

## Islands of Wonder: Madagascar

By Terri Kochert

Join us at Chambersburg Area Middle School South on November 14, 2024 at 7 PM for some extraordinary footage of the oldest existing island, Madagascar. This 2019 PBS film depicts a strange topography including lush rain forests on the east, spiny, jagged mountains running north to south in the center, and the world's driest arid area on the west. It's a large 200,000 square mile area filled with astounding animal and insect life. The film is narrated by actor, Michael J. Hayes.

You'll see the Ring-tailed Lemur who feeds on a spiny-looking desert plant filled with corrosive sap (to us humans). On the rain forest side there are over 100 distinct species. You'll encounter a 1" white hatchling chameleon with only four months to mature and find a mate. As it matures, it turns a striking Kelly green. The female lays her eggs in the arid sand. With the spring rains the hatchlings come forth, fighting to fully live out their four-month life span.

Many lemurs are endemic to Madagascar, such as the Von der Deckens Sifaka. You'll also see a most unusual-looking endemic creature called a Tenrec. It's 5" long and eats up to thirty worms per day. It somewhat resembles a hedgehog. You'll be surprised at its unique "alarm" system. The Pelican Spider is so named for its long jaw. The Aye-Aye lemur devours insect larvae found in the recesses of bark. Notice how it finds its prey.

Even more fascinating is the expansive underwater cave system beneath the surface of 160'. Amazingly, the remains of some mysterious and extinct animals have been located here.

Madagascar's forests are quickly disappearing due to the invasive practices by humans eking out an existence in this difficult environment. There remain no more than the original 20% forests. Ninety-five percent of lemurs are threatened with extinction. Recently, the Greater Bamboo Lemur was thought to be nearly extinct. In 2019 there were 72 babies born to the troop of 500 bamboo lemurs. These are remarkable creatures in that they consume bamboo which contains cyanide. They eat enough bamboo/cyanide per day to kill five humans!

Of course, we will also see how the human population survives in this harsh environment. The people have an unusual way of plowing up their fields. Please join us on November 14!