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Jackson Zoo Staffers Playing Matchmaker

Red Ruffed Lemurs

This week zookeepers at the Jackson Zoo introduced Moon, a 10-year-old female Red Ruffed Lemur, to her potential mate, 12-year-old Pete. Moon arrived several weeks ago from the Denver Zoo and animal staff hopes that "a love connection" will be made between her and Pete that will result in a litter.

Part of the Jackson Zoo's mission, as well as zoos across the country accredited by the Association of Zoo's and Aquariums, is to ensure the survival of selected wildlife species. The Species Survival Plan (SSP) basically works to develop breeding programs for selected wildlife as a hedge against extinction and increase public awareness of wildlife conservation issues.

Unlike other lemurs, ruffed lemur females can have up to six young at a time. The average, however, is about three young per litter. The young are born covered with fur and with their eyes open at birth, but they are still quite helpless.



They are born in a nest where they stay, unless the mother moves them some where else. A behavior unique to the lemur family that is the "parking" of the young in a nest or the crotch of a tree while the mother forages.

Lemurs are very clean animals and spend a lot of time grooming themselves and each other. The lower incisors (front teeth) and the claw on the second toe of the hind foot are specially adapted for this behavior. The lower incisors grow forward in line with each other and are slightly spaced. This creates a "tooth comb" which can be used to groom their long, soft fur. The claw is also used for grooming.

When appropriate flowers are available, the ruffed lemur eagerly feeds on nectar by sticking its long nose deep into the flower. During this feeding, the flower is not harmed, but the lemur's snout becomes coated with pollen, which is then transported to other flowers. Hence for certain species of plants in the tropical forests of Madagascar, the ruffed lemur is an important pollinator.

In the wild, they are critically endangered, with only about 1,000 to 10,000 animals remaining. They are restricted to an area of tropical forest in the north east of Madagascar - the Masaola Peninsula, where they are threatened by deforestation, hunted for food and trapped for the pet trade.

Lion-tailed Macaques

Celeste, a 10-year-old Lion-tailed Macaque, arrived several weeks ago from San Diego. She's originally from the Denver Zoo. Celeste joined her new friends, the two males Jamaal and Stacie and female Sophie.

It is estimated that only about 2,500 Lion-tailed macaques left in the wild. The Jackson Zoo hopes to breed Celeste with one of the males as part of its SSP program as well.

Covered in smooth, black hair, lion-tailed macaques are hard to see in the shady forest. They have distinctive gray manes that frame their faces and give them a big-headed look. These animals get their common name from their tuft-tipped, droopy tails. They are usually about two feet long, with an additional 18 inches of tail. Males grow slightly larger than females. Weight ranges from 15 to 33 pounds. They eat fruits, seeds, buds, leaves, insects, and small birds and mammals.



Lion-tailed macaques live in southwest India in pockets of evergreen forests in the Western Ghats range. They live at elevations between 2,000 and 3,500 feet. Lion-tailed macaques live in moist, shady evergreen forest in the Western Ghats Mountains. During the day, lion-tailed macaques travel the treetops in groups of 10 to 20, including one to three adult males, several females, and their young. Males call loudly to announce their presence to other males. Three other primate species occur within the lion-tailed macaque's range, but the lion-tailed is the most arboreal (tree-living) species. While slowly moving through the trees, troop members stuff their cheek pouches full of food. Later, they extract the food by rubbing their cheeks with the backs of their hands.

Lion-tailed macaques are unique to India. In the early 1970s, they still ranged through the southern third of the country. Today, they only live in mountain forests scattered across three Indian states: Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. Over the years, many were captured for the pet trade, zoos, research, and use in traditional Chinese medicine. The macaques declined as human settlement advanced. Teak, coffee, and tea plantations as well as dams and roads destroyed many forests. Today, habitat destruction is the lion-tailed macaques' worst enemy.

Twenty-two other species at the Jackson Zoo are part of the Species Survival Program.

The Jackson Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). The AZA is America's leading accrediting organization that sets rigorous, professional standards for zoos and aquariums. The AZA is building North America's largest wildlife conservation movement by engaging and inspiring the 143 million annual visitors to its member institutions and their communities to care about and take action to help protect wildlife.

The Jackson Zoo is located at 2918 West Capitol Street and is open daily from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. For more information about the Jackson Zoo, call (601) 352-2581 or visit www.jacksonzoo.org.

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