

LESSON PLAN: BLACK & WHITE RUFFED LEMUR

By Susan Johnson

Objective: Education is a big part of the Wildlife Waystation's mission. Lesson plans are available to download for students, teachers and anyone interested in learning more about wild and exotic animals.



SAX

Sax is a Black and White Ruffed Lemur (varecia varecia variegata). She came to the Wildlife Waystation about three years ago from Florida. This black and white ruffed lemur loves to go out on walks or taken to a "play" area where she can jump, leap from pole to ropes. One of her favorite foods is hearts of palms.

Animal Facts:

All lemurs are endemic to Madagascar. There are more than 40 different lemur species - 17 of which are now extinct and the rest are endangered. Black and white ruffed lemurs live in one place and one place only, in the eastern rain forest of Madagascar. They are tree dwellers and are the most arboreal of the true lemurs.

Black and white ruffed lemurs are some of the largest lemurs - weighing around 8 to 12 pounds. They have black and white luxuriant fur. They have a snout. Their front teeth form a comb used in grooming, along with their second toe on their hind foot, which has a claw like nail. Their eyes glow reddish at night. Their ears are tufted - hence their name. They have scent glands on their neck, muzzle, chest and bottom, which they use to mark their territory and communicate with other animals. They are most active during dusk and dawn.

They live in social groups with many males and many females, consisting of 2 to 16 individuals. Members frequently change groups. The female has social dominance both within and outside the context of feeding and usually wins any aggressive interactions. Reproductive females need more access to food, since they carry and care for their offspring; that is why they establish this feeding priority.

Did You Know?

Their name "lemur" comes from the word "lemures" in Latin. It means "spirits of the dead" or ghosts. A researcher called Linnaeus came up with that name because the lemurs have big eyes and a ghostly stare in the forest at night.

Madagascar people once believed black and white ruffed lemurs worshipped the sun because they often sunbathe.

It is believed the ancestors of the current lemurs reached Madagascar from Africa crossing the sea by floating on fallen trees, approximately 40 million years ago.

The B&W Ruffed lemur tail is longer than its body and helps the animal keep its balance.

They eat mostly fruit, seeds, gums and leaves. Most hang upside down while feeding on fruit. They disperse undigested seeds in their feces throughout their territory and also pollinate plants by carrying pollen on their bodies. The seeds sprout to replenish the vegetation. This is especially important now that 80% of Madagascar's forests have been lost to logging and agriculture.

They become adults at 2 years of age and can start breeding. Females built a nest with twigs and branches and babies are born after about 102 days of gestation. The litters are 2 to 3 infants. A female lemur carries her newborn in her mouth until the baby is able to cling to the fur on her stomach or back. By five weeks infants can climb to the top of trees.

Lemurs communicate with each other by using different calls. When startled ruffed lemurs produce group alarm calls. The black and white ruffed lemur has the second loudest call of any primate, only howler monkeys are louder. One individual can start a chorus that spreads to all ruffed lemurs within hearing. Their sounds can be heard up to over one kilometer away (3/4 of a mile).

The black and white ruffed lemur's predators are boas, eagles, hawks, fossas (members of the mongoose family) and of course humans. They are the most endangered of all lemurs.

QUIZ & LEARN

1. How many fingers do Black & White Ruffed Lemurs have?
2. What is a "toilet claw"?
3. What is a "toothcomb"?
4. Why are the eyes of a lemur so round?
5. What do they use their "scent glands" for?

(See how you did by checking out the answers at the bottom of the page).

Project

Make your own Black & White Ruffed Lemur mask anytime you feel like dressing up. Download the template from our website.

Quiz Answers:

1) Five (5) and they have finger nails and the tip of their fingers is flat - 2) the toilet claw is on the second finger of their feet and is used for cleaning the fur and scratch - 3) The lower jaw incisors form a toothcomb used for grooming. - 4) Because originally, lemurs were nocturnal and they could see well at night. - 5) To mark their territory and communicate with other lemurs

Did You Know?

B&W Ruffed lemurs live in the tree canopy.

Their fur is dense and silky which allows them to stay dry during the rainy season.

They do not have full color vision but they can see enough color to distinguish between ripe and unripe fruit and to recognize young tender leaves.

Lemurs can live up to 15 years in the wild, much longer in captivity.