

Fossa

Scientific Name: *Cryptoprocta ferox*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Euplerida



The fossa is Madagascar's largest terrestrial predator. It is a lithe cat-like animal. The body is slender, but the limbs are very muscular. The head is similar to that of a mongoose, but with a broader muzzle. The eyes are a medium brown with pupils that contract to vertical slits. It has retractable claws, frontal eyes and round ears. The tail is cylindrical. The fossa's head and body is about 27 inches, and tail length about 25 inches. Adult weight can vary from 21 to 44 pounds. The coat is reddish brown to dark brown. The carnassial teeth are well developed, and upper molars reduced. The claws are retractile and the feet webbed. The ankles are 'reversible,' enabling the animal to grasp both sides of a slender tree trunk with the hind feet. They can then descend headfirst or jump to an adjacent tree.

Range

Madagascar

Habitat

Evergreen forests

Gestation

6 to 7 weeks

Litter

2 to 6

Behavior

The fossa evolved on Madagascar to fill the niche of a medium-sized nocturnal, arboreal predator, and is an ecological equivalent of the Clouded leopard of Southeast Asia. The teeth and claws are adapted to a diet of animals that are captured with the forelimbs and killed with a well-aimed bite. They prefer to live in dens or holes. Their anal glands secrete a very unpleasant odor. The fossa lives at low population densities and requires undisturbed forests, which are rapidly disappearing. They are solitary outside of the breeding season.

Reproduction

Fossas are seasonal breeders, mating between September and December. After a six to seven-week gestation they give birth to two to four young in a tree or ground den. Newborns are quite small – 2.8 to 3.5 ounces. Physical development is slow; the eyes do not open for 16 to 25 days and solid food is not taken for three months. The mother raises the young alone. They are weaned by four months and growth is complete at two years. Sexual maturity is reached at 3 to 4 years.

Wild Diet

Insects, frogs, reptiles and mammals, including lemurs.