



Ring-tailed Lemur

Lemur catta

Classification *What groups does this organism belong to based on characteristics shared with other organisms?*

Class: Mammalia (all mammals)
Order: Primates (prosimians, monkeys, apes, humans)
Family: Lemuridae (lemurs)
Genus: Lemur (ring-tailed lemur)
Species: *catta* (ring-tailed lemur)



Distribution *Where in the world does this species live?*

Ring-tailed lemurs are found in south and southwest Madagascar.

Habitat *What kinds of areas does this species live in?*

They prefer spiny forest, lowland gallery forest, dry scrub, dry deciduous forest and rock canyons.

Physical Description *How would this animal's body shape and size be described?*

- The ring-tailed lemur has a very distinctive bushy tail with thirteen alternating black and white bands.
- They are about the size of a house cat with a head and body length of 17 inches (42.5 cm) Their tail is 24 inches long (60cm). They weigh 4 ½ - 5 ½ pounds (2.0 – 2.4kg).
- They have gray to rosy brown fur on the back, gray limbs and haunches and dark gray heads and necks.
- Their undersides are white and their faces are white with dark triangular eye patches and a black pointed muzzle.

Diet *What does this species eat?*

In their historic range: This species of lemur eats fruit, leaves, flowers, bark, sap, large insects and sometimes small vertebrates like chameleons. They will occasionally consume soli to supplement their diet.

At the zoo: The troop of lemurs is fed vegetables, greens, starches, a low starch gel, biscuits, and a small amount of dried fruit for training.

Predators *What eats this species?*

Their main natural predators are the Madagascar harrier-hawk, Madagascar buzzard and fossas.

Social Organization *How does this animal interact with others of its species?*

Ring-tailed lemurs are the largest groups of all lemurs in Madagascar. The ratio of males to females is about 50:50 plus young. Groups which are called troops are numbered anywhere between 3 and 35



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individuals. Females are dominant over the males. It is a matriarchal society where the males leave when they become sexually mature at 2.5 – 3 years. Males continue to change groups every 3 to 5 years throughout their lives.

Life Cycle *How does this species mate, raise young, grow and develop?*

Ring-tailed lemurs usually give birth to a single offspring, but twins occur occasionally. Gestation is about 130 – 144 days and babies are born in September when food becomes abundant. The young lemurs weight 3–4 oz (85–113 gm) at birth and can immediately cling to the mother’s belly where they stay for about for 1-2 weeks. They then migrate to her back for another 1 -2 weeks and begin walking at about four weeks, returning to their mother only to eat and sleep. Offspring are independent at about six months. Their life expectancy is 15 – 16 years in the wild and around 20 years in captivity.

Adaptations *What physical and behavioral characteristics enable this animal to survive and thrive?*

- Ring-tailed lemurs are **diurnal**, or active during the day.
- They are **terrestrial**, meaning they spend most of their time on the ground, though they are still agile in trees.
- Males **scent-mark** with a wrist gland that also has a horny pad used to gouge scent into bark.
- They keep their **ringed tails in the air** when they travel as visual communication to keep the group together.
- They have **six lower teeth** that stick straight out from the jaw forming a “comb” that they use to groom their own fur and that of other members of the troop.
- They are one of the most **vocal** primates with several different alarm calls.

Collection Connection

The ring-tailed lemurs live in Primate Panorama in the Emerald Forest building.

- Kermit was born on 4/23/96. He was named this because of his resemblance to Kermit the Frog.
- Waldorf was born on 3/20/97.
- Zonker was born on 3/22/15. He is one of the more curious lemurs. You can often find him outside in nice weather climbing to the top of the mesh to pull leaves off of nearby trees.
- Baldwin was born on 4/27/15. He loves to sit by the front glass and watch guests. He often sits on enrichment or inside cardboard boxes.

Conservation Status *Is this animal at risk for extinction and why?*

IUCN Status: Endangered

The ring-tailed lemur has lost habitat due to burning, overgrazing and wood harvesting for charcoal production. They are also hunted for food or captured and kept as pets.

Resources and Where to Learn More

National Geographic <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/r/ring-tailed-lemur/>.

Franklin Park Zoo <https://www.zoonewengland.org/franklin-park-zoo/our-animals/mammals/primates/ring-tailed-lemur>.

Smithsonian’s Nation Zoo <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/ring-tailed-lemur>.