

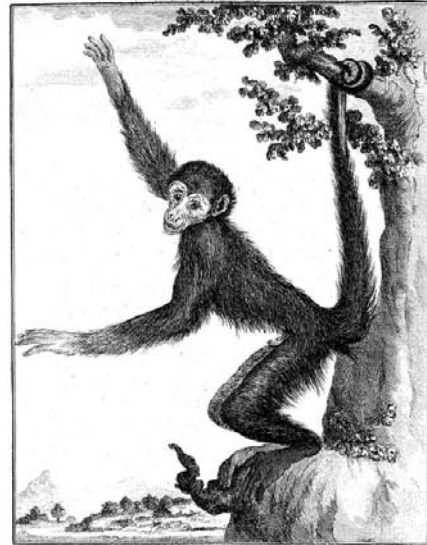
All About the BLACK SPIDER MONKEY

Scientists Call It

- *Ateles paniscus* (species name)
- Black spider monkeys are primates. Primates include humans, apes, monkeys, lemurs, lorises, tarsiers, bush babies, marmosets, and tamarins.

Other Names

- It is called “spider monkey” because with its long limbs and tail it looks like a huge spider.



Physical characteristics

- Black spider monkeys are among the largest primates in the New World.
 - Weight: 15-20 pounds
 - Body length: 15.5-24 inches
 - Tail length: 24-31.5 inches
- Black spider monkeys have bushy black fur. Their faces are usually black. Their snouts and cheeks are bald. They may have pink or white rings and freckles on the skin around their eyes and noses.
- Spider monkeys have long arms and legs. They have four fingers and a stumpy thumb, which give their hands a hooked shape.
- Their feet are long, with an opposable big toe and four smaller toes. They use their feet to grasp and hold things and to hang onto branches.
- The spider monkey’s prehensile tail is like an extra leg or arm. It is strong and nimble. A monkey uses it to hang from branches and to grab things. It provides extra security when the monkey swings from branch to branch.
- Spider monkeys are so strong and agile that they can dive from high limbs to lower limbs and from tree to tree. Only the Asian gibbon out-swings the spider monkey!

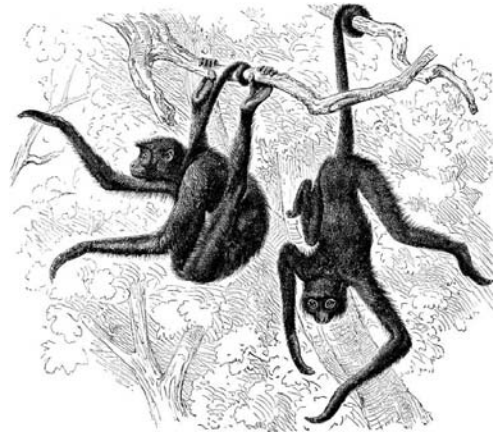
Habitat and Range

- Spider monkeys live in moist, tropical forests from Mexico to Brazil.
- Spider monkeys are tree dwellers. They almost never leave the forest canopy.
- They avoid disturbed habitats and stay away from human settlements.

Behavior

- Black spider monkeys belong to troops of 18-35. These troops include adult males and females, youngsters, and babies.

- Each troop has a home territory that it defends from other troops and other animals. Territories may be as large as 740 acres.
- Much of the time, spider monkeys do not stay with their troops. They travel in small groups looking for food. Sometimes spider monkeys travel alone.
- Small groups often meet up and reform the troop. Small groups also gather to defend the troop territory.
- This social structure—breaking into small groups and re-gathering into a large troop—is called “fission-fusion.”
- One study noted that black spider monkeys spend their time resting (45%), feeding (29%), and traveling (26%).
- Resting monkeys groom each other, play, fight, and sleep.



Diet

- Spider monkeys eat many kinds of fruit, mostly figs. They eat only ripe fruit. (Most rainforest fruit-eaters will eat unripe fruit, also called “hard” fruit.)
- When ripe fruit is scarce, they eat leaves, nuts, flowers, flower nectar, and bark. They also sometimes eat insects, spiders, and bird eggs.

Reproduction

- Spider monkey mothers give birth to one baby about once every three to four years.
- Young monkeys stay with their mothers for about 3 years.
- Each mother cares only for her own baby. For the first four months after birth, the baby clings to its mother’s chest at all times.
- A youngster older than four months travels on its mother’s back. It wraps its tail around the mother’s tail to hold on.
- Spider monkeys are mammals; they nurse their babies. Youngsters are weaned after about 15 months.

Communication

- Spider monkeys make many different kinds of sounds. They bark, whoop (males only), scream, whinny, growl, and chuckle.
- Their loud, long, barking calls may help them keep in touch when the troop separates. Their alarm calls warn that a predator is near.
- Spider monkeys whinny greetings when they meet up with members of their troop. They may also sniff each other and embrace.
- They whoop and throw branches to warn monkeys from other troops away from their home territory.

- They whoop and throw branches to drive away predators, including human hunters.
- Spider monkeys also use many facial movements to express fear, anger, and other reactions.

Conservation Status

- Vulnerable: There are still many black spider monkeys, but their numbers are expected to shrink as rainforests are destroyed.

Threats

- Spider monkeys are widely hunted for food by local peoples. They are easy to find because they are large and noisy.
- Habitat loss: Spider monkeys avoid human beings. When trees are cut down or burned, they must retreat deeper into uncut areas.

Did you know? Spider monkeys **brachiate!** The verb “brachiate” means “to travel by swinging from hold to hold.”

Also, spider monkeys are **important seed dispersers**. They eat fruit, travel, then poop. In doing so, they move seeds away from mother trees and deposit them with a dollop of fertilizer. This kind of helpful relationship—in this case between trees and spider monkeys—is called “**mutualism,**” which is one kind of “**symbiosis.**”

