The common squirrel monkey has a wide range in the northern Amazon and is thus considered an animal of Least Concern by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature). The species occupies secondary forest and is often found close to human settlements with the resulting conservation issues of shared space. Due to their small size they are not often hunted for food, but in many parts of their range, they are commonly trapped to sell in the pet trade.
SCIENTIFIC NAME
Saimiri sciureus

OTHER NAMES
Common squirrel monkey, South American squirrel monkey

RANGE
Northern South America including Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Surinam and Venezuela.

HABITAT
Rainforests, secondary forests, gallery forests, tropical marshes and swamps

DESCRIPTION
A small monkey with short, grayish brown fur on the back and head, with yellow fur on the arms and legs. The face has a white mask of fur around the eyes and dark brown or black coloration around the mouth and chin. The two main groups currently recognized can be separated by the white above the eyes; it is shaped as a pointed arch in the S. sciureus group, while it is shaped as a Roman rounded arch in the S. boliviensis group.

AVERAGE SIZE
Weight
Male: 740 grams
Female: 635 grams

LIFESPAN
20 years

DIET
Fruit, leaves and insects

GESTATION
160 – 170 days

PREDATORS
Birds of prey, snakes and small carnivores

BEHAVIOR
Squirrel monkeys are diurnal (active in the daytime) and arboreal (spending their time in the trees) using all levels of the forest, but forage and travel mainly in the lower canopy and understory moving rapidly predominantly on all four limbs (quadrupedally).

Squirrel monkeys are frugivore-insectivores spending the majority of their day foraging for fruit and insects. Groups can number into the 500s, but usually break off into small troops of closer to 50 individuals, made up of both sexes. Males and females in the group form a single, linear hierarchy in the group, with most males being dominant to females. Aggression between females is uncommon, but they do not form coalitions. Males form coalitions and can be aggressive to each other.

Squirrel monkeys exhibit complex vocalizations of at least 25 to 30 calls including peeps, twitters, chucks, cackles, pulsed and noisy calls. These calls are used to keep the group together, alert when predators or danger threatens the group, and maintain the territory of the troop. Physical posturing is also important for communication with “urine-washing” being one of the most widely recognized displays. In this behavior, the monkey (male or female of any age) urinates on its hands and feet and then spreads the urine all over their body. The purpose of this is thought to include the following: marking trails for other members of the group to follow, self-cleaning, displays of dominance, enhanced grasping of branches during locomotion, controlling body temperature through evaporative cooling, or communicating reproductive hormone levels.

REPRODUCTION AND BREEDING
Mating usually occurs during the dry season from August to early October with both mating and births being highly seasonal, seldom exceeding two months in duration.

Squirrel monkeys have a polygamous mating system, but usually only one or two males mate with the most frequency in the group. Experienced females prefer the larger males that have put on weight before the breeding season, but young females are not as selective and will mate with smaller, sexually mature males. Females reach sexual maturity around 2.5 years of age and males are sexually mature at 3.5 years of age.

Squirrel monkeys exhibit birth synchrony, with all pregnant females giving birth within less than one week, to decrease chances of predation. A single offspring is born each mating with the female responsible for almost all infant care and males responsible for group security. The birthing season lasts from February to early April coinciding with the dry season and the time when arthropods are in abundance.

For the first month of life, infants remain in constant physical contact with their mother, usually being carried on her back. By the fourth month of life they are spending more of their time with peers in play groups, making associations and relationships that are thought to carry through to adulthood alliances.

AMAZING FACTS
There are four recognized subspecies of this monkey.

During dry season shortages of appropriate fruiting trees, they are able to depend entirely on animal prey.