

YZC Animal of the Month, May 2012
Malayan Flying Lemur
Galeopterus variegatus



You can find this peculiar-looking creature in the room with the primates in the lower gallery of the museum. The flying lemur – not a lemur and it doesn't properly fly. What a confusing name! Flying lemurs, also known as Colugos, are closely related to primates (the group of mammals that includes lemurs, monkeys, apes and us). They can glide through the air using large flaps of skin stretched between their arms and legs. However, we do not class this as true flight – the only mammals that can truly fly, having wings that can flap to produce lift, are bats.

The gliding membrane of flying lemurs is very large. It

stretches all the way from the fingers to toes, and also between the legs and the tail. Add to this the webbed hands and feet with skin stretched between the fingers and toes, the sight of a flying lemur in mid glide is quite extraordinary: a huge sheet of skin with a small head and body down the centre. Their gliding ability is extraordinary too – travelling distances of up to 70m between trees in their rainforest home. They may not be true flyers, but they are great gliders.

This species of flying lemur lives in the tropical rainforests of South East Asia, including the Malay peninsula. Here they feed on leaves, flowers, shoots and sap. These animals are nocturnal, so are awake and active at night. They live on their own except for when a mother is looking after her young. Another species of flying lemur, the Philippine Colugo (*Cynocephalus volans*) is found in the Southern Philippines.