

The Spider Monkey

Cloudbridge Nature Reserve - Nature Notes No. 28

Cloudbridge offers a habitat for the Central American Spider Monkey, *Ateles geoffroyi*, a Central American primate with some unique characteristics. Though diurnal, they are often heard rather than seen as they move in groups of 3 to 5 within and between trees, usually high in the canopy. They have pink hairless faces and reddish-brown bodies with long dark limbs. (They are easily distinguished from the only other species of primate found in the area, the Capuchin: the latter has a white neck area.)

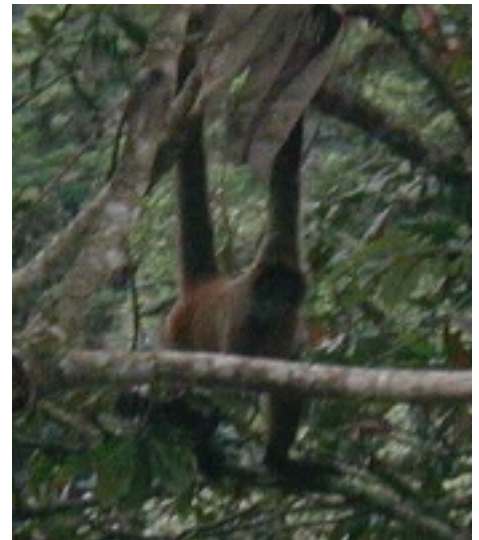
Legs: 5. Thumbs: 0.

This monkey's most distinctive physical feature is a long, prehensile tail that functions as a fifth limb. The spider monkey reputedly has the strongest and most agile prehensile tail of any mammal on earth. Their arms are long and muscular, as are their fingers. Strangely, they have no thumbs. An X-ray of their hands reveals a mere vestige of the thumb bones. All these features are adaptations to their lifestyle of swinging from branch to branch and tree to tree in search of forest fruit, their principal diet.

Since fruit may be scarce and seasonal, spider monkeys require large areas of habitat. It is encouraging to discover this endangered species at Cloudbridge, foraging as they move from tree to tree. Their presence is no doubt due in part to this reserve being adjacent to the extensive Chirripo National Park.

Lifestyles of the High and Mighty

Spider monkeys have been spotted in several locations on Cloudbridge, including Cloudbridge North, the Pizote Trail, Gavilan and even from the porch of The Casa. However the sightings are sporadic and little is known about their lifestyles. No systematic study of their behavior in the Chirripo region has been done -- yet.



Ateles geoffroyi,
the central american spider monkey