

Episode 12: Bush Babies



Megan: We may be called the Duke Lemur Center, but we do house one other primate species, and it's an adorable one—the Moholi bush baby, also known as the lesser bush baby! These bouncy little primates are related to lemurs, so they are strepsirrhine primates, and they're part of the same early branch of the primate family tree.

There are a few different species of bush baby, and all of them are found on the continent of Africa. Moholi bush babies are found in southern Africa. You'll find them in habitats like the savanna woodlands and deciduous forests.

Being small has its challenges, especially when your main method of moving around is giant,





energetic leaps. Bush babies have to eat lots of high-energy foods like insects and worms, and they also love to eat the sweet gums and saps you can find inside of trees. Here at the Lemur Center, our bush babies enjoy multiple catered meals every day including tasty treats like crickets, meal worms, wax worms, and gum paste, as well as some fresh veggies and primate chow.

Bush babies have a couple of special adaptations that help them find their food in the wild. They have narrow, rough tongues that are perfect for extracting gum from inside a tree, and they also have incredible hearing that allows them to track and hunt crickets and other insects with amazing accuracy. Their large ears can move and rotate independently of one another, acting like little sonar dishes to help them locate and catch unsuspecting bugs.

Moholi bush babies are pretty small, they are about six inches tall without their tail, and then their tail is even longer than their body—about nine inches long. That long tail is incredibly useful when you're a tiny jumping animal that can go over six feet in a single bound. They need something like a rudder to help keep them stable as you're moving through the air, so that long, long tail can swing around and help them balance as they jump and land.

This species may look cute and cuddly, but it's important to remember that no primate should be kept as a pet, no matter how small or fluffy they are. As an added deterrent to anyone who might be considering a bush baby as a pet, these little jumpers have a peculiar habit called urine washing—which is pretty much exactly what it sounds like. They regularly wash their hands and feet in their own urine. There's been some speculation over the years as to why bush babies exhibit this odd behavior. Some theorize that it might have something to do with scent marking, but more evidence suggests that it helps keep their grips nice and sticky when they're jumping and landing on branches and trees.

