
WHAT ARE PET LEMURS?

A little bit about everything you've wanted to know about pet lemurs but didn't know to ask.



Why are lemurs important?

There are over 100 different types of lemurs in Madagascar but lemurs are becoming more Endangered and many are at risk of extinction. Madagascar is the only place in the world where you can see lemurs in the wild and many people come to Madagascar to see lemurs.

One-third of all of Madagascar's lemurs have been kept as illegal pets in Madagascar.

What is a pet lemur?

Wild lemurs are born in and live in forests. Pet lemurs include any lemur that has been illegally taken from its natural forested habitat, or that relies on humans for food. Many pet lemurs have a human owner and they are often kept in someone’s house or are kept on the properties of businesses like hotels and restaurants.

Why are lemurs kept as pets?

Lemurs are kept as pets for many reasons. Sometimes they are kept as a personal pet by families and other times they are kept by people and businesses who charge tourists money to interact with and take photos with the lemurs.

Is it illegal to keep lemurs as pets in Madagascar?

In Madagascar, lemurs are protected by National and International law (CITES 1972 accord) and it is illegal to remove them from the forest, sell them, or to keep them as pets. Most pet lemurs in Madagascar are illegally owned, including any pet lemur taken from the wild without a permit. There are approximately 30 facilities in Madagascar that have permits to keep captive lemurs for the purpose of rescue and rehabilitation, research, education, or for managed breeding programs. Legal captive facilities include the Tzimbazaza Zoo (Antananarivo), Lemurs Park (south of Antanarivo on RN1), and the Reniala Lemur Rescue Center (Mangily).



Lemurs are often kept in inadequate conditions, including in restrictive cages and lacking regular access to food and water.

Over 28,000 lemurs were kept as illegal pets in Madagascar between 2010 and mid-2013.

In Madagascar, it is illegal to keep lemurs as pets without a government permit. According to Malagasy Law N. 2005-018 (17 October 2005), it is illegal to take a lemur from the wild, sell it, or keep it as an illegal pet. Individuals that break this law can be fined and potentially face jail time (up to two years). The law stipulates a fine of between 10-50 million Ariary. In most cases, the lemur will also be confiscated. Finally, there is sometimes a social penalty for owning lemurs, as people in some communities consider lemurs to be sacred and it is taboo to take them out of the wild.

How many lemurs are kept as pets in Madagascar?

It is estimated that over 28,000 lemurs were kept as pets in Madagascar between 2010 and mid-2013. Most of these lemurs have been illegally taken from the forests and are illegal to keep as pets. This virtually no captive breeding of lemurs in Madagascar. For comparison, there are at least ten species of lemur that have less than 10,000 individuals left in the wild.

In what kinds of conditions are lemurs kept as pets in Madagascar?

Lemurs are kept in many different ways. Sometimes they are kept in cages or on a rope; in other cases they are trained to live near people (these are sometimes called 'habituated lemurs') and although they are owned by a human, they are not restrained. In most cases, pet lemurs are not kept in good conditions. Even for the ones kept in better conditions, their natural diet, habitat, and social structure cannot be properly replicated in captivity, which can lead to many problems for those individuals. Many pet lemurs die within weeks or months after being taken from the wild.

A pet lemur should be kept in an environment that allows for a full range of natural movement (walking, sleeping, climbing, jumping) and social behaviors. Lemurs should be allowed to move away from loud noises or from people and should also have access to shade and protection from the weather. Cages should be clean with no feces or rotting food. Lemurs should always have access to clean drinking water.

It is very important that lemurs are fed foods that are appropriate to their species. There are over 100 different types of lemurs and each species eats slightly different types of foods. Lemurs should never be fed human food such as rice or alcohol. Lemurs should not be fed too many sweet fruits like bananas or mangos.

Why is it bad to keep lemurs as pets or to interact with them?

As lemurs get older, they become more aggressive and can bite and scratch their owners.

In Madagascar, it is not good to keep lemurs as pets for several reasons. First, **lemurs are Endangered and removing them from forests to keep as pets is not sustainable.** Lemurs taken from forests suffer high mortality rates in the days and weeks following their capture. Moreover, habitat loss, hunting, and now the pet trade have significantly reduced the numbers of lemurs remaining in the wild. Continued harvest of lemurs for the pet trade will likely result in extinctions.

Second, **pet lemurs cannot go back to living in forests.** Most pet lemurs are captured as infants and do not learn how to find food or water, or how to protect themselves from predators. Pet lemurs also do not learn normal social behaviors and are not accepted into groups of wild lemurs. Therefore, they cannot survive in the wild.

Third, **adult pet lemurs often become extremely aggressive and disruptive to village life.** They may attack or bite, defecate in houses, and steal food or water. Unfortunately, aggressive lemurs are often abused or killed.

Fourth, evidence suggests that in areas of Madagascar where lemurs and humans often come into contact, ***there is an increased risk of disease transmission among and between lemurs and humans.***

It is very hard to keep a lemur as a pet, and because of this pet lemurs are often kept in sub-standard conditions. For example, when pet lemurs are kept in cages, the cages are often too small and not kept clean. In these situations, lemurs often do not have constant access to water and appropriate food, and they suffer because of this.

Why are pet lemurs sometimes aggressive?

When lemurs reach sexual maturity in their adulthood, they may become extremely aggressive. This is because they are unable to express normal social or ranging behavior and they become frustrated. They can bite or scratch adults and children. Lemurs also become aggressive when they are kept in small cages or in stressful situations. It is very difficult to keep lemurs as pets that are aggressive.

Is there a connection between the illegal trade of lemurs in Madagascar and the ownership of lemurs elsewhere in world?

At this stage, there is no evidence to suggest that lemurs kept elsewhere in the world are being illegally exported from Madagascar. In other words, lemurs taken out of forests in Madagascar are being kept as illegal pets in Madagascar and are not illegally exported to other areas of the world. Lemurs kept as pets elsewhere in the world have typically been bred in captivity outside of Madagascar.

What to do if you see a pet lemur in Madagascar.

First, if you see a pet lemur in Madagascar, you can anonymously report it to the Pet Lemur Survey (www.petlemur.com). This survey collects information for research purposes and makes data about the illegal pet lemur trade available to the public. Reporting information to the Pet Lemur Survey will not result in action against the pet lemur owner or confiscation of the pet lemur.

Second, you can also report the pet lemur to the *Direction Régionale de l'Environnement et des Forêts* (DREF). This report may result in action against the pet lemur owner or confiscation of the pet lemur.

Finally, you can support the rehabilitation of lemurs that have been confiscated from the illegal trade by supporting the following non-profit organizations: Lemur Love (US-registered NGO, www.lemurlove.org), Reniala Lemur Rescue Center (French/Malagasy NGO, www.association-reniala.jimdo.com), and the Madagascar Fauna and Flora Group (Offices in Madagascar, www.madagascarfaunaflora.org).

