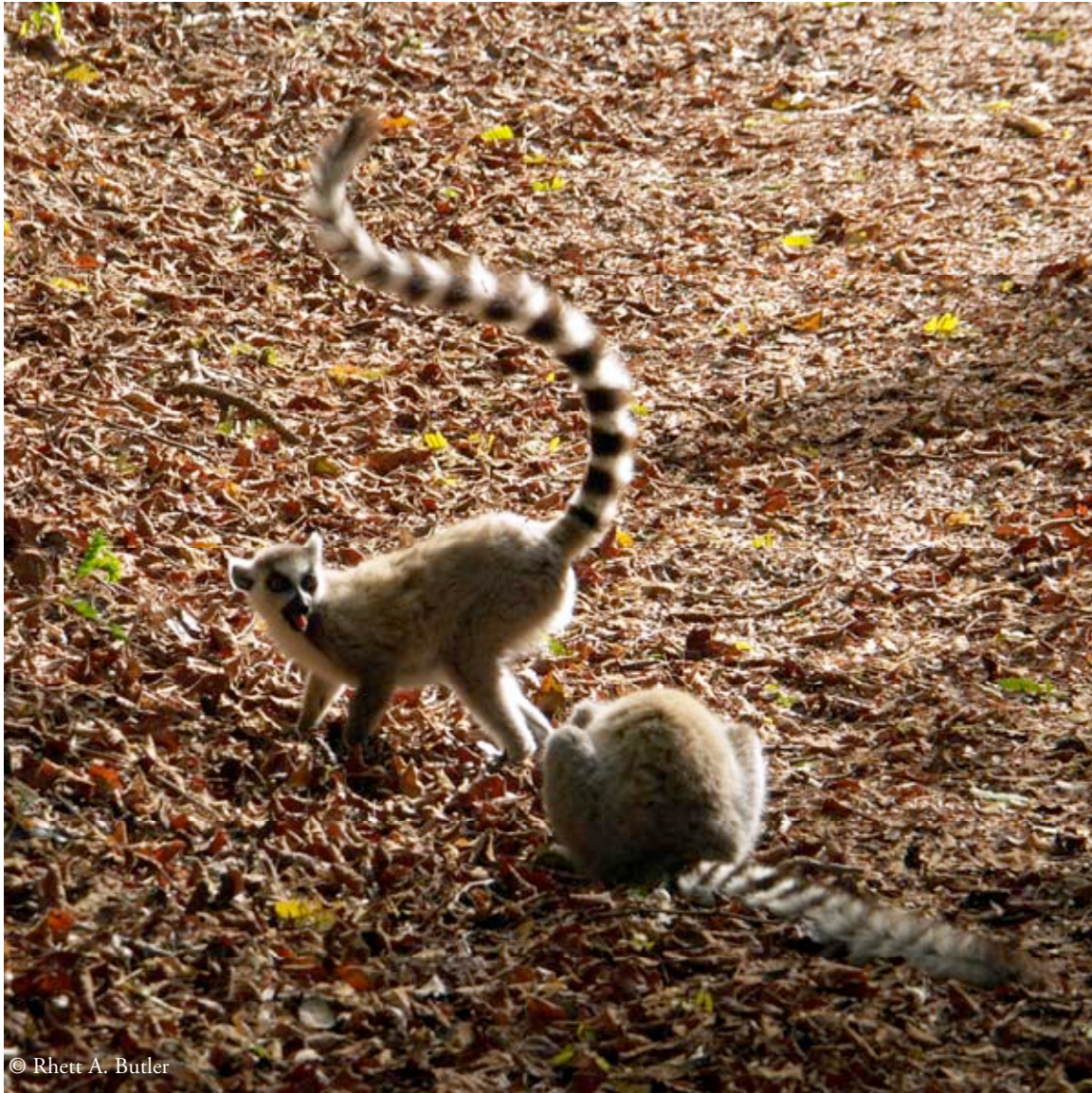


The Wildlife of MADAGASCAR



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Ring-tailed lemurs in Madagascar

W I L D M A D A G A S C A R . O R G

Mammals of Madagascar

LEMURS

Lemurs are a group of primates found only on the island of Madagascar. Today there are around 60 types of lemurs that live in virtually every habitat across the island. Sadly, due to forest destruction and hunting many lemurs are threatened with extinction today.



