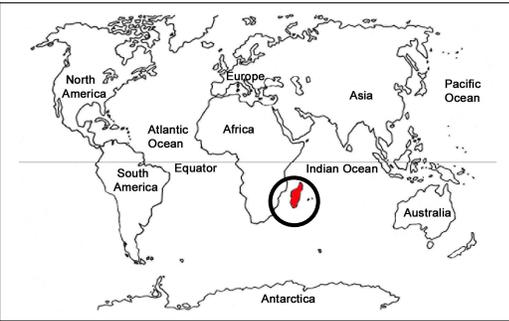


Ring-Tailed Lemur



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



Photo courtesy of Tony Wisneski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** Although widely distributed throughout the dry forests of southwestern Madagascar (some of the hottest, driest and least hospitable forests in the country), *Lemur catta* exists in only a few protected areas. Lemurs spend most of their time in the trees, but this species also spends considerable time on the ground.
- **Exhibit Location:** Social Animals

Characteristics

- Weight – about 2700 grams (6 lbs.) with the males slightly larger than the females.
- The lemur is a prosimian - an “early primate” - and a relative of monkeys and other primates. The ring-tailed lemur is named for the 13 alternating black and white bands on its sometimes two-foot-long tail. The adult is about the size of a house cat. All ring-tailed lemurs have white faces with dark triangular eye patches and a black nose. Their bodies are mostly gray and rosy brown in color on the back, white on the belly, gray on the limbs, and dark gray on their heads and necks. They also have a soft skin covering on their soles and palms that allows them to grip onto various objects. Six comb-like teeth sticking straight out from their lower jaws are used for grooming along with the second toes on their hind feet which have specialized claws. Males have a fingernail-like spur near each wrist that emits a strong scent for marking territories.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 20 to 25 years ; **In Captivity** 25 – 30 years

Behaviors

- Ring-tailed lemurs are social animals, living in troops of 15 – 25 individuals. Females are dominant within the troop and defend territories they’ve scent-marked by leaping and darting toward intruders. The male lemurs tend to hang back until the battle is over.
- The core of a troop of ring-tailed lemurs consists mainly of the females and their young. Males come and go from one troop to another, while females stay with the one in which they were born. As the troop moves from feeding site to feeding site, the core group settles into the best feeding spot (generally a good tree) and eats first. The males wait for them to finish or feed in a less desired tree nearby. Lemurs communicate vocally with howls and trills as well as through scent markings.
- They keep their tails raised in the air, like flags, to keep group members together. They spend more time on the ground (and less in the trees) than any other species of lemur. They often walk on all fours but will stand and run in a sideways skipping motion when necessary to escape quickly. Ring-tailed lemurs’ hind legs are longer than their front legs, so when they walk on the ground on all fours, their hind ends stick up in the air!
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** a variety of food, toys, scents and climbing apparatus

Reproduction

- Sexual maturity is reached at 3 years in the wild and as early as 18 months in captivity.
- Females usually have their first offspring at the age of 3 years and continue to produce offspring annually. *Lemur catta* mate during mid-April and give birth in August or September. Females are in estrus for less than one day, and all of the females come into estrus within 2 weeks of each other.
- Gestation is approximately 134-138 days. All infants in a large troop may be born in a matter of days. Single infants are most common, but twins are a frequent sight in ring-tailed troops when food is

plentiful. A newborn is carried in its mother's mouth until the baby is able to cling to the mother's stomach or back. Groups of females switch infants, baby sit, form play groups, and even allow infants other than their own to nurse. In the wild, the mortality rate of infants during the first year is 30-50% (primarily a result of falling or male infanticide).

- Infants begin to sample solid food after their first week, and will take their first steps away from mom at 3 - 4 weeks. Over the next five months, infants will spend increasing amounts of time on their own, returning to mom to nurse or sleep, until they are finally weaned at 5 - 6 months of age.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** plants, leaves, flowers, fruit, and even sap and bark. They feed from many different species of plants and trees, but are partial to the Kily tree. Occasionally they eat insects.
- **At the Zoo:** monkey biscuits, primate diet (canned vegetable/soy-based mixture), oranges, whole bananas, apples, grapes, carrots, broccoli, green beans and peanuts

Conservation Status

- IUCN status – Vulnerable (Redlist 2000); CITES Appendix I
- The gallery forests that ring-tailed lemurs prefer are rapidly being converted to farmland, overgrazed by livestock, and harvested for charcoal production. Ring-tailed lemurs are also hunted for food in certain areas of their range and are frequently kept as pets. Fortunately, ringtails are found in several protected areas in southern Madagascar, but the level of protection varies widely in these areas, offering only some populations refuge from hunting and habitat loss.
- The ring-tailed's primary predator is the cat-like fossa, the largest carnivore in Madagascar.
- All types of lemurs are now protected by CITES, which makes it illegal to hunt or capture lemurs for trade except for scientific research and conservation breeding programs in zoos. Rosamond Gifford Zoo participates in the Species Survival Program (SSP) for this animal. The Madagascar Fauna Group comprised of zoos and other related organizations, works to conserve lemurs, other Madagascar wildlife, and their habitat. Approximately 1,000 can be found in over 140 zoos worldwide.

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Ring-tailed lemurs are sunbathers, sitting with their bellies facing the sun with arms and legs stretched out.
- Ring-tailed lemurs are one of the most vocal primates. They have several different alarm calls with distinct meanings to alert members of their group to potential danger.
- Ring-tailed lemurs can spend up to 50% of their day on the ground.
- Ring-tailed lemurs have scent glands on their wrists and chests that they use to mark their foraging routes. Male ringtails are equipped with scent glands on their wrists which are used in "stink fighting" with a rival male. A horny spur on the male's wrist gland is used to pierce tree branches before scent marking them.

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