

YZC Animal of the Month, July 2012

Aye-Aye

Daubentonia madagascariensis



Venture to the primate display and you can find this peculiar creature with big eyes, bat-like ears and a spooky-looking long middle finger. The Aye-Aye is a primate from the rainforests of Madagascar. Here it lives in the trees feeding on beetle grubs within their branches. And by within the trees' branches I mean inside them. The long middle finger is their route to feeding on such tasty treats. An Aye-Aye uses this finger to tap the tree. Where it is hollow, the animal listens out for beetle grubs. It then gnaws a hole in the wood and uses its long finger to pull the grubs out.

Aye-Ayes are nocturnal. That means that they are awake and active at night. They sleep

during the day in round nests made of twigs high in the trees. Being nocturnal animals, Aye-Ayes have supersensitive ears for picking up even the slightest sounds. To gnaw through the wood they have teeth that grow continuously, like a squirrel or mouse. With its weird teeth, long fingers and huge ears it is a very odd-looking animal.

In its Madagascan home, the Aye-Aye has been seen as a symbol of doom. It would be killed on sight for fear of it bringing death and bad luck to those who looked at it. This, along with the loss of rainforest habitats, have threatened the survival of this unique animal. However, there are now protected areas of rainforest in Madagascar which, along with breeding programs, will hopefully help protect this species from extinction.