



Leapin' Lemurs

by Dan Breeding

“Cool. Is that a monkey?”

“Does she tear meat with those sharp teeth?”

“Hey, isn’t she on that TV show—*Zoboomafu*?”

She’s not a monkey—although she does have a tail like one. No, she doesn’t eat meat with her sharp teeth, but she sure tears through tough-skinned fruit with them. And, yes, she does look like Zoboo, the cute little creature from the popular children’s show. But she’s a different type of lemur than Zoboo.

As a wildlife educator, trainer, and speaker, I get to answer lots of questions about exotic animals like lemurs. The presentations I give throughout the U.S. allow people to experience God’s wonderful creatures up close and personal.

One of my favorites, among the nearly 40 wild animals I own and care for, is Maddy, a 7-year-old black-and-white ruffed lemur. I have representatives from all three main types of primates—apes, monkeys, and prosimians (primates that rely on smell rather than sight). The black-and-white ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) is from the prosimian group, which has a tail, unlike apes.

While *Zoboomafu* helped make this playful primate popular, the animated film *Madagascar* brought notoriety to her. Who could forget the fun-loving singing and dancing lemurs: King Julien, the ring-tailed lemur; Maurice, the aye-aye; and Mort, the Goodman’s mouse lemur?

Dan Breeding enjoys teaching about God’s amazing creatures, including Maddy, a black-and-white ruffed lemur that he has owned since she was two months old.



Photo Courtesy Dan Breeding

The Island of Lemurs

Madagascar, the place from which lemurs come, is just as interesting as these animals. This amazing island, located off the southeastern part of Africa, was once named Lemuria for its abundant population of lemurs.

Biologists continue to wonder exactly how lemurs arrived on this island. One possibility is that lemurs might have crossed over from Africa on floating log mats some time after the global Flood of Noah’s day.

According to Smithsonian National Zoological Park, Madagascar and the nearby Comoros Islands are home to nearly 88 different species of lemurs. The number and classification of species are changing as more DNA studies are conducted. For instance, in 2006 genetic analysis revealed three previously unknown species of lemurs, including one of the world’s smallest primates, a type of mouse lemur.*

My, What Big Canines You Have

One amazing feature that I love to point out about Maddy is her very large canines. While some evolutionists mistakenly assume that sharp teeth normally indicate meat-eating behavior, we know that God originally designed all animals to be vegetarian, and lemurs are still vegetarian.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The first Europeans who heard lemurs thought the forests were haunted. Thinking these screeching animals were the ghosts of dead people that wanted to harm them, they called them lemurs, which means “spirit of the evil dead.”
- There are two species of ruffed lemurs: red ruffed and black-and-white ruffed. Their name comes from the “ruff” of long hair around their chin and ears.
- Grooming is a social activity for lemurs. They can spend up to 10 percent of the day grooming. Females especially groom each other and one another’s babies.
- Each species of lemur has its own distinct vocabulary. Ruffed lemurs, which can make up to 13 unique sounds, produce group alarm calls when startled. It takes only one individual to begin a chorus that spreads to all ruffed lemurs within earshot. Their calls can be heard up to 1,000 yards (1 km) away.

CLASS: Mammalia

ORDER: Primates

FAMILY: Lemuridae

GENUS/SPECIES: 88 species

SIZE: The different lemurs range from the smallest, the pygmy mouse lemur at 1 ounce (30 g), to the largest, the indri and the diademed sifaka at 15 pounds (7 kg) and up to 4 feet (1.2 m) tall. Black-and-white ruffed lemurs are about the size of a large house cat.

DIET: Mostly leaves and fruits. Some nocturnal lemurs eat insects as well.

Source: Smithsonian National Zoological Park, <http://www.nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/Primates/Facts/FactSheets/Lemurs/default.cfm>.



Like all other lemurs, this red ruffed lemur (above) has a big, bushy tail that helps with balance. Lemurs also wave their tails in the air as a form of communication.



Kevin Schafer / The Image Bank / Getty Images

Lemurs have opposable thumbs and long toes for gripping tree branches (left).

A Treetop Nest Built for Two

Lemurs spend most of their time close to their food—high in the top half of the forest canopy where the fruit is plentiful. Female lemurs build nests for their young in the treetops, 60 to 80 feet (18–24 m) above the ground. Using her mouth to tear off and carry narrow branches, the mother builds one or more nests and uses some of her own soft fur to finish them off. After she gives birth to her babies (twins are common), the black-and-white ruffed lemur transports them in her mouth from nest to nest as she forages for food.

Lemurs have the ability to jump from tree to tree up to 30 feet (9 m). This incredible ability is possible because of their powerful legs, which are built like a rabbit's or a kangaroo's.

When I look at Maddy, I wonder how some people can believe she is the result of evolutionary processes. Showing Maddy to people gives me the opportunity to explain what an amazing designer our God is. He gave lemurs exactly what they need to live in the treetops of Madagascar, just as He gave us what we need to understand the wonders of His Creation. ■

NOTES

* <http://www.wildmadagascar.org/wildlife/lemurs.html>



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However, Adam's fall into sin changed everything, including the behavior and diet of many animals. In observing lemurs, we see that God likely designed their sharp, pointy canines to rip open hard-skinned fruits and vegetables, which are key elements of their diet today. Just because an animal has sharp teeth is not an indication it eats meat.

Oh, Where Is My Hairbrush?

Another really cool feature of lemurs is their unique grooming tooth on the bottom of their jaw. Similar to a hair pick, this grooming tooth is essentially several teeth fused together. Lemurs use this tooth to groom their hair, along with two grooming claws on their hind "feet," which have been referred to as another set of hands.



Dan Breeding is the founder of *Creatures of Creation* and *Wild Animal Encounters*. Dan has a degree in Wildlife Education and Animal Training and has made numerous appearances with his animals on television and at the White House.