



Marojejy National Park Anjanaharibe-Sud Special Reserve Madagascar



Silky Sifaka (*Propithecus candidus*)

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Although Madagascar is only about 500 km from the eastern coast of Africa, it has been geographically isolated for more than 160 million years. As a result, most of the plants and animals evolved in seclusion from the other parts of the world and can only be found in Madagascar. Out of about 51 total types of lemurs, none are found outside of Madagascar and the Comoros Islands. Many lemurs are presently in danger of extinction due to human hunting, habitat loss from slash-and-burn agriculture (“tavy”) and cyclone damage. Seventeen species of very large lemurs (the largest weighing 200 kg) have already gone extinct since the time humans first arrived on Madagascar about two thousand years ago.



The Silky Sifaka (*Propithecus candidus*) is one of the three rarest lemurs in Madagascar (along with Perrier’s Sifaka and the Greater Bamboo Lemur). Silky Sifakas are only found within the fragile borders of three reserves in northeastern Madagascar: Marojejy National Park, Anjanaharibe-Sud Special Reserve, and the Makira Conservation Site. The total remaining population is estimated at between one hundred and one thousand individuals. Due to their limited population, restricted range and continued threats, they have been recognized as one of the top twenty-five most endangered primates out of over six hundred total nonhuman primates in the world.

Silky Sifakas live in groups of two to nine individuals, usually consisting of several adult males and females, each weighing up to 7 kg. They are only active during the day and can travel very quickly through the trees using a form of locomotion known as “vertical clinging and leaping,” in which they jump from tree trunks using powerful legs that are 35% longer than their arms. Each day they travel about 0.7 km, while always remaining within their 44 hectare home range. Their daily travel is not continuous: about seven rest and feeding periods are taken each day that last from

15 minutes to 3 hours. Animals such as the Silky Sifaka that eat many leaves require much rest to digest this food. While their diet consists mainly of leaves, some fruits and flowers are also eaten. Seed-predation is common with fruits: the hard inner seed is preferred to the soft outer fruit. Sometimes they will eat dirt from the ground which may contain minerals and/or help kill parasites.

Although there is no difference in body size between adult males and adult females, and rates of aggression within the group are very low, adult females have priority of access to food over adult males and may (rarely) bite or slap the males during feeding. Silky Sifaka adults and juveniles spend great amounts of time playing with each other in the trees and on the ground. They may chase and wrestle while playing for up to an hour. Silky Sifakas communicate with each other by vocalizations and by smell or scent. They express approximately ten different vocalizations associated with various social and ecological contexts. All Silky Sifakas transmit their scent by leaving scent marks on trees; both females and males scent mark with their genitals, but only males scent mark with their chest. Scent marking (particularly in males) increases dramatically during the mating season (November – January). Like other lemurs, Silky Sifakas exhibit strict reproductive seasonality where females will mate for at most a few days of the year, giving birth on average to one infant every two years.

The major predators of Silky Sifakas are the Fosa (*Cryptoprocta ferox*) and human beings (*Homo sapiens*).