Tayassu tajacu (Collared Peccary or Quenk)

Family: Tayassuidae (Peccaries)
Order: Artiodactyla (Even-toed Ungulates)
Class: Mammalia (Mammals)

Fig 1. Collared peccary, *Tayassu tajacu.*

[http://a-z-animals.com/animals/collared-peccary/, downloaded 30 November 2011]

TRAITS. The overall coat of the peccary is bristled and is grey-black in colour and it has a dark dorsal stripe which is light by the shoulders (Wikipedia, 2011). It also has coarse fur. The peccary is characterised by the sizes of their heads and snouts which are large and long respectively and are covered with thick dark grey coats and have bristled hair. They are made noticeable by the white collar around their necks and have small straight tusks which are pointed down. The weight of the peccary is between 35-60 pounds and has a length of 48-58 inches and height of 20-24 inches. The lifespan of this mammal is 10 years in the wild. These creatures have small legs with their feet at the front having four hoofed toes and the hind have three hoofed toes. The peccaries also have a musk or scent gland, which is located on a mane, which is a line of hair around the neck of the mammal. The function of the musk gland is to identify the

members of its group and to claim territory. Their odour is very distinctive when excited and therefore the peccary is smelt before it's seen.

ECOLOGY. The peccary is an adaptable species. Its habitats range from deserts in North America to tropical forests in South America. In temperate regions which is at the peccary's northern range, the peccary during winter in which the temperature at nights can fall below freezing temperature, continues to maintain a viable population. For a species that also lives in the tropics, its tolerance to such low seasonal temperatures is exceptional. The diet of the species varies according to the habitat it inhabits. Roots, fruits, tubers, seeds, insects are some examples of the foods the collared peccary eats. As with all peccaries, *P. tajacu* are highly sociable, living in herds of between 6 and 30 or more individuals. The home range of peccaries are on average of 150 ha but could be as large as 800 ha. The variation of the home ranges among different herds in different regions is not uncommon. In winter, the peccaries are very active throughout the day taking advantage of the heat given off by the sun and at night they either rest in holes the dug themselves or caves whereas throughout summer, feeding happens at dawn and dusk and during the day they rest in shaded areas. They are known for being very athletic, speedy and agile and clocking speeds of 30 kph. Although they poor eyesight, peccaries have very good senses of smell and hearing.

COMMUNICATION. Due to the poor eyesight of the collared peccaries they depend on their keen sense of smell to travel and to learn its environment. Peccaries cannot distinguish moving objects from as far as 100 yards. They therefore use their scent glands compensating for this weakness. To identify a member of its herd, it rubs against the scent glands of another using its head and with the side of its lower jaw.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR. The dominant male of the herd will mate with the females as they come into heat but if more than one female comes into heat at the same time, subordinate males will mate with them. The collared peccary breeds yearlong. The normal gestation period is between 20- 21 weeks. The female either delivers the piglets in dens in a hollow log or either in a hole in the ground. She has one to three young, but the average size of the litter is two. The piglet can travel with the herd shortly after its birth. They are then weaned when they are three months old.

The collared peccary is a very unique even-toed ungulate, because both sexes live without struggle in the herds. There is a the lack of a clear dominance hierarchy, which results from the sexual size monomorphism of the peccary, although this hypothesis is somewhat controversial; Sowls (1997) argues that the more dominant males take first choice over other males when selecting a mate. The is supported because there are no secondary male sex characteristics that might aid in the victory or defeat of a male peccary in a potential agonistic situation, which would be rare because males do not fight one another for females.

Collared peccaries are generally congenial with one another, because of the amount of members its herd both males and females, represented in its social group and small litters of offspring that are able to travel and sustain themselves shortly after birth. Regardless of rare divisions to subcategories, the peccary herd members stay together the majority of the time such as times of eating and feeding, etc. When it is approached by predators and notices the threat, it makes a noise to communicate with its members to notify them of a potential threat. It is also said that the scent gland is also important in notifying other members of its herd. In order to

protect their offspring from danger, regardless of who is the parent, they organise the herd in such a way that the piglets are placed in between the adults. Peccaries are not favoured in treatment of their young, as offspring have been seen nursing from other females. While feeding, peccaries do not seem to have any problem with other peccaries feeding within their zone or in sharing the same meal. Peccaries defend their territories by rubbing their rump oil gland against tree trunks, stumps and even rocks. Collared peccaries ward off opponents by facing off, laying back their ears, and clanging their canines together. During the fight, they attack the opponent head on and biting.

REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR. Collared peccaries have an unrestrained mating system, and this is so because the peccaries do not pair after mating. Females generally allow the male to take up the dominant role in courtship and mating, although males can tend to be unreceptive at times (Byers and Bekoff, 1981). Lending more evidence to the hypothesis that a dominance hierarchy does not exist in these creatures, Byers and Bekoff observed only mild agonistic behaviour among male peccaries competing for sexually receptive females, and they failed to see any fighting. Though females will fend off a male who challenges to disturb mating between her and another male, the females have been known to mate with more than one male, without any hostility between the two males (Byers and Bekoff, 1981). It may therefore be said that the sperm of the male is highly competitive and that the fertility of male peccaries guarantees the production of their own offspring, since there is little or no hostility between male peccaries regarding females.

REFERENCES

Byers and Bekoff (1981) Social Play Behaviour: Cooperation, Fairness, Trust, and the Evolution of Morality, http://www.imprint.co.uk/pdf/81-90.pdf, downloaded 11 November 2011.

Sowls, L.K. (1997) Javelinas and other peccaries: their biology, management, and use. Texas A&M University Press.

Wikipedia (2011) Collared Peccary, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peccary, downloaded 1 November 2011

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Fig. 2. Collared peccaries during social interaction.

[http://bss.sfsu.edu/holzman/courses/Fall99Projects/peccary.htm, downloaded 16 November 2011]

Fig. 3. Collared peccaries communicating with one another.

[http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/pictures/Pecari_tajacu.html, downloaded 16 November 2011]

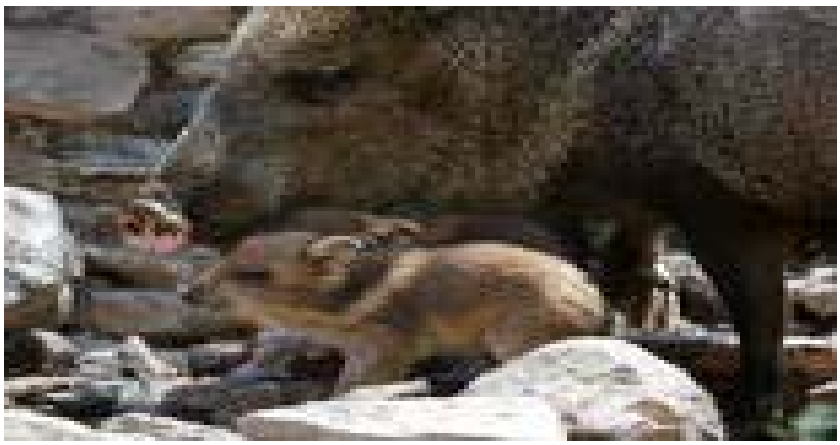

Fig. 4. Parental care of collared peccary.

[http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/pictures/Pecari_tajacu.html, downloaded 16 November 2011]