

**Golden Lion Tamarin**  
*Leontopithecus rosalia rosalia*

**Classification**

Class: Mammalia  
Order: Primate  
Family: Callitrichidae  
Genus: *Leontopithecus*  
Species: *rosalia*  
Sub-species: *rosalia*

**Distribution**

Golden lion tamarins are native to southeastern Brazil near Rio de Janeiro.

**Habitat**

Tropical swamp forests in coastal lowlands.

**Physical Description**

- Golden lion tamarins are six to ten inches (15-24 cm) long with a ten to 16 inch tail (25-40 cm).
- They weigh 17-24 ounces (500-700 g).
- They have reddish-gold fur and a lion-like mane around the head.
- Their faces are dark and hairless.
- Have claws, rather than flattened fingernails.

**Diet**

What Does It Eat?

*In the wild:* Fruits, flowers, frogs, lizards, snails, bird eggs, insects and plant exudates (gums and nectars).

*At the zoo:* Canned marmoset diet, mealworms, egg, fruit, vegetables and vitamins.

What Eats It?

Hawks, large snakes and cats prey on the tamarin.

**Social Organization**

Golden lion tamarins are social animals living in family groups of up to 15 members. Groups usually consist of one breeding adult of each sex, their offspring and sometimes other relatives.

**Life Cycle**

Tamarins are sexually mature at about 18 months. Mating occurs once a year and females give birth during the rainy season when fruit is most abundant. Pregnancy usually results in twins born after a gestation of about 128 days. Females nurse the babies but infant care is cooperative with the fathers and other group members caring for the infants when they are not nursing. Infants are weaned at about 90 days. Offspring often remain with the family group as adults to help care for younger siblings. Lifespan in the wild is about eight years and up to 15 years in captivity.

**Adaptations**

**Keep Out!**

Golden lion tamarins establish and defend a territory as large as 100 acres against other tamarins. Territories are marked using scent glands located in the sternal and genital areas. Vocalizations are also used to warn intruders to stay away. Actual fighting between rival groups does not occur.

**Treetop Living**

Golden lion tamarins are active in the upper canopy of the forest during the day. They forage for food using their long, slender fingers to probe in small crevices, under bark and inside plants. At night they retreat to nest holes in trees and sleep until after sunrise. The adults are the first to venture out in the morning and the last group members to enter the nest holes at night. The tree holes also provide protection from predators and relief from the mid-day heat.

**Talk to Me**

Tamarins use a variety of vocalizations to communicate with group members. High-pitched calls and squeaks are used to warn intruders away and to warn group members if predators threaten.

Different calls are used for predators in the air (like hawks) and predators on the ground or in the trees. Tamarins also communicate through facial expressions and scent marking.

### **Conservation Connection**

*IUCN Status: Endangered.*

Golden lion tamarins are endangered due to severe habitat destruction because of logging, farming and urbanization. Only 2-3% of their former forest habitat still exists. In 1974, the Poco das Antas Biological Reserve was established in Brazil to provide a protected area for tamarins. A second reserve, União Federal Biological Reserve, was established in 1996. In 1971 an international cooperative breeding program was established to increase the captive population of tamarins. By 2001, nearly 150 captive born tamarins had been reintroduced to Brazil to increase the number and genetic diversity of the wild population. Because of the cooperative efforts between the government of Brazil, zoos (including Denver Zoo), WWF and other organizations as well as farmers in Brazil, there are now over 1200 wild golden lion tamarins in preserved forest in Brazil and a stable population of about 500 golden lion tamarins in zoos around the world. By 2025, the goal is to increase preserved forest to 62,000 acres and provide corridors to reconnect fragmented habitat to support a sustainable population of 2,000 golden lion tamarins.

### **Fun Facts**

- Golden lion tamarins commonly give birth to twins.
- By 1971, golden lion tamarins were critically endangered with only 200 left in the wild.
- Golden lion tamarins groom themselves like other primates. Mainly males groom females.
- Juveniles play with each other a lot; they chase and wrestle with each other.

