

Fun Facts about Madagascar

Where is it?

Madagascar is an island off the coast of Africa. Scientists think it broke off from the African continent about 160 million years ago.

How big is it?

The world's fourth largest island, Madagascar is about the size of Texas.

What is it really like?

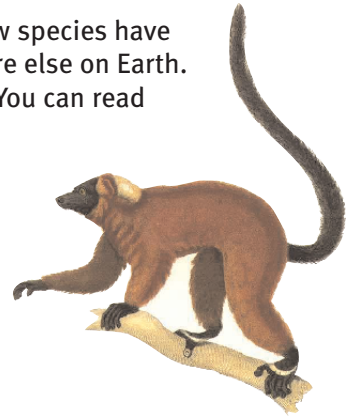
In real life, Madagascar has no lions, giraffes, zebras, or hippos. (The fossil record shows that hippos once lived on the island, but scientists think they went extinct about 1,000 years ago. These hippos, known as pygmy hippos, were much smaller than their African relatives.)

Why is it special?

Because Madagascar has been isolated from the rest of Africa for so long, many new species have evolved there. About 80% of the animals found in Madagascar do not exist anywhere else on Earth. Many are endangered, since over 90% of their natural habitat has been destroyed. You can read about a few of these special animals below.

Lemurs

These tree-hopping, furry creatures might seem like they're related to squirrels or cats, but they're actually more closely related to you and me. Lemurs are primates, just like monkeys, apes and humans. Over 30 different species of lemurs, including aye-ayes, live in Madagascar. They can travel up to 25 feet in one leap!



Chameleons

Almost half of the world's chameleons (about 60 different species) are found only in Madagascar. Known for their ability to change color, these reptiles vary their appearance in response to changes in temperature, light, and mood. By rotating each eye independently, chameleons can see to all sides without moving their heads.



Tenrecs

Tenrecs, which look similar to moles, shrews, and hedgehogs, were probably the first mammals to arrive on the island of Madagascar.

When scared, they curl up in a ball and extend spiky hairs to protect themselves from predators.



Fossa

Madagascar's largest predator - the fossa - has a cat-like body and a dog-like nose, but it is neither a cat nor a dog. This endangered animal is actually a close cousin of the mongoose. About twice the size of a house cat, the fossa primarily hunts birds and lemurs. A long tail helps it balance in trees high above the ground.



LEARN MORE!

Visit the Naturalist Center at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco and find answers to all of your Madagascar questions. The Academy is located at 875 Howard Street. For more information, call (415) 321-8000 or visit www.calacademy.org.