

# Episode 11: Mouse Lemurs

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**Megan:** Let's head into the nocturnal building to meet the Duke Lemur Center's smallest residents, the gray mouse lemurs.

There are several different species of mouse lemur, including the world's smallest primate, Madame Berthe's mouse lemur, coming in with a body length of a whopping two inches! But we'll focus on the gray mouse lemur in this video.

With bodies only about three inches long, gray mouse lemurs can be hard to spot on a visit to the Lemur Center. Despite their tiny size, mouse lemurs have big personalities and have the reputation of being pretty feisty both with their keepers and with each other. While many lemur species are social, these little nocturnal lemurs are more solitary, though they do frequently sleep in groups. Most mouse lemurs here at the DLC live in condo-style housing so they can have their own personal space.

Gray mouse lemurs are found in the dry deciduous forests of western Madagascar. Tiny animals like gray mouse lemurs need to eat food that gives them lots of energy quickly, so they love to eat bugs, fruits, flowers, and tree gum, and sometimes even a small reptile or amphibian. Their larger relatives, Coquerel's giant mouse lemurs, have actually been observed eating rodents and even other small







mouse lemur species.

Mouse lemurs in the wild typically live to maybe six or seven years old. Here at the Lemur Center, they're a little more spoiled by our excellent animal care and vet teams, so they tend to live quite a bit longer: up to 15 years old! Mouse lemurs are great study subjects for our non-invasive research projects, since even though they are tiny and have shorter natural lifespans, they're still primates just like us.

Because the mouse lemurs here at the Lemur Center live so much longer than their wild counterparts, they can develop health complications as they age, like dementia, just like humans can! By studying these tiny primates living in optimal conditions here at the Lemur Center, we can actually learn more about how diseases like Alzheimer's can be observed and even treated in primates like them, or like us! It's important to remember that no mouse lemurs are harmed for our research, and in fact, they usually really enjoy participating.

We have trained mouse lemurs to use tiny touch screens to do very basic cognitive tasks, like distinguishing between two different shapes, kind of like a little lemur computer game. In order to motivate these tiny lemurs to participate in our research, we had to find a tasty treat that wouldn't blow their little diets, so they actually get a couple drops of pineapple juice as a reward for participating. If only we could all be motivated so well by just a few drops of juice!

