

# Episode 10: Ring-tailed Lemurs

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**Alanna:** I'm here with the ring-tailed lemurs. These guys are probably the most popular species of lemur. They are known for their very distinctive black-and-white striped tails. It looks like they have little individual rings going from top to bottom.

These guys are the most terrestrial of any lemur species. As you can see, these guys are snuggled up on the ground behind me.

The two lemurs we have in here are Onyx and Hibernia. They are an aunt-nephew pair living together. And they get along very nicely, as you can tell.

Ring-tailed lemurs live in the southern tip of Madagascar in the dry spiny desert. All of the plants and trees there have very large spines protecting their very small little leaves to hopefully prevent ring-tailed lemurs from eating them. But ring-tailed lemurs are very nimble and very good at climbing through those spines to munch on those yummy, crunchy leaves.

These guys are **opportunistic omnivores** so pretty much whatever they can find, and whatever they can catch, they will eat! They will eat anything from fruits, leaves, nuts, flowers, and seeds all the way







up to bugs, insects, grubs, and occasionally a small lizard or two if they can catch them.

Ring-tailed lemurs are very tricky to tell apart because they are not sexually dichromatic. So the males and females have the exact same fur coloration, and they are just about the same size as well. We have to look for small individual characteristics to help us tell who's who.

Lemurs communicate primarily through olfactory communication, or **scent marking**. What we would talk about, lemurs are going to stink about. All different species have a different array of scent glands on their bodies. Female ring-tailed lemurs just have scent glands under the base of their tail. Male ring-tailed lemurs have scent glands on their wrists, their shoulders, and under the base of their tails. They will use these scent glands to mark their territory and also to flirt with each other.

A unique behavior to ring-tailed lemurs is **stink fighting**. The males will mix their scent glands from their wrists and their shoulders into their tail and then they'll flick that tail over their heads and at the other males. And the stinkiest lemur is the one that wins! When the males are interested in a female, they will flick their stinky tail at her and then she gets to decide which male ring-tailed smells the best. For her, it's probably the stinkiest one!

Like most species of lemur, ring-tailed lemurs are female dominant. So the girls are in charge of the family group. Unlike other lemurs who live in smaller family groups, ring-tailed lemurs can actually live in groups as large as 30 individuals. So you will have one female who is in charge, then the other females rank below her and at the very bottom of the pyramid are the males. The males will usually







hang out on the edges of the family groups, not too close to the females. Because if they look at the females in a funny way, they might decide to come chase the boys around.

Females ring-tailed lemurs can have between one and three infants every single year, but they most commonly have either a single infant or twins.

Ring-tailed lemurs are endangered primarily due to habitat loss, and they are unfortunately victims of the illegal pet trade both in Madagascar and through breeders here in the United States. Lemurs do not make great pets. These guys are wild animals and, as we talked about before, they are very into scent-marking on everything. So you definitely don't want one in your home.

We are a hands-off facility here with our lemurs, so we do not touch them, we do not pet them, we do not play with them. The only time we have any sort of physical interaction with them is for any animal care or medical concerns that we might have with them. And that is trained behaviors asked for by our veterinary team. It's best to let wild animals like lemurs be wild, and stick to domesticated animals like dogs and cats for our pets.

One thing you can do to help ring-tailed lemurs is if you see videos or photos of people interacting with them, please do not share those photos or videos. People tend to see those and think that because lemurs are so fluffy and cute that they might make good pets. For more information on the Duke Lemur Center's policy on pet lemurs, please see our website: [lemur.duke.edu/not-a-pet](http://lemur.duke.edu/not-a-pet).

