

# Long-tailed Chinchilla

*Chinchilla lanigera*

**Class:** *Mammalia*

**Order:** Rodentia

**Family:** *Chinchillidae*

**Characteristics:** Body length 8 ½ -15 in. Tail Length 3-6 in. Sexually dimorphic- female 800g; male 500 g. Black-tipped fur, dense and soft – 60 hairs per follicle, more than any other mammal. Thick fur prevents water and heat loss. Tail furry with coarse hair. Head broad; external, large ears; black eyes; cheek pouches. Fore and hind foot have four digits with stiff bristles around weak claws. Excellent hearing helps to detect predators and long tail provides balance for high-speed escapes. Grasping forelimbs and sharp nails make for agile climbing. Endothermic.

**Behavior:** Very Social. Have lived in colonies of over 100. Sit erect and hold the food in forepaws while eating. Can be hand-tamed to play and interact with owner. Primarily nocturnal with crepuscular activity peaks. Midday sun generally too hot but have been observed on sunny days sitting in front of holes, climbing and jumping on the rocks with amazing agility. Excessive heat escapes through large ears. Do not drink water but obtain it from dew on plants. Whiskers help navigate through cracks and fissures. Will express threats through growling, chattering teeth, and urination.

**Reproduction:** Opportunistic breeders. As the dominant sex, females very aggressive during estrus. Breeding season is six months depending on hemisphere. 2-3 litters per year. After 112 days gestation, 2-4 precocial young, born fully furred with eyes open, will nurse 7-8 weeks, eat solid food at 2 weeks and mature sexually by 6 months.

## **Diet:**

Wild: Birds eggs, insects, leaves, grains, nuts

Zoo: Commercial Chinchilla Chow.

**Conservation:** Critically endangered; only 10,000 left in wild. In addition to habitat destruction, although protected by law hunting for fur continues. Attempts at reintroduction into the wild have failed. Commercially bred animals are in no danger.

**FYI:** AKA Chilean, coastal, common, or lesser chinchilla

Considered to be the most valuable pelt in the world selling for as much as 100,000.



## **Range & Habitat:**

Rocky crevices and holes in barren, arid mountains of northern Chile.



**Lifespan:** up to 8-10 years in captivity, 1-5 years in the wild.

**Special Adaptations:** Adapts to poor eyesight by forming mental maps of the environment remembering fastest routes to safety.

## **IUCN Conservation Status:**

Critically Endangered

