**Choloepus didactylus**

**Linnaeus's Two-Toed Sloth**


*Other names:* southern two-toed sloth or unau

**Physical Description:** Often called the world’s slowest mammal, the two-toed sloth, is covered with a long (6 inches), bristly coat of hair that covers an undercoat of shorter finer hair. They can be gray-brown to beige in coloration, often having a greenish cast due to algae growth in the fur. They have a flattened, hairless face with small eyes that are set in black rings. The ears are small and hidden under the coat. They have no tail. There are 2 toes on the front feet and 3 on the back. The claws are 3-4 inches in length. They are 21-29’ long and weigh 9-18 pounds.

**Diet in the Wild:** Mainly leaves, some shoots, fruit, nuts, berries, bark; known to occasionally eat small rodents and insects.

**Diet at the Zoo:** apples, cooked carrots, grapes, corn on the cob, cooked sweet potato, hard-boiled eggs, pears, mangos, callitrichid powder

**Habitat & Range:** tropical moist lowland & montane forest of S. America-Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru

**Life Span:** 20 years in the wild, 30-40 years in captivity.

**Perils in the wild:** Big cats (jaguars, ocelots), birds of prey (harpy eagle), and large snakes (anaconda).

**Physical Adaptations:**
- Greatly camouflaged, sloths are so slow that algae grow on their grooved fur; looks like the trees.
- Climb at speeds of 6-8’ per minute, slow movement conserves energy and avoids detection
- Elongated limbs and trunk are adaptations to acrobatic, hanging lifestyle
- They move through the tree branches and even mate and give birth while hanging upside down aided by the sickle-shaped claws of their four limbs and hairless foot pads.
- The fur is parted on the belly and curves across the back, allowing rain to run off
- Lowest (besides echidna) and most variable body temperature of any mammal (74-92°F). This causes them to have a slow metabolism that allows them to survive injuries that would kill other mammals. Their body temperature depends on the weather and the time of day.
- Have 18 simple, peg like teeth which grow constantly; get worn down by eating
- Their teeth lack enamel.
- Two large, blade like teeth in front for biting which sharpened by rubbing against lower teeth.
- Hardened lips to allow them to grasp and eat leaves more easily
- Food is digested slowly and remains in their large, four chambered stomach for as long as one month; descending from a tree every 4-8 days to urinate and defecate at the base
- Large thick tongue, densely covered with sharp, minute, backward-directed spines
- Nearsighted, rely little on vision to carry out normal patterns of behavior due to poor vision
- Great sense of smell (Olfactory bulbs extremely well-developed), and a poorly hearing.
Behavioral Adaptations:
- Nocturnal, sleeping for 15-20 hours during the day and waking during the night only to feed
- Solitary
- Arboreal; staying high in the canopy most of the time, protection from big cats and snakes.
- They often remain motionless, even when awake.
- Sometimes fall from the trees into water, but they are very good swimmers.
- If caught on the ground they have no protection.
- Generally silent; hiss in defense; low bleats in distress

Reproduction and Development:
- Males scent mark on tree branches from a gland near the anus
- Little is known about courtship in this species
- After a gestation period of 5-6 months the female gives birth (while hanging upside down) to a single, well-developed young born 10 inches long, weighing 12-16 oz.
- Young are carried on the mother's body for six to nine months, hooking itself securely into her breast fur to remain hidden.
- By about one month it begins to take leaves chewed by the mother and after a further month it can pick its own leaves from those it can reach while hanging onto its mother's fur, becoming independent at about 9 months.
- Sloth infants separated from their mothers will let out a loud bleat lasting 30-90 seconds
- Reaches adult size between 2-3 years old
- Females reach sexual maturity at 3 years of age; males reach sexual maturity between 4- 5.

Additional Information:
- The two-toed sloth is larger and faster than the three-toed.
- They cannot shiver to stay warm.
- Almost all their liquid requirements are met through the juicy plants they eat.
- They have the lowest muscle mass relative to overall body weight of any mammal.
- By defecating at the base of their host tree, the sloth provides the tree with fertilizer

Conservation Status: Least Concern, threats to populations include habitat destruction and hunting for their meat, fur, and claws. Because of their slow nature, sloths are also frequently hit by cars in places where roads have been cut through the forest.

Conservation Efforts:

Sources:
- Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens
  - http://www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk/meet-animals/sloth.htm
- http://www.mnzo.com/animals/animals_sloth.asp
- http://www.bristolzoo.org.uk/two-toed-sloth
- http://library.sandiegozoo.org/factsheets/sloth/sloth.htm
- http://eol.org/pages/328521/details