

Tapirus terrestris



South American tapir

Conservation status



Scientific classification

Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Perissodactyla
Family: Tapiridae
Genus: Tapirus
Species: *T. terrestris*

Binomial Name

Tapirus terrestris

(Linnaeus, 1758)

The South American tapir can be found near water in the Amazon Rainforest and River Basin in South America, east of the Andes. Its geographic range stretches from Venezuela, Colombia, and the Guianas in the north to Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay in the south, to Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador in the west. Although found in a wide variety of tropical and subtropical moist forests, dry forests and moist grasslands and savannas, the majority (approximately 50%) of its range is the Amazon rainforest.²⁶

T. terrestris is dark brown, paler in the face, and has a low, erect crest running from the crown down the back of the neck. The round, dark ears have distinctive white edges. Newborn tapirs have a dark brown coat, with small white spots and stripes along the body. The South American tapir can attain a body length of 1.8 to 2.5 m (5.9 to 8.2 ft) with a 5 to 10 cm (2.0 to 3.9 in) short stubby tail and an average weight around 225 kg (496 lb). Adult weight has been reported ranging from 150 to 320 kg (330 to 710 lb). It stands somewhere between 77 and 108 cm (30 and 43 in) at the shoulder.²⁷

T. terrestris is an excellent swimmer and diver, but also moves quickly on land, even over rugged, mountainous terrain. It has a life span of approximately 25 to 30 years. In the wild, its main predators are crocodilians and large cats, such as the jaguar and cougar, which often attack tapirs at night when tapirs leave the water and sleep on the riverbank. The South American tapir is also attacked by the green anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*). *T. terrestris* is known to run to water when scared to take cover.²⁸

Diet

The South American tapir is a herbivore. Using its mobile nose, it feeds on leaves, buds, shoots, and small branches it tears from trees, fruit, grasses, and aquatic plants. They also feed on the vast majority of seeds found in the rainforest. This is known because the diet is studied through observation of browsing, analysis of feces, and studying stomach contents.^{29,30}