

PHILADELPHIA ZOO

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Golden Lion Tamarin

We don't roar, but we are rare...



This monkey got its name from a much better known animal, and with only about 1,500 of these little guys left, perhaps you haven't heard of them before. Found in Brazil, Golden lion tamarins are endangered due to extreme habitat loss - less than 2% of their forests remain.

Their habitat is not only small but it is also fragmented, with groups living and breeding far apart from one another. Without conservationists'

intervention, groups could easily decline and eventually go extinct. Climate change, which also affects insects, lizards, and fruit that the Golden lion tamarin eats, makes survival more difficult for the species. Changing weather patterns and food availability can quickly have a severe impact on this rainforest species.

Quick facts:

- The golden lion tamarin is a squirrel-sized monkey found in southeastern coastal Brazil.
- They use their long, narrow hands for catching insects and other small prey that are hiding in the crevices and hollows of trees.
- Tamarins cannot grip objects very well because their thumbs are not completely opposable - an exception in the primate family.
- They typically weigh less than 2 pounds.
- The oldest Golden lion tamarin lived to be 31.
- The Golden lion tamarin has mutually beneficial relationships with 96 different plants, which it helps to disperse throughout its vast foraging range.

At the Zoo:

Rare Animal Conservation Center

On Exhibit:

Jameson: Male, born April 8, 2010, at the Philadelphia Zoo.

Natural History:

The golden lion tamarin is a squirrel-sized monkey found in southeastern coastal Brazil, in dense lowland rain forest. It is named for the mane of fur around its head and its bright coloration, which ranges from pale gold to a rich reddish-gold, with variable black markings, particularly on the tail.

The lion tamarins are the largest of the marmoset and tamarin group. More than 30 species of marmosets and tamarins are found in the Neotropics, from Panama through much of South America. Marmosets and tamarins differ from other monkeys in their small size and in having claws instead of flat nails on most of their digits (only the big toe has a flat nail). These claws help the small monkeys cling to trunks and branches.

Lion tamarins differ from other marmosets and tamarins in having long, narrow hands and long fingers, which they use to probe for insects and other small animals in places their prey might be hiding - under tree bark or inside a curled dried leaf. One of their favorite places to find insect prey is between the leaves of epiphytic bromeliads. Bromeliads are a group of plants found mostly in the New World tropics - the most well-known bromeliad is the pineapple plant. Many bromeliads are epiphytic - meaning they grow on the trunks or branches of trees or bushes rather than on the ground. Lion tamarins probe between the leaves of these "arboreal" bromeliads to find insects and other prey. They also use large bromeliads as sleeping locations - the entire tamarin group disappears into the middle of the dense mass of vegetation as dusk approaches.

Longevity

Golden lion tamarins have been known to live beyond 20 years of age in the protected environment of a zoo. In the wild they may live as long as 17 years, but most fall victim to predators, injury or illness long before reaching this age.

Behavior

Golden lion tamarin groups may be as large as 12-14 individuals, but most groups are smaller, with 5 or 6 being a typical group size. Many golden lion tamarin groups are composed of an adult pair and their young from recent litters. However, some groups contain two adult males, both of which may breed with the reproductive female. Some groups may also contain two breeding females. Golden lion tamarin groups are very territorial - when neighboring groups meet, they face off, calling loudly and chasing each other, but actual fights or injuries are rare. The average territory for a golden lion tamarin group is about 100 acres (40 ha). Why would a small group of monkeys need so much space? Believe it or not, they may need that much space to find enough food, particularly in the Brazilian winter, when fruit and insects are scarce.

Golden lion tamarins sleep in protected spots at night - often a cavity in a tree trunk, but sometimes in the middle of a dense clump of bamboo or in a large bromeliad. What's a bromeliad? Find out under "adaptations" below. Potential tamarin predators include large hawks, small cats like the ocelot, the tayra (a large weasel-like mammal), and large snakes.



Reproduction

Marmosets and tamarins, including the golden lion tamarin, have unusual reproductive patterns compared to most other monkeys. A female marmoset or tamarin usually produces twins and sometime triplets - for all other monkeys, twins are the exception rather than the rule. Marmoset and tamarin twins (or triplets) are usually fraternal, not identical, but they share a single placenta.

Another way in which marmosets and tamarins are unusual is in infant care. In most monkey species, only the mother carries a new baby. But in marmosets and tamarins, the father as well as older brothers and sisters will also help carry the baby, giving mom some rest. In the golden lion tamarin, the mother usually carries the baby 24 hours a day for the first week or so after the birth, before first the father and then the older siblings start to help.

Gestation period for the golden lion tamarin is 125-131 days. In the wild, most golden lion tamarin babies are born from September through December, near the beginning of the Brazilian summer, which is also the wet season in the part of Brazil where the tamarins are found. Usually, a female produces just this one litter a year, but sometimes, apparently when weather and other conditions produce a heavy fruit crop, so there's a lot for the tamarins to eat, a female might produce a second litter in January or February. In zoos, where there is plenty of food, female golden lion tamarins may have as many as three litters in one year.



Size

Head and body length is about 11 in (28 cm). Tail length is averages around 13 in (33 cm).

Weight

Wild golden lion tamarins typically weigh 1.2 - 1.5 lbs (550-700 g). Zoo tamarins may be somewhat larger and heavier.

Diet

In the wild: Fruit and insects are the major part of the diet. They also eat spiders, snails, small lizards, birds' eggs and nestlings, flowers, and frogs. In the Zoo: Specially formulated marmoset diet, crickets, mealworms, a variety of fresh fruits.

Geographic Range

Small remnants of low altitude forest in the Atlantic coastal region of SE Brazil, NE of the city of Rio de Janeiro.



Conservation Status

On the 2011 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Golden Lion tamarin is listed as Endangered.



Conservation at a Glance

Long-time Philadelphia Zoo conservation partner Associação Mico-Leão-Dourado (Golden Lion Tamarin Association) employs several strategies to save tamarins, including:

- Reintroduction and Translocation
- Reforestation
- Watershed management

- Public education

The Golden Lion Tamarin Association (GLTA) has worked to gain landowner and local government support for its efforts to improve and preserve habitat. As a result, a growing number of landowners are dedicating forested areas on their property as private reserves for this small monkey.

Planting “tree corridors” to create connections between private forests is facilitated by the Golden Lion Tamarin Association (GLTA). These corridors provide natural bridges that allow tamarins to explore formerly inaccessible pieces of their habitat. They also foster genetic diversity by connecting otherwise segregated tamarin groups.

GLTA has also spearheaded the creation of a regional consortium to protect the São João River watershed, a critical area of golden lion tamarin habitat; and was instrumental in raising enough money to purchase a large privately-held parcel of land that now provides an 18-mile long connection between the União Biological Reserve and neighboring forest fragments.

Today approximately 1,600 golden lion tamarins, including zoo-born animals reintroduced into the wild by conservation workers, are living in isolated forest fragments in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest. Of these, GLTA is managing approximately 1,463 individuals and tamarins are using connected habitat that spans over 30 private ranches and two federal reserves totaling 10,600 protected hectares.

Just as we’re planting corridors of trees to connect isolated patches of forest in Brazil “Treetop Trails,” our innovative Zoo360 trails in the treetops join Zoo habitats for golden lion tamarins and other animals. The trailway at the Rare Animal Conservation Center is just one part of a Zoo-wide system that links exhibits across the Zoo.