

Episode 82: Lemurs in Madagascar

Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about their visit to Madagascar several years ago. The highlight, of course, was all the different lemurs they saw while they were there!

Transcript

Nick: For our fiftieth episode, which we recorded a while ago, Wendy and I chose our five favourite countries each. And we chose quite different countries in the end. Umm, and so we thought it would be interesting to explore some of these in a little bit more detail. And, Wendy, your number five was Madagascar.

Wendy: Was it? That was a good choice.

Nick: It was indeed.

Wendy: I will stand behind¹ that one.

Nick: So why did you pick Madagascar to be in your top five countries?

Wendy: Well, the main overarching² thing that I love about Madagascar is the nature: the flora and fauna, the animals, the plants, the landscapes. Umm, it's a unique place. There are animals that live there that don't live anywhere else in the world, that I had never seen before. And it's just a fascinating place to explore. It's very, very different from the rest of Africa. I mean, it's generally considered to be part of Africa but it is not part of the continent. It is a separate island. And so because of that, you know, there are all these different species that have evolved there, uhh, separately from the animals that evolved on the mainland.

Nick: Right, and even the people there are not African, per se³. They actually, or are believed to have come from Asia in dug-out canoes, so there's a bit of an Indonesian-Malaysian kind of look to the people there. And so that's another interesting thing and another thing that separates it from the African mainland. But

¹ stand behind: continue to support or hold a view

² overarching: all-encompassing, thing that overshadows everything else

³ per se: not exactly or inherently. See also: Episode 66.

with all due respect⁴ to the great people of Madagascar, what people really want to see, usually, when they go there, are lemurs.

Wendy: Lemurs! I love lemurs.

Nick: So lemurs are small animals, or some of them aren't that small.

Wendy: No.

Nick: Uhh, it's a monkey-like animal. Uhh, it's a kind of pre-monkey. Umm, I've forgotten all the details about the kind of history of the lemur but, yeah, I believe it developed before monkeys and then, uhh, in the African mainland, monkeys came in and the lemurs kind of died out. In Madagascar where there are no monkeys, the lemurs have been able to not just survive but to thrive⁵, and so they're still there in great numbers today.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm. And there are many, many different kinds of lemurs and, yeah, some are big, some are small and, you know, some are furry, some are not so furry, and they look completely different. So you wouldn't necessarily think that they were all the same, uhh, species - is it species? - that they can all be called the same thing: lemurs. Umm, but they're amazing creatures.

Nick: Yeah, that's definitely something that struck me as well is that, yes, you go to see lemurs and you maybe have this idea that there's one or two types. Uhh, probably the most recognisable type is called the ring-tailed lemur, and these were the ones that were featured in the movie *Madagascar*, the animated movie. And so people maybe have that idea in mind. And they're great lemurs, they really do have these tails with these rings on them. Umm, but, yes, there's a massive variety of lemurs. And we got to see both the largest lemur and the smallest lemur and when you put them next to each other - we didn't see them at the same time, but when you think about them next to each other - you wouldn't imagine that they're the same type of animal at all. So the largest of the lemurs is called the *indri indri*, and this is one of the first ones that we saw. And I don't really think we had seen pictures, or we didn't really know what to expect. And this is a remarkable lemur. Umm, it's the colour of a panda, really, black and white like a Chinese panda. It looks ... its face is kind of like a koala bear from Australia, but it's bigger than a koala. It's just this very funny-looking animal. It's quite large, like I said, the largest of the lemurs, and one of them came down from a tree and we got to see it very close, and that was just really remarkable.

Wendy: Yeah, another thing that I remember about the *indri indri* is the sounds that they make. Uhh, so they have like a whistling sound, which I can't imitate at all because I don't even know how to whistle. Uhh, but they have this call, and you'll hear it, it really, you know, carries all across the forest. And so we were staying in

⁴ with all due respect: a polite way to disagree

⁵ thrive: do very well, flourish, prosper

cabins, you know, very close to the forest where the *indri indri* lives, and we would hear that. And then they also have a mating call⁶, uhh, which goes something like: (*Wendy makes a sound*). So, umm, yeah, and that ... I think about that whenever I think about the *indri indri*.

Nick: Definitely. And then at the other end of the scale, you have the mouse lemur, so called because it looks like a mouse, but it's actually a lemur. The mouse lemur is actually a nocturnal lemur, so it's awake during the night. And we went to one of the national parks in Madagascar which is called, uhh, Ranomafana. And apart from the walks that we did during the day in the forest, there's also a special thing you can do at night specifically to see the mouse lemur, and we did see it, and, yeah, it's this tiny little mouse-sized creature, and you can't imagine that it's the same species of animal as the *indri indri*, but technically, it is.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm. We saw a lot of chameleons on that night walk, I remember, as well. So I think that's another reason to do a night walk. Although we did see a few of them during the day at other times. But, yeah, chameleons are another type of animal that you can see quite a lot of in Madagascar. And, again, they come in a lot of different shapes and sizes and colours. And they're always changing their colours, uhh, which is what they're famous for.

Nick: Yeah, we did see one that was incredible in Ranomafana, in that same national park, where the guide that we had for the day walk that we were doing pointed out that there was this chameleon, and he was pointing to it. And us and the other tourists who were there, we couldn't see it. And it was right in front of us and we couldn't see it. And he kept saying, 'It's right there, look! It's there.' And we would just say, 'What? We don't ... what? There's nothing there, it's just a plant or there's just a, you know, little tree or something.' And he's like, 'No, it's there!' And we said, 'What? That leaf?' And he said, 'Yes, that leaf.' And then we saw it move and it wasn't a leaf. It was this, uhh, chameleon. Uhh, and that was extraordinary. We were literally just staring at it for a couple of minutes without knowing that we were looking at an animal.

