

Black & White Colobus Monkey (Guereza)

Colobus guereza

Black fur, a white face and long-haired white capes make black and white colobus monkeys look a bit like tree skunks. They have dark-skinned faces with dark eyes, prominent noses, and long, white-tufted tails. Unlike other monkeys, colobus monkeys lack functional thumbs.

What They Eat

Tender, high-protein leaves from forest trees are black and white colobus monkeys' favorite food. They also eat unripe fruit, seeds, flowers, and bark.

Where They Live

Black and white colobus monkeys are found throughout central Africa, from lowland trees to mountainside stands and wooded grasslands. Because each family group occupies a relatively small home range (about 20-80 acres), colobus monkeys can survive in small fragments of forested land interrupted by farms and villages. In fact, sometimes they do best in forests that have been slightly disturbed by logging and other human activities.

What They Do

Black and white colobus monkeys spend their days eating, relaxing, and socializing with each other, generally without squabbling. Males defend their group and its territory from others with roars, tongue-clicks, chases, and an unusual stiff-legged display.

Females give birth after a 158-day gestation period; infants are cared for by multiple females within the family unit. After about three weeks, the newborn's fur and skin begin to darken; after eight or nine weeks, the young monkey begins to go off on its own to nibble on leaves and play with other members of its group. Infants are susceptible to falling from trees and are targets of predators such as eagles. Those that survive are generally weaned by about one year of age. Females become mature around 4 years of age, and the males around age 6.

How They're Doing

Because individual family groups need only a small area, black and white colobus can coexist near people when clusters of trees remain intact. In some areas of tropical Africa, however, these small forest fragments are disappearing rapidly. Although sometimes captured for their fur, black and white colobus monkeys are not considered threatened by people.

How the Minnesota Zoo Is Conserving

The Zoo has provided funds to support primate patrolling and monitoring on Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea. Bioko Island is a small island twenty miles off the coast of Cameroon in West Africa, home to the capital city of Equatorial Guinea, 150,000 people, and some of the most endangered animals on Earth, including two species of colobus monkeys.

In the 1980's, the capital city of Malabo at the northern end of Bioko became home to a commercial bushmeat market, selling monkeys, duikers, sea turtles, monitor lizards, and other large animals. Since then, wildlife has largely disappeared from the northern half of the island. At the island's southern end, the Gran Caldera – a hollowed out volcanic crater – shields many animals from hunters with its steep gorges. As bushmeat supply decreases, prices increase – and hunters are making riskier and longer treks into the southern forests.

This project, run by the Bioko Biodiversity Protection Program, coordinates seven wildlife patrolling and monitoring teams in an effort to protect the island's remaining wildlife and keep commercial bushmeat hunters out of protected areas. In 2008 and 2009, the Minnesota Zoo

provided funding through the Ulysses S. Seal Conservation Grant Program to help keep these patrols running.

Interesting Facts:

- Colobus monkeys have multi-chambered stomachs that allow them to digest leaves and unripe fruit other monkeys can't.
- The word 'colobus' derives from the Greek word for 'mutilated.' They were given this name by European biologists because they lack functional thumbs.
- The male head of a colobus group announces its presence and location each morning with a series of loud, long roars.
- The practice of eating leaves is called "folivory."
- Black and white colobus monkeys are occasionally hunted for their striking fur, which has been used for everything from costumes and coat trim to rugs. Colobus monkeys, in turn, are eaten by crowned hawk-eagles, chimpanzees, and leopards.