

Ring-tailed Lemur

Lemur catta

Stink Fights - Ring-tailed lemurs have scent glands on their wrists, chests and genital regions. These glands secrete a fatty substance used to mark territory along their foraging routes. During mating season, males rub secretions from the scent glands all over their tails and then wave their tails in the air. These "stink fights" establish rights to breed with females.

Calling All Ring-tails - Ring-tailed lemurs communicate with vocalizations and scent marking. They are one of the most vocal primates with at least 15 different vocalizations including one call for aerial predators and another for terrestrial predators. There is a call to bring troop members together, and an alarm call uttered in unison by the whole troop.

Classification

Closely related to all other lemurs, the ring-tailed lemur is one of five groups of lemurs.

Class: Mammalia

Order: Primate

Family: Lemnidae

Genus: *Lemur*

Species: *catta*

Distribution

The island of Madagascar supports the entire range of the ring-tailed lemur.

Habitat

Tropical deciduous forests, and Euphorbia bush habitat.

Physical Description

- Ring-tailed lemurs are 15-18 inches (39-46 cm) long with a 22-25 inch (56-63 cm) tail.
- They weigh five to seven and a half pounds (2.3 - 3.5 kg)
- They have dense gray fur with white undersides. The face is white with dark triangular eye patches and a black pointed muzzle.
- Their distinctive tails are black and white striped.

Diet

What Does It Eat?

In the wild: Fruit, leaves, flowers, exudates, spiders, caterpillars, birds, and grasshoppers.

At the zoo: Monkey chow, fruit and vegetables.

What Eats It?

Raptors, fossas, civets, snakes, and domestic cats prey on lemurs.

Social Organization

Ring-tailed lemurs live in social groups of 5-24 individuals including a core group of adult females with their infants and juveniles, including one or more adult males. All females in the group are related while males move among troops. There is no consistent leadership in the group but all adult females are dominant over all males in the group. Troop members establish and aggressively defend territories.

Life Cycle

Both male and female ring-tailed lemurs reach maturity at about two and a half years, but males are generally older before they are strong enough to win breeding rights. Mating begins in mid-April in the wild. Gestation is 134-138 days with infants born in August and September. Single infants are most common, but twins are not rare when food is plentiful. Lemur infants weigh three to four ounces (85-113 gm) at birth. The infants cling to the mother's belly for the first two weeks and then begin riding on her back. They nurse for about five months but begin taking solid food at about two months. They begin to walk at about four weeks and are independent by six months. Females remain with their natal group but males move among troops once they reach maturity. Lifespan in the wild is 16-19 years but in captivity they can live about 30 years.

Adaptations

Stink Fights

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Tooth Comb

Ring-tailed lemurs have six lower teeth that stick straight out from the jaw forming a "toothcomb" that they use to groom their fur to remove excess fur and parasites. They also groom other troop members which helps reinforce social bonds within the group.

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Conservation Connection

IUCN Status: Vulnerable.

All lemurs on Madagascar are threatened because of deforestation for industry and plantations, slash and burn agriculture and logging. Ring-tailed lemurs can only survive in primary forest which is rapidly disappearing.

Fun Facts

- Ring-tailed lemurs spend one-third of their day on the ground more time on the ground than other lemurs.
- Males have "stink fights" for the right to breed with females – the smelliest guy fathers the most offspring.
- Lemur means "ghost" in the Madagascar language.