Indri

The indri is the largest living lemur. Black and white in color, the indri is famous for its eerie wail that sounds a bit like the song of a humpback whale. The indri feeds on fruit and leaves in the canopy of the rainforests of eastern Madagascar. Today the indri is endangered due to habitat loss



Aye-aye

The aye-aye is one of the strangest creatures in the world. This nocturnal and reclusive lemur looks like it has been assembled from a variety of animals. The aye-aye resembles a large house cat but with the face of a ferret or weasel, bat-like ears capable of rotating independently, teeth that grow constantly like those of a rodent, piercing green eyes, and black hands featuring a bony middle finger reminiscent of a dead twig. The aye-aye uses this finger for locating insect larvae that lurk deep inside tree bark, seeds, and fruit. As it climbs along a tree branch, the aye-aye taps the bark while listening for cavities in the wood. When it hears something potentially appetizing beneath the surface, the aye-aye gnaws away at the wood in search of its prize. Today the aye-aye is highly threatened by habitat loss and hunting. In some areas local people believe the aye-aye brings bad luck and will kill the animal whenever they encounter it



Bamboo lemur

Bamboo lemurs feed on bamboo and are generally found in the rainforests and cloud forests of Madagascar



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Verreaux's Sifaka

Verreaux's sifaka lives in the dry forests of western and southern Madagascar where it feeds on leaves, fruit, and flowers. Sifakas are quite vocal with a variety of calls but they are best known as "dancing lemurs" for their mode of locomotion when they cross open ground. Sifakas do not move about on all fours -- instead they sashay on their hind legs while holding their arms aloft (below).



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Ring-tailed lemur

The ring-tailed lemur is the best known of lemurs. Ring-tails live in the dry forests of southern and western Madagascar where they feed on fruit, flowers, leaves, and bark.



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Mouse lemurs

Mouse lemurs are tiny primates found widely in Madagascar. Nocturnal and feeding on insects, small vertebrates, fruit, and flowers, mouse lemurs are known for the chirping vocalizations and frenetic activity. The pygmy mouse lemur (*Microcebus myoxinus*) may be the world's smallest primate.



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Black-and-white ruffed lemur

The black-and-white ruffed lemur lives in the eastern rainforests of Madagascar. These lemurs are highly territorial and practice communal care for infants which are kept in nests rather than being carried on the backs or stomachs of their mothers. These lemurs are widely hunted over their range.



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Red-fronted brown lemur

The red-fronted brown lemur is widely distributed in the dry deciduous forests of western Madagascar where it feeds on flowers, leaves, seed pods, fruit, insects, and bark.



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Lepilemur, Sportive or Weasel lemur

Lepilemurs are nocturnal lemurs that are easily spotted during daylight hours as they rest in tree hollows. Lepilemurs, which are neither weasel-like or sportive, feed on leaves and are quite vocal at night.

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CARNIVORES & TENRECS



Fossa

The fossa is a carnivore that is related to a mongoose and looks like a cross between a puma and a dog. Fossas are nocturnal creatures that hunt almost any animal including insects, reptiles, rodents and lemurs. They also prey on chickens in and around Malagasy villages and are hunted by local people as vermin. Fossas are active both in trees and on the ground and are excellent climbers.



Narrow-striped mongoose (top), Fanaloka (bottom)

These small carnivores are found in western and eastern Madagascar respectively.



Streaked tenrec

Tenrecs are unusual insectivores that have radiated into ecological niches filled in other lands by hedgehogs, mice, shrews, opossums, and even otters. While some tenrecs are found in Africa, they are most diverse in Madagascar which has around 30 species.

BIRDS

Madagascar is home to 258 bird species of which 115 are found nowhere else in the world. Madagascar once had giant land birds, the largest of which weighed over 1100 pounds (500 kg) and stood ten feet (3m) tall. Elephant birds (*Aepyornis*) were driven to extinction in recent history by human hunting, introduced species, and habitat loss.



Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher

(left) This kingfisher is endemic to Madagascar.

Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher

(right) The local name for this bird is *soimanga*

Madagascar Bee-eater

(middle left) Local name: tao-taonkafo

Giant Coua

(bottom left) The giant coua large terrestrial bird that is endemic to the island.



Marsh Owl

(bottom right) This owl is endemic to Madagascar



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FROGS

Madagascar is thought to have more than 300 species of frogs, 99% of which are endemic. Frogs are the only amphibians found in Madagascar -- there are no toads, salamanders or newts.

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Tomato frog

The Tomato frog releases a sticky glue-like secretion that protects it against colubrid snakes, cats, and dogs. This secreted substance can produce an allergic reaction in humans as well



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Golden mantella (left), Painted mantella (right)

Mantella are among the most popular of Malagasy frogs in the pet trade. These strikingly beautiful frogs fill a similar ecological niche to the poison dart frogs of South America in that both use bright color frogs to advertise their toxic skin secretions to predators.



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Boophis tree frogs

(top and left) Boophis tree frogs are common in the rainforests of eastern Madagascar

Green Climbing Mantella

(above right) Another mantella species found in the Bay of Antongil watershed forests

REPTILES

Madagascar is home to more than 300 species of reptiles of which over 90% are endemic. Madagascar's reptile fauna includes lizards, snakes, turtles & tortoises, and crocodiles.

