

