

Episode 9: Blue-eyed Black Lemurs



Faye: I'm really excited to teach you all about these awesome blue-eyed black lemurs! If you can see the two of them in there, you might notice that only one of them is actually black. That's because blue-eyed black lemurs come in different colors. They are **sexually dichromatic**—so the male is the black one, his name is Hamill, and the female is the one with the red hair. That's Gellar.

Hamill and Gellar are named after blue-eyed celebrities, according to the naming theme for blue-eyed black lemurs at the DLC. Hamill, of course, is Mark Hamill; and Gellar is Sarah Michelle Gellar. Other famous names here include Elvis Presley, Vivien Leigh, and Ann-Margret. Every species at the Lemur Center has its own naming theme, and the keeper who is in charge of taking care of each family gets to name the new babies when they arrive.

Blue-eyed black lemurs are found in the northwestern tropical forests of Madagascar. In that leafy forest they eat a lot of leaves, fruit, flowers, pollen, and sometimes insects.

One of the most unique and special things about blue-eyed black lemurs is, of course, their blue eyes. Blue-eyed black lemurs are one of only four primate species in the whole world known to have a blue-eyed gene, and they are the only lemurs that have blue eyes.





In human care, blue-eyed black lemurs are very rare, which means you can only see them in a few places in the U.S., including the Duke Lemur Center.

In sexually dichromatic species like the blue-eyed black lemur, when the baby is born it's always born the same color as mom, whether it's male or female. That's because baby lemurs are carried on the mom's belly, holding on tight, or on her back. Because that baby is the same color as mom, it blends in to her fur perfectly. This offers extra protection to the little one if a predator were to come by and spot mom. Once baby lemurs start to get a little bit older and start moving around on their own, the males are then going to change color, and end up the color that they will be as an adult.

In 2018, the Duke Lemur Center welcomed a new breeding pair of blue-eyed black lemurs, Velona and Mangamaso, all the way from Madagascar. These two were born in a zoo in Madagascar, and came all the way to the Lemur Center to join our **conservation breeding program**. Through this breeding program and other conservation projects in Madagascar, the Duke Lemur Center is protecting critically endangered species like the blue-eyed black lemur.

Most of the DLC's funding for those conservation programs comes from grants, from the Education Department, and donations from people like you! If you'd like to learn more about how you can help, visit lemur.duke.edu/protect.

