

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Desert Meerkats

Meerkats live in the deserts and prairies of southwest Africa. They have cute pointed faces and tiny ears. Black patches of hair surround their eyes. They are adorable little creatures. Some people even tame them. They keep them as pets to kill rodents. Most meerkats live in the wild, though.

It can be very hot in the places where meerkats live. But they have a smart way to avoid the heat. They burrow tunnels in the ground. They use their strong claws to dig the tunnels.

### Just One of the Gang

A group of meerkats is called a “mob” or a “gang.” In the morning, the gang goes out in search of food. Meerkats are very social animals. They work together to find food. They like to eat insects. The insects can be found in rocks.

While searching for food, the meerkats are out in the open. This means they are in danger of being hunted. Large birds can swoop down and snatch them up. Jackals can sneak up and attack them. But some meerkats are sentinels. They act as guards. First, the sentinel finds some food to eat. It eats until it is full. Next, the sentinel stands up on its hind legs so it can look out for enemies. If anything tries to sneak up on them, the sentinel shrieks loudly. This tells the rest of the gang to run and hide. Then the gang moves on to the next place to search for more food. It is a very smart system.



**These adult meerkats are about 12 inches tall and weigh about 2 pounds.**

John Warburton-Lee/SuperStock

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An adult meerkat babysits two pups.

### Safety in Numbers

Meerkats work together to raise their young. When a litter of “pups” is born, it is not just the mother who protects them. Other meerkats help. At three weeks old, pups start eating insects. After five weeks, the pups leave the den during the day. They follow the gang around, begging for food. When the pups fall behind, helpers carry them on their backs.

At night, the gang returns to the tunnel. Families gather together in groups. They cuddle up and go to sleep. These very cute animals have developed smart ways to survive.