**Black & White Ruffed Lemur**

*Varecia variegata*

**Scientific Name:**
*Varecia variegata*

**Other Names:**
Vari, Varikandana, Varikandra

**Range:**
Eastern Madagascar

**Habitat:**
Primary rain forest

**Description:**
Larger lemur with a black face, white chin and white, tufted ears. Body and feet are black, with white saddle, hind legs and forearms.

**Average Size:**
Length:
Body: 20 inches
Tail: 22 - 24 inches
Weight: 6 - 10 lbs.

**Lifespan:**
In the wild: Unknown
In captivity: 19 years

**Diet:**
In the wild: Fruit, seeds, leaves and nectar
In captivity: Fruit, vegetables and browse

**Sexual Maturity:**
20 months

**Gestation:**
102 days

**Number Offspring:**
2 - 6; 2 - 3 common

**Weaning Period:**
90 days

**Predators:**
Birds of prey, fossa and humans

**Population Status:**
Critically Endangered

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**Conservation**

Like all lemurs, Black and White Ruffed Lemurs are endangered. It is more difficult for this species, however, since they eat mature fruits from the largest trees that are the first to get cut in selective logging. In addition to loss of habitat and food sources, forest fires and capturing infants for the pet trade cause rapid declines in their wild populations.

Black and White Ruffed Lemurs are one of the few primate species to be reintroduced into the wild. The first release took place in 1997 when five, zoo-born lemurs were released into the Betampona Nature Reserve in eastern Madagascar. Since then, two more releases in 1998 and 2001 have been made.

The Sacramento Zoo partners with the Duke University Primate Center and the American Association of Zoos and Aquarium’s Madagascar Faunal Interest Group to breed this species and educate the public on how they can help these and other animals in the wild. Recycling programs, ecologically responsible practices and wild preserve funding are all part of the zoo’s conservation plans.

**Behavior**

These lemurs are diurnal and arboreal. They move about in the trees quadrupedally (using all four limbs) and are often seen suspending themselves upside down by their hind feet to feed on fruit near the tips of branches. Groups of this species number anywhere from five to 30 and are composed of mixed genders and ages, with the females being the leaders of each group. The exact social system is variable depending upon the season and on the quality of the habitat. Each troop is territorial, scent marking and defending their home range with vigor. There is also some inter group aggression, especially during breeding.

Although olfactory communication is used, vocalizations are much more important in the everyday lives of these ruffed lemurs. They have 13 documented, distinct calls, six of which relate solely to predators. There is even an “all clear” call to gather the group back together, but they are infamous for the loud, raucous bark given by all members to announce their territory. The group may even pursue perched birds of prey and carnivores stalking on the ground below to distract them from young in the nest.
Reproduction and Breeding
Breeding season in the wild is May through July, with birthing season in the months of September and October. In North America, the breeding season is from December to January, with births in April and May. Unlike most primates whose offspring cling to their bodies, black and white ruffed lemurs place their newborns in a nest for the first week. The female prepares a nursery in a tree hold or vegetation clump high in the trees, using leaves and her own fur for nesting material. She will stay in the nest for the a few days with the newborns before leaving to forage for food, while non-breeding females and males remain nearby to protect the young. One to two weeks later, the female carries the young in her mouth to a safe platform up in the trees, changing the location several times a day.

Black and White Ruffed Lemur babies develop faster than other lemur babies, and by one month of age they can already hold onto the branches. Not surprisingly, infant mortality, up to 65%, is high due to injuries from falling. The mother leaves for several hours at a time at this point, knowing the rest of the troop will assist the youngster if need be. At three to four months the young lemur is completely mobile and has begun to eat leaves and fruit, and only nurses from the mother ten percent of the time.

Amazing Facts
Because they pass seeds in two to three hours, black and white ruffed lemurs are great at seed dispersal and helping new trees grow!

Other than the much larger indri, this species has the loudest call in the lemur family. They can be heard 1 km away!

The traveler’s palm probably owes its existence to the black and white lemurs, thought to be the plant’s main pollinator!