Wendy: Yeah, so they are very, very good at camouflaging themselves.

Nick: Umm, but, anyway, back to the lemurs. Beyond the two largest and smallest lemurs, there are many, many types. We saw, gosh, I don't remember now, but I think fifteen or twenty different species of lemur. Umm, I remember one time in particular, we were on a trip to the western part of Madagascar, and we saw a type of lemur which is called a *sifaka*. And again, within the *sifaka* family, there are different types, different colours and things like that. And we saw a couple of them hopping from ... on the ground from one tree to another, and that was amazing because they have this strange way of doing it. Umm, instead of walking, they really do this hop-jump thing, but they're kind of leaning back as they do it. It looks

⁶ mating call: sound animals make to attract a partner

so uncoordinated and clumsy⁷. But they've been doing ... that's how they've been moving for millions of years, so it works for them.

Wendy: Yeah, they spend most of their time in the trees, so they're more adapted to climbing and things like that. But when they do need to get around on the ground, then, yeah, they do this funny leaping-dance kind of thing.

Nick: And there was another lemur that we didn't see because I think you could only see it in the north of the island. And now I've forgotten the name but it kind of looked like a bat.

Wendy: Yeah, I know the one you're talking about. I don't remember its name.

Nick: And so, yeah, you've just got this incredible variety of lemurs. And so you can't see them all, but you do what you can. And like you said, it's not just lemurs or it's not just animals as well, there's also plants and trees that you don't see anywhere else. Umm, for example, the baobab tree, umm, which is a beautiful tree - there are eight species in baobab trees, and you can find one of them on the mainland in Africa, which we've seen in several countries in Africa. There's another one that you can find in Australia, and then there other six are endemic⁸ to Madagascar and they're only in Madagascar. So seventy-five percent of baobab species live only in Madagascar, so it's just these things about the country that make it unique. And there's one area in the west of the country where you can see what's called the Avenue of the Baobabs, where there's this road, I think it's probably still a dirt road, and then there's just baobabs on either side of it. And so it forms this amazing scene, and if you go there at sunset, you know, you can just see this, uhh, amazing image.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm. And the other kind of landscape that I really ... stays in my mind from Madagascar is the *tsingy*, where we went to visit the Tsingy National Park, which, I'm not exactly sure how to describe it. It's, uhh, what type of rock are the *tsingy*, do you know?

Nick: I don't know, but it's a very grey pointy rock.

Wendy: Yeah, very jagged⁹ and sharp pointed edges that just, kind of, you know, jut out of the ground straight up into the sky. So it's like a bunch of knives, standing up into the sky. And (it) can be quite dangerous, uhh, so you have to be quite careful when you're climbing on them and walking around them. Umm, but they have built some walkways and some bridges and things like that so you can explore this incredible landscape.

⁷ clumsy: awkward, unskilful

⁸ endemic: indigenous, native

⁹ jagged: tooth-like, uneven and usually sharp and pointy

Nick: Yeah, it's a bit of a hike to do it. Like you said, there's some things you have to climb and you have to cross these bridges which are a bit rickety¹⁰. Umm, there's a small *tsingy* and a large *tsingy*, so you've got your option of going to one or the other. But, yeah, that's definitely one of the other things that makes Madagascar such a unique and amazing place! So we felt like we saw a lot of stuff when we were in Madagascar, but it's quite a big island and we didn't see everything, so maybe we'll have to go back and check out some more.

Wendy: Yeah, we don't go back to countries we've been to that often, but that is definitely one that I feel like it would be worthwhile to make another trip or even two more trips. And I feel like we could still see new things in different parts of the country.

Nick: Alright, we'll see.

¹⁰ rickety: unstable, likely to collapse (used often to talk about old bridges)

Comprehension Questions

1. What is the main overarching thing Wendy liked about Madagascar?
2. Nick was struck by the size and appearance of the *indri indri* lemur. What did Wendy find interesting about the *indri indri*?
3. Why might Nick and Wendy try to go back to Madagascar one day?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. _____, I don't agree with you on that point. I think you are significantly underestimating the threat.
2. When he was young, he was tall and quite _____, not good at sport etc. But as his body started to develop, he became more coordinated.
3. Kangaroos are _____ to Australia (and Papua New Guinea, as we found out in Episode 81!). They don't live anywhere else.
4. They accused him of assault, and they still _____ claim that despite his denials.
5. A tablet is not a smartphone _____. It's more like a cross between a smartphone and a computer.
6. You know it's mating season in the forest when you start hearing the male birds doing a _____ to attract females.
7. In the *Indiana Jones* movies, Indy often has to walk over _____ old bridges to find treasures and artifacts.
8. They struggled in the beginning, but they quickly began to _____. Now they are two of the most important people in their department.
9. The _____ concern for people as the country prepares to hold an election is the economy. Everything else is a secondary priority.
10. He dropped the bottle and it smashed on the ground. Then he cut himself on one of the _____ edges.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to go to Madagascar? Why or why not?
2. Which of the things Nick and Wendy mentioned (lemurs, chameleons, baobabs and *tsingy*) would you most want to see? Why?
3. Have you seen the animated movie *Madagascar*? If so, what did you think of it?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. The nature, which includes flora (plants), fauna (animals) and landscapes.
2. The sounds that it makes, especially its mating call.
3. Because they didn't see everything they wanted to see and there's still more of the country to explore.

Exercises

1. With all due respect
2. clumsy
3. endemic
4. stand behind
5. per se
6. mating call
7. rickety
8. thrive
9. overarching
10. jagged