

JUNIOR CATEGORY

THIRD PRIZE

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TOPIC 1

Write about your favourite primate and say where it is found, and why you like it.

My favourite primate has to be the lemur. Ever since I watched the movie Madagascar couple of years ago, the self-proclaimed 'Lord of the Lemurs' King Ringtail Julien, certainly caught my attention. I thought that he was the funniest character of all. He ruled over a large colony of lemurs although he had little ability to lead.

The name Lemur is actually Latin for 'the spirits of the night'. Lemurs are a species of primate known as the 'Prosimians'. They are primates that have very interesting feature. They look like a cat crossed with a squirrel. The country Madagascar is world-famous for its lemurs. These animals have very unique behaviors too, from singing like a whale to swaying across the sand like a ballerina. Lemurs are found to have evolved independently. It is believed that when humans arrived on the island around 2000 years ago, there were lemurs as large as a male gorilla.

Lemurs can range in weight from 30 grams to 9 kilograms. The smallest living lemur is the pygmy mouse lemur, which is less than 2.5 inches from head to toe although its tail adds another 5 inches. The largest living lemur is the Indri, which can stand as tall as 0.75 meter in adulthood. These animals also share common traits like most other primates which include opposing digits on their hands, feet and nails instead of claws. Another common trait is that they have a 'wet nose'. However, their brain to body size ration is smaller compared to other primates. The smaller species consume a wide variety of fruits and insects, while the larger species eat mostly plants.

Lemurs are easy to be loved. They're cute, charismatic and oddly humanlike, which isn't just a coincidence. Lemurs are primates like us, and while they're not as closely related to people as chimpanzees and other apes are, they're still family. Despite lemurs' popularity, sadly they are Earth's most endangered group of mammals, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Researches by scientists have shown that lemurs certainly are very intelligent creatures. They have shown they can memorize lists of images, type them out in the correct sequence, identify which are larger and even understand basic math! Another amazing fact is that the Indris, the largest lemurs, are the only lemurs known to sing. Although they are certainly not Ed Sheeran material, the songs are usually a key role in group formation as well as defense. They live in small groups across Madagascar's eastern rain forests. Both males and females sing, and research has

shown that the group members carefully coordinate their chorus by copying each other's rhythms and their notes.

When many people think about pollinators, animals like butterflies, bees and hummingbirds come to their mind. Did you know that the ruffed lemurs are considered Earth's largest pollinators? They come in two types of species which is red or black and white. Both ruffed species get pollen all over their noses as they eat fruit and nectar, and spread pollen to other plants.

Lemurs are in currently danger of becoming extinct due to the destruction of their tropical forest habitat on their native island of Madagascar. Lemur habitats are often cut down for illegal logging and forest clearing for agriculture and mining. They are increasingly hunted for food and certain species, the Aye-aye, are killed due to their strange appearance as an omen of sickness, death or evil. As a result many of the people that live in this area have placed traps to capture and kill them.

Of the 103 species, 24 are now listed as 'Critically Endangered', 49 are 'Endangered' and 20 are 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. There are many organizations trying to help the lemurs to survive. They continue to try to raise money for these animals to be saved. We should contribute and take effort to help take steps to save the lemurs for future generation.

Judges' comments

Moving from Malaysia to Madagascar, the writer highlights the diversity of lemurs, their importance and also the sad plight of primates today. Clever use of analogies and examples, making it easy for readers to fall in love with lemurs even if they have not seen one before.