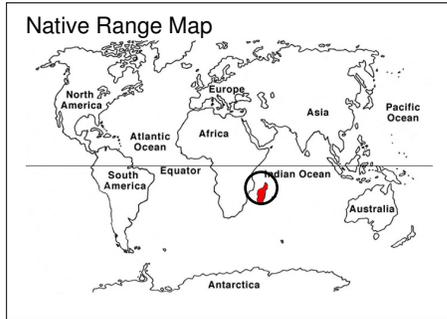


Native Range Map



Black & White Ruffed Lemur

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Primata
Family: Lemuridae
Genus: *Varecia*
Species: *variegata variegata*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The ruffed lemur, like all other lemurs, is endemic to (found only on) Madagascar, a large island off the east coast of Africa. The black-and-white ruffed lemur inhabits the eastern rainforests.
- **Exhibit Location:** Social Animals

Characteristics

- Along with lorises and tarsiers, the lemur is a prosimian - an “early primate” - and a relative of monkeys and other primates. *Varecia variegata* is the largest member of the lemur family, weighing 7.7 to 10 lbs. Its body length is about 50 cm (20"), and its tail is about 60 cm (24") long. The ruffed lemur gets its name from the long, thick, tufted hair circling the lower half of the face from ear to ear. Its coat consists of different sized patches of black and white, and it has bright, yellow eyes.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 15 – 20 years; **In Captivity** up to 25 years.

Behaviors

- The ruffed lemurs are arboreal forest dwellers, getting around by walking or running on larger branches and leaping from tree to tree. They are diurnal, active mainly in the early morning and late afternoon, though nocturnal behavior has been observed. These lemurs are social animals, with group sizes typically varying from 2-5 individuals, but occasionally numbering up to 30. Females are dominant to males, forming the core of the group and defending the territories, a system common only to Malagasy lemurs. Grouping patterns change with the seasons, with females forming larger groups during the wet season and dispersing during the dry season in search of food. Social bonds in groups are established and reinforced by grooming, but whereas most other primates groom with their fingers, prosimians such as the ruffed lemur have limited dexterity and instead have developed an unusual behavior; their 6 bottom incisors project away from the jaw to form a comb which these primates use to groom their fur and the fur of other group members.
- The word ‘lemur’ means a ‘night wandering ghost’ referring to their stealthy, noiseless movement through the forest by night. When alarmed by predators, however, these primates are far from quiet, emitting an elaborate system of loud barks through the forest to alert other group members.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** A variety of food, toys, scents and climbing apparatus.

Reproduction

- Females may become pregnant by 20 months of age, but the average age at first reproduction in captivity is 3.4 years. The gestation period is 90 – 102 days, with mating occurring between May and July. Unlike other lemurs, the ruffed lemurs give birth in well-concealed nests constructed of twigs and leaves, held 10 – 20 meters (32 – 65 feet) above the ground. Twins are the norm, with a range of 1 – 4 possible. However, infant mortality in the wild is high with about 65% of offspring failing to reach 3 months of age, dying from accidental falls and related injuries. The young are initially carried in the mouth of the female and are often deposited in a convenient place (also known as “parking”) while she forages. By 5 weeks of age the young can climb to the top of trees. Weaning occurs at about 135 days. After only four months the young are independent and as mobile and active as adults.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** They enjoy a rich diet in fruit, nectar of Bauhinia trees (obtained by using their long snouts and tongues to reach deep inside the flowers), seeds and leaves.
- **At the Zoo:** Monkey biscuits, primate diet, carrots, green beans, mixed greens, sweet potatoes, broccoli, apples, grapes, bananas.

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** Endangered on Red List 2004; **CITES:** Appendix I
- Most lemur species are endangered because of loss of habitat. Much of Madagascar's rainforest has been destroyed in the last century by logging and cultivation, leaving only about 10% of the native vegetation remaining. The ruffed lemur is particularly susceptible to this situation since they depend on large fruit-bearing trees for food and habitation. These animals are also at risk due to extensive hunting on the island for meat and for sale as pets.
- Conservation efforts are being focused on protecting the few existing patches of forests. The black-and-white ruffed lemur is known to occur in at least ten protected areas in Madagascar, though its numbers are sadly still declining. In North America, a captive breeding project for the ruffed lemur has been underway since the 1960s, under the Species Survival Plan (SSP) in which the Rosamond Gifford Zoo participates. Nine individuals were re-introduced to the Betampona Reserve in the Eastern forest between 1997 and 2001. Only one male survives, now integrated into a wild group, and one other pair produced triplets.

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Approximately 40 million years ago, several lemurs, floating on fallen trees, crossed the widening sea between their African habitat and the island of Madagascar. The lemur continued to evolve in isolation and developed into more than 40 different species. Seventeen of these species are now extinct and the rest are endangered.
- Madagascar natives once believed that the black and white lemurs worshipped the sun because they often sunbathe.
- In the north of Madagascar, the black and white ruffed lemurs have more black fur than those from the south.
- Lemurs sometimes hang upside down by their feet to feed.

Source:

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