

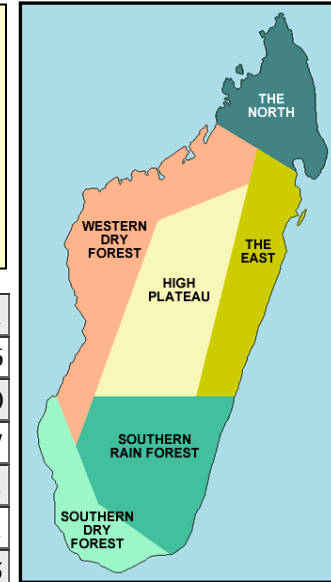
Madagascar—an island off the coast of Africa—has some of the world's most interesting animals. About 80 percent of the species found in Madagascar live nowhere else on the planet.



# Madagascar - Biodiversity Hotspot

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world and broke away from the mainland some 160 million years ago. Therefore, the hotspot is a living example of species evolution in isolation. Despite close proximity to Africa, the island does not share any of the typical animal groups of nearby Africa, making Madagascar home to a vast variety of endemic species, found nowhere else on Earth. The island contains 5% of animal and plant species on Earth, with 80% endemic to the island.

Madagascar and the surrounding islands have a total of eight plant families, four bird families, and five primate families that live nowhere else on Earth. Madagascar has more than 50 lemur species which are commonly associated with the island and are the focal point for conservation. The carnivorous fossa is another example of an endemic species as well as six Baobab species (huge trees with wide stumps). There are so many species endemic to Madagascar that some ecologists have called it "the eighth continent". Many of these species, such as the fossa, are now considered to be an endangered species, with only about 2,500 mature fossa individuals in existence. Tenrecs, a family of small omnivorous mammals, primarily find their home on Madagascar, with 30 species found only there, and just 3 on the African mainland. There are numerous other species endemic to Madagascar, including 14 unique rodents, 15 species of bat, various chameleons and geckos, over a hundred birds, and hundreds of beetles and other insects. Conservation efforts must proceed aggressively to preserve this unique Madagascar fauna.



**Biomes in Madagascar**  
Western areas of the island consist of dry savannah with deserts found in central regions. The eastern side of Madagascar facing the Indian Ocean is tropical rainforest with a high level of rainfall. The island is also host to several high mountain ecosystems. These biomes each support contrasting species, portraying the contrasting eco-regions in Madagascar.

Hotspot Original Extent (km <sup>2</sup> )	600,461
Hotspot Vegetation Remaining (km <sup>2</sup> )	60,046
Endemic Plant Species	11,600
Endemic Threatened Birds	57
Endemic Threatened Mammals	51
Endemic Threatened Amphibians	61
Extinct Species	45
Human Population Density (people/km <sup>2</sup> )	32
Area Protected (km <sup>2</sup> )	18,482

In terms of flagship species in Madagascar, Baobabs are considered to be flagship trees for landscape conservation in western Madagascar, unique and individual features to the island landscape. Madagascar has seven of the world's eight Baobab tree species, six of them endemic to the island. Another endemic flagship plant to the island is the traveler's tree or palm, pollinated by the island's flagship vertebrate species, the lemurs. The tomato frog is a flagship amphibian of Madagascar, found only in a small corner of northeastern Madagascar.



Specific locations in Madagascar which are renowned for high biodiversity are situated on the eastern coast which is mainly tropical rainforest. These areas have year-round warmth and receive a lot of rainfall. Interestingly, the soils in the rainforest are poor because most of the biomes nutrients are locked up in the vegetation. Rainforests are home to the greatest variety of animal life found above sea level, though they cover less than 6% of the Earth's land.

## Threats to biodiversity

Of the 10,000 plants native to Madagascar, 90% are found nowhere else in the world. Madagascar's varied fauna and flora are endangered by human activity, as a third of its native vegetation has disappeared since the 1970s, and only 18% remains intact. However, there are several national parks which have been established to help protect many of the endemic species. Extensive deforestation has taken place in parts of the country, reducing certain forest habitat and applying pressure to some endangered species. Madagascar has a population growth rate of approximately 3%, therefore, with a growing population, more of the island's endemic species become at risk due to the increase in human activity and development.

