



photos by Drew Fellman, © IMAX® film "Island of Lemurs: Madagascar"

About 60 million years ago, our distant cousins, the **lemurs** (LEE-mers), were castaways on Madagascar, an island off the coast of Africa. For millions of years, this island was a wonderful home for the lemurs — until humans arrived.

Today, lemurs are endangered, and many species are extinct. Experts say they are one of the most endangered mammals in the world. Wild lemurs are found nowhere on Earth except Madagascar.

This week, The Mini Page learns more about these cute animals.

Distant relatives

Lemurs were one of the first **primates** (PRY-mates), the family that includes humans, monkeys and apes. Primates have **digits**, or fingers and toes, that can grasp things. Most have fingernails instead of claws.

Primates have big brains for their body size. The lemur brain is smaller than those of later, similar-sized primates such as monkeys.

Lemur paradise

Scientists believe lemurs originated in Africa about 65 million years ago. Some time later, a storm swept a group of small mammals, these early lemurs, out to sea. They floated from Africa on a natural raft of plants until they reached an island about the size of Texas.



This island, Madagascar, was so isolated from other land that there were no other mammals or birds present. There were few **predators**, or enemies, of the lemurs. Snakes and crocodiles lived on the island, but no other predators arrived for about 40 million years. Lemurs spread throughout the island. They developed into hundreds of different species, ranging from some as big as a gorilla to others as tiny as a mouse.

The arrival of humans

When people first landed on Madagascar about 2,000 years ago, they began burning the lemurs’ forest home. Now, more than 90% of the forests there have been destroyed. All the large species of lemurs are extinct. More than 75% of the remaining lemurs are endangered.

Most of the people in Madagascar are poor. They may kill lemurs for food. Sometimes they are scared of the strange-looking animals. Lemurs have wide-eyed stares, and some kinds move around at night, so many native people believed they were spirits. “Lemur” means “ghost” in Latin.



Most lemurs are arboreal (ar-BORE-ee-uhl), or animals that live in trees. Species such as the ring-tailed lemur travel easily through the forest. The ring-tailed lemur also is at home on the ground, which is not true for all lemurs.

Mini Fact: Ring-tailed lemurs stay together for extra protection during the day.

Lemur life

Female lemurs are **dominant**, or the most powerful animals in a group. Usually in primate groups, males are dominant.

Different types of lemurs get together, or **socialize**, in different ways. Many groups stay together for years. **Nocturnal** lemurs, or those that are active at night, often seek food alone but nest together during the day. Many females, and sometimes a male, may share a nest.

In a group of black-and-white ruffed lemurs, all the females have their babies at the same time. They reproduce only when there is enough food to support lots of babies. They may go years without having any at all. When there is enough food, they may each have two to five babies in a litter.

Lemurs keep track of other lemurs by calls and smells. They have different calls for greeting and alarms. Lemurs may rush to help lemurs of a different species or even to help birds that aren’t lemur enemies.



Lemurs such as this sifaka eat fruit and other plant matter. Small lemurs also eat insects, and some eat frogs too.

Resources

On the Web:

- lemur.duke.edu
- bit.ly/MPKidz4Lemurs

At the library:


- “Lemurs of Madagascar” by KeriAnne Jelinek



Try ‘n’ Find

Words that remind us of lemurs are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

AFRICA, ARBOREAL, CALLS, DIGIT, DOMINANT, ENDANGERED, EXTINCT, FEMALE, FORESTS, GHOST, ISLAND, LEMUR, MADAGASCAR, NEST, NOCTURNAL, PREDATOR, PRIMATE, SMELLS, SOCIALIZE.



S	A	U	F	E	P	R	I	M	A	T	E	E	V	L
O	U	F	P	E	N	L	Z	E	B	C	X	W	T	T
C	L	D	R	V	M	D	A	P	U	T	F	S	S	N
I	A	N	E	I	P	A	A	N	I	O	O	S	L	A
A	E	A	D	F	C	A	L	N	R	H	Y	L	L	N
L	R	L	A	N	M	A	C	E	G	U	R	L	E	I
I	O	S	T	E	E	T	S	E	Q	E	T	A	M	M
Z	B	I	O	S	U	T	I	G	I	D	R	C	S	O
E	R	V	R	T	S	H	R	U	M	E	L	E	O	D
R	A	C	S	A	G	A	D	A	M	B	E	Y	D	N

Cook’s Corner


Veggie Cream Cheese Pizza

You’ll need:

- 1 (8-ounce) package crescent rolls
- 1 (8-ounce) package low-fat cream cheese, softened
- 1 (8-ounce) carton light sour cream
- 1 packet ranch dressing mix
- 1/2 cup green pepper, diced
- 1/2 cup broccoli, chopped
- 1/2 cup matchstick carrots
- 1/2 cup red pepper, diced
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese

What to do:

1. Spread crescent rolls on a 12-inch pizza pan evenly, pressing out seams to form one big crust. Bake according to package directions.
2. Mix softened cream cheese, sour cream and ranch dressing mix in a bowl. Spread on cooled pizza crust.
3. Spread vegetables and cheese on top. Cut into wedges or squares. Makes 8 servings.




* You’ll need an adult’s help with this recipe.

7 Little Words for Kids

Use the letters in the boxes to make a word with the same meaning as the clue. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in the solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

1. writer of a book (6) _____
2. Steph Curry’s game (10) _____
3. make (5) _____
4. nothing (4) _____
5. noisy black bird (4) _____
6. brave (8) _____
7. estimate (5) _____



ESS	LD	BAS	ZE
HOR	FEA	GUE	CR
RO	OW	AUT	KET
RL	BALL	BUI	SS

Answers: author, basketball, build, zero, crow, fearless, guess.

Mini Jokes

Lena: Where do lemurs go when they lose their tails?


Lonnie: To the retail store!



Eco Note

More than half of Earth’s land ecosystems are experiencing unprecedented conditions due to human activity, a new study reveals. Researchers found 58% of the planet’s land is exposed to a combination of human-caused climate change, species extinctions and disrupted plant life. The Amazon, New Zealand and Mediterranean regions were among the most affected, with even protected areas showing similar levels of disruption. Scientists say their findings highlight the need to focus on slowing or managing change rather than trying to restore ecosystems to their original states.

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Thank You

The Mini Page thanks primatologist Dr. Patricia C. Wright, founder of a lemur refuge in Madagascar, for help with this issue.



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