

# The secret life of... Ring-tailed lemurs

**R**ing-tailed lemurs are perhaps the most familiar and instantly recognisable of Madagascar's endemic primates: an icon synonymous with their island home. Yet paradoxically they are far from being typical: they are the most terrestrial of lemurs, live in the largest social groups, and tolerate some extreme habitats that no other lemurs can.

They are most often associated with the dry areas in southern Madagascar – spiny forest and adjacent gallery forest, but they are also known to inhabit mountainous areas up to altitudes of more than 2500m.

Berenty Reserve in the far south of the island provides the best opportunities to watch and photograph these lemurs at close quarters. Their social dispositions and the fascinating dynamics between different groups provide endless interest.

While during the months of September and October females are nurturing their youngsters, which provides wonderful photographic opportunities.



Sitting on the cool sand and lined up like a row little buddhas, a group of ring-tailed Lemurs catch the first rays of morning sun. Berenty private reserve, southern Madagascar (digitally stitched image)  
Nikon D3, Nikkor 500mm f/4, ISO 200, 1/250sec at f/8



Ring-tailed lemurs are adept at climbing through the tangled spikey branches of Octopus trees (Didieraceae) in spiny forest areas and feed on the small succulent leaves that grow between the thorns. Andohahela National Park, southern Madagascar  
*Nikon D2X, Nikkor 300mm f/2.8, ISO 100, 1/800sec at f/5*





A ring-tailed lemur lit by a spot sunshine as it pauses on the ground of a spiny forest in Berenty private reserve, southern Madagascar  
*Nikon D3, Nikkor 500mm f/4, ISO 400, 1/1000sec at f/7.1*



**Right:** Infant ring-tailed Lemurs stay very close to their mothers during early life. For the first two weeks they cling tightly to the mother's underside, but when older move around to ride on the back.  
Berenty private reserve, southern Madagascar  
*Nikon D300s, Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8 zoom at 200mm, ISO 500, 1/160sec at f/4*







An infant ring-tailed lemur, just six to eight weeks old, feeding and being groomed by its mother. Berenty private reserve, southern Madagascar  
Nikon D3s, Nikkor 200-400mm f/4 zoom at 380mm, ISO 500, 1/1000sec at f/5





**Above:** Ring-tailed lemurs spend long periods foraging in leaf litter on the forest floor. Here a female carrying an infant investigates some fallen tamarind fruit in Berenty private reserve, southern Madagascar  
*Nikon D3s, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8 zoom at 17mm, ISO 1000, 1/125sec at f/8, fill-in flash*



**Right:** Early mornings in southern Madagascar are often cool and ring-tailed lemurs regularly bask to warm themselves up. Berenty private reserve, southern Madagascar  
*Nikon D2X, Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8 zoom at 150mm, ISO 200, 1/500sec at f/4*





Ring-tailed lemurs are agile and acrobatic and often leap from branch to branch through treetops. This female is carrying her young that is perhaps less than a month old. Lac Tsimanampetsotsa National Park, southwest Madagascar

*Nikon D2X, Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8 zoom  
at 155mm, ISO 400, 1/320sec at f/5.6*





**Female ring-tailed lemurs carrying infants when running across open ground. Berenty private Reserve, southern Madagascar (digitally stitched image).**

*Nikon D300s, Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8 zoom at 120mm, ISO 200, 1/25sec at f/16*



**Nick Garbutt** is one of the world's leading authorities on the wildlife and ecosystems of Madagascar. A qualified zoologist, Nick has been a professional wildlife photographer since 19xx and is the author or co-author of six books, including *Mammals of Madagascar*, *Wild Borneo* and *Chameleons*. He has twice been a category winner in Wildlife Photographer of the Year. Nick leads wildlife photo tours to Madagascar, Borneo, the Pantanal, and to Tanzania for the Serengeti wildebeest migration.

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