

8 Unusual Animals You Can Only Find in Madagascar

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Madagascar is an island situated in the Indian Ocean, about 300 miles off the coast of Mozambique. Roughly the size of Texas, the remote country is home to [nearly 25,000](#) animal species — many of which are endangered and endemic, meaning they don't exist anywhere else. Scientists attribute this phenomenon to the relative isolation of the island nation and its great distance from other landmasses. Boasting over 3,000 miles of stunning coastline, as well as lush rainforests, coral reefs, and one of the largest mangrove ecosystems in the world, Madagascar is renowned for its exceptional fauna and flora. Here are eight rare, fascinating creatures that are native to the island.

Aye-Aye



The [aye-aye](#) is a type of lemur that only lives in the northern region of Madagascar, and was initially believed to belong to the rodent family. With large, bulging, amber eyes, oversized, bat-like ears, and sharp front teeth reminiscent of a rat's, these bizarre creatures are endangered today not only because of their shrinking habitat, but also because they're frequently hunted by the Malagasy people, who believe they bring misfortune. The aye-aye uses its long, thin middle finger to tap trees and search for larvae to dig out and eat. Although they move nimbly on all fours, they cannot grip or swing from branches using long tails like their primate cousins.

Mouse Lemur



Of the dozens of discovered species of lemurs living in Madagascar, the [mouse lemur](#) is notable for being not only adorable, but also the smallest primate in the world. There are several different species of mouse lemurs, almost all of which have been discovered in the last 25 to 30 years. Generally, these pint-sized creatures weigh about as much as a tennis ball, measure just a few inches in height, and live high among the treetops.

Madagascar Flying Fox



The name of this endemic animal is deceiving; the [Madagascar flying fox](#) is actually a bat, rather than a fox! These nocturnal creatures have reddish fur (like a fox) and massive, dark wings, with a span of roughly 50 inches. This species of “megabat” is the largest bat on the island and lives in colonies of 400 to 1,000. Sadly, since the animal is popularly hunted for bushmeat and deforestation threatens its habitat, Madagascar flying fox population numbers are declining quickly.

Madagascar Serpent Eagle



Nesting in the towering forest canopy of eastern Madagascar, the majestic [serpent eagle](#) is among the most endangered raptors in the world. Rather than soar the skies to catch their prey, these birds still-hunt from tree branches high above sea level. Despite what their name suggests, serpent eagles feed mainly on chameleons, geckos, tree frogs, and bats. Measuring around 25 inches in size, with a pale, delicately striped belly, yellow legs, a short crown, and beady, yellow eyes, these stunning birds are quite elusive. Amazingly, researchers have closely observed only two nests to date.

Panther Chameleon



Nearly [half the world's 200 known species of chameleons](#) live on the island of Madagascar and exist nowhere else on the planet. [Panther chameleons](#), specifically males, are reptiles remarkable for their striking and vibrant rainbow coloration. Females are more uniform in appearance and are generally a light shade of green or pink, depending where they were born on the island. At rest, these masters of disguise change their appearance to stay hidden from predators and blend in with their environment — be it striped, spotted, plain, or multicolored. But when the panther chameleon is on the defense or seeking a mate, it puts on a kaleidoscopic display unparalleled in the animal kingdom. These lizards prefer to live largely in open habitats found on the island's central eastern and northern regions, which are void of too much shade. Chameleons are considered opportunistic hunters, because they sit and wait for their prey to move within range before striking out their long tongues to capture and eat them.

Giraffe Weevil



Of the countless insects that inhabit Madagascar, the odd-looking [giraffe weevil](#), a rare species of beetle found only on the island, is notable for its elongated neck from which its name derives. With a tiny, rounded body, bright red covering over its wings, long, black legs, and an even longer neck, this bug is both fascinating and hard to miss. The male giraffe weevil's neck measures two to three times longer than the female beetle's — an adaptation that comes in handy for nest building and for fighting off predators and other males.

Mantella Frog



Often called the “poisonous jewels of Madagascar,” the nation’s 16 different species of native [mantella frogs](#) exist in a range of stunning, bright colors — orange, yellow, emerald green, bronze, and blue. Some are uniform in appearance, while others are black and speckled with vibrant splotches of color. There’s an adaptive purpose for these frogs’ brilliant skin. Their striking, jewel-toned coloring is meant to send a warning of the toxins they secrete through their skin. Since this coloring would lose its purpose in the dark, these frogs are diurnal rather than nocturnal, meaning they are active during daylight hours. Most mantella species live on land, with a couple of exceptions that prefer treetop habitats. Since these special little amphibians crawl around on the forest floor rather than swim, mantellas also have feet that lack the webbing typically associated with frogs.

Fossa



The [fossa](#) is a brownish, cat-like forest dweller — the largest endemic carnivore in Madagascar. Adult fossa measure around five feet in length and have short legs, sharp claws, and a small head and ears for their large size. The fossa is terrestrial as well as arboreal, meaning it lives and hunts not only on the ground but also in trees. Most active at night, it eats mainly birds, lemurs, and livestock. Its ferocity is legendary on the island — haunting tales center around this savage predator, though many today consider the legends mere fantasy.