Madagascar's reptiles are as unusual as they are unique. The island lacks pythons, which are found in nearby Africa and throughout Asia, along with front-fanged venomous snakes. Equally strange, Madagascar's iguanid lizards and boas have their closest relatives in South America.

The uniqueness of the island's reptiles has resulted in widespread collecting for the exotic pet trade. Some species of chameleons, geckos, and tortoises are threatened due to unsustainable collection



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Radiated tortoise

Four species of Tortoises (Testudinidae) exist in Madagascar today. Some of these species are among the rarest in the world and all are endemic

The island also has four turtle species, one of which is endemic.

Nile crocodile

Crocodylus niloticus, the Nile crocodile, is found in freshwater habitats in Madagascar. This species was once widely abundant and greatly feared in the country but years of hunting for its skins has made it a threatened species.

Crocodiles are found in the caves of Ankarana special reserve. National Geographic led an expedition to learn about this unique behavior.



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LIZARDS

There are more than 210 species of lizards in Madagascar. Some of the better known are chameleons, geckos, skinks, and iguanids. Strangely absent from the island are agamas and monitors which are found across Asia and Africa

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Day geckos

Unlike most geckos which are nocturnal, day geckos are day-active lizards. Day geckos feed mostly on insects.



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Leaf-tailed or Uroplatus geckos

These geckos are remarkably well camouflaged. Inactive during the day, Uroplatus geckos only move when disturbed. They respond to prodding with an impressive display of a brightly colored gaping mouth and an erect tail. At night they hunt insects.

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Leaf-tailed geckos
Uroplatus fimbriatus
(above)

Uroplatus fimbriatus
(top right)

Uroplatus phantasticus
(middle right)

Uroplatus eburnei
(bottom right)

Chameleons

Madagascar is home to about half the world's 150 or so species of chameleons. Chameleons are small to mid-size reptiles that are famous for their ability to dramatically change color. Contrary to popular belief, a chameleon typically does not change colors to match its surroundings. Instead color is usually used to convey emotions, defend territories, and communicate with mates.

Chameleons change colors thanks to two layers of specialized cells that lie just beneath the lizard's transparent outer skin.

Chameleons are territorial and aggressive towards members of their own species. They are opportunistic hunters that wait for prey to pass within range of their long tongues. Most chameleons lay eggs.

In some parts of Madagascar chameleons are feared for their supposed magical powers and ability to see into the future.



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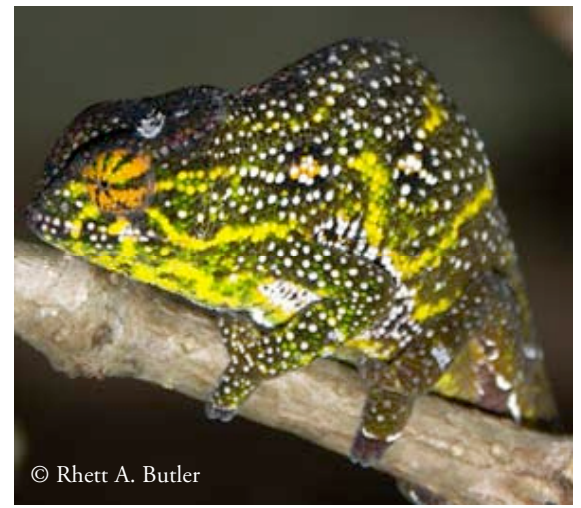
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Chameleons

Some of the smallest reptiles in the world are the Brookesia, stumpt-tailed or leaf chameleons. One species of Brookesia reaches a maximum length of just over an inch (30 mm).

These diminutive creatures are found in the leaf litter of rainforests and dry deciduous forests in much of Madagascar.

Brookesia feed on small insects and rely on their cryptic coloration to evade predators. When disturbed, these chameleons will play dead in an effort to resemble a fallen leaf.

Brookesia are easiest to find at night when they sleep on the leaves of small shrubs



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Collared iguanid

Iguanids are quite common in Madagascar even though their closest relatives are found in South America.

SNAKES

Madagascar is home to more than 80 species of snakes, none of which are overtly dangerous to humans.



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Langaha madagascariensis



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Madagascar tree boa

INVERTEBRATES

An unknown number of species of invertebrates are found in Madagascar, which has some of the richest insect biodiversity on the planet



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Pill millipede

At any sign of threat and the pill millipede rolls itself into a tight ball



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Millipede



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Stick mantid



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Comet moth



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Giraffe necked Weevil (below)

Leaf insect (above)



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Flatid leaf bug (*Phromnia rosea*)

These insects undergo a remarkable transformation between their nymph (juvenile) form [upper left] and their adult form [pink coloration].