital parts of the communication necessary for herd cohesiveness, their primary defense against predators. The musky smell secreted from their scent glands also facilitates herd cohesiveness. Paradoxically, however, it would seem to make it easier for predators to locate a herd as well.

Coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions will predate on young or sick peccaries if they are separated from the herd. A lone adult javelina, with its strong jaws, long sharp teeth, and quick reactions, may successfully repulse an attack from a mountain lion or coyote group, but is usually unable to do so.

Togetherness calls range from the low purring and grunts used to keep track of one another while feeding to a bark, used to reassemble the herd or locate a lost member. Aggression within the group usually occurs in overcrowded situations or in the presence of a limited food source and will be exhibited by growls, tooth clicking, and squealing. The vocalization for alarm or distress is a loud woof.

Peccaries are not monogamous. Reproduction appears to be somewhat dependent upon available nutrition, which is dependent upon seasonal rains. Females generally become able to reproduce at about one year of age. Although young may be born in any month, the most common months for births are June through August. Most litters consist of 1-3 young, after approximately 145 days of gestation. The female will nurse the young for approximately 1½ months and watch closely over them until they are about 3 months old.

Javelinas will usually attempt to avoid human contact. If they begin to associate humans with food, however, the chances of a human-javelina encounter increase. When javelinas feel cornered, they can become aggressive, so please don't feed them.