

Sloths



Behaviour

Male sloths are solitary, shy animals. Females sometimes congregate together. Sloths are **nocturnal**; they are most active at night and sleep all day. Sloths sleep during the day. They sleep about 15 to 18 hours each day, hanging upside down.

Appearance

Sloths have a thick brown (and slightly-greenish) fur coat. Sloths are about the size of a cat (roughly 2 feet = 61 cm long). They have a short, flat head, big eyes, a short snout, a short or non-existent tail, long legs, and tiny ears. Sturdy, curved claws are on each foot; they use these claws to hang from trees. Some sloths have colonies of green algae encrusting their fur, both adding to the camouflage effect and providing some nutrients to the sloths, who lick the algae. The sloth got its name from its slow movement. It is not lazy, just slow-moving.

Diet

Sloths are plant-eaters who are more active at night; they eat leaves (including leaves from the cecropia tree), tender young shoots, and fruit; they are herbivores (plant-eaters). It used to be thought that sloths ate mostly cecropia leaves because they were often spotted in cecropia trees. It turns out that they also live in many other trees, but aren't spotted there as easily as in cecropia trees. Sloths have a low metabolic rate and a low body temperature (91°F). This keeps their food and water needs to a minimum. Sloths have small molars which they use to chew up their leafy food. Their stomach has many separate compartments that are used to digest the tough cellulose (a component of plant material that they eat).

Predators

Sloths are hunted by jaguars and people. A sloth's main forms of protection are its camouflage (greatly increased by the coating of algae growing on its fur) and its very slow movement; these adaptations make it virtually disappear in the rain forest canopy.

Habitat

Sloths spend almost all of their lives in trees; they are **arboreal**. These mostly-quiet mammals live in the tropical rain forests of South and Central America.

Locomotion

The sloth is the slowest mammal on Earth. Sloths are quadrupeds (four-legged animals) who "walk" upside-down along tree branches. They only rarely venture to the ground and walk on the ground in an upright position. Sloths can swim well.

Life Span

Sloths may live 10-20 years in the wild.

Reproduction

Adult females produce a single baby each year. They give birth upside down hanging from a tree branch.