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## **Ring-tailed Lemurs Constitute Over One-Quarter of Lemurs Illegally Kept as Pets in Madagascar May Threaten Conservation and Survival of Species**

**MONTPELLIER, FRANCE:** An estimated 28,000 lemurs, the world's most endangered primates, have been illegally kept as pets in urban areas of Madagascar over the past three years, possibly threatening conservation efforts and hastening the extinction of some of lemur species. Now, the preliminary results from a new survey by researchers from Temple University and the University of Utah indicate that ring-tailed lemurs (*Lemur catta*) are the species most impacted by the in-country illegal pet trade.

The researchers presented their preliminary findings, "Live capture and ownership of lemurs in Madagascar," at the 27<sup>th</sup> International Congress for Conservation Biology this week in Montpellier, France.

Led by Kim Reuter, the researchers used an online global survey ([www.petlemur.com](http://www.petlemur.com)) to collect information from over 335 individuals who had seen 685 different pet lemurs in Madagascar over the past few years. Surprisingly, and despite the fact that respondents observed over thirty different lemur species, 28% of the observations of pet lemurs in Madagascar were of ring-tailed lemurs. No other species was observed by more than 10% of respondents.

"Until this point it has been very unclear which lemur species is most impacted by the illegal pet trade in Madagascar. This has made it very hard to properly target conservation initiatives," said Reuter. "Now that we know that ring-tailed lemurs are

highly impacted by this trade, we can move to create targeted outreach programs focusing specifically on this species.”

Reuter said that although pet lemur ownership is illegal, enforcement of the law seems to be relatively weak. She said that lemurs are often kept in hotels, resorts, and restaurants where they are kept as an amenity for tourists.

“Ring-tailed lemurs are a flagship species for Madagascar, though its popularity with the public may be the very reason why it is also so commonly kept as a pet,” said Reuter, who currently works at Conservation International in Washington, DC. “This species, which has been seen in Disney movies and countless documentaries, is perhaps the most recognizable lemur species across the world. Now, and maybe due to demand from tourists visiting Madagascar, we have evidence that hundreds of ring-tailed lemurs are being kept as pets in Madagascar, and often not in acceptable circumstances.”

With ring-tailed lemurs observed as pets in almost every corner of Madagascar and sometimes over 1000 km away from their natural habitat ranges, Reuter said Madagascar’s extensive lemur pet ownership could be a larger threat to the species than previously recognized. Ring-tailed lemurs are endangered and it is likely that less than 10,000 individuals remain in the wild.

“It is incomprehensible that this species, which is used across the world as a symbol for Madagascar’s rich biodiversity, is being kept illegally across the country and often in the open,” said Reuter. “We need to address the pet lemur trade in Madagascar or we risk losing yet another species.”

In addition to Reuter, this research was also conducted by Melissa Schaefer of the University of Utah.

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**Note:** *Copies of this presentation and photographs of pet lemurs are available to working journalists and may be obtained by contacting Kim Reuter at [kimeleanorreuter@gmail.com](mailto:kimeleanorreuter@gmail.com) or can be found on [www.petlemur.com](http://www.petlemur.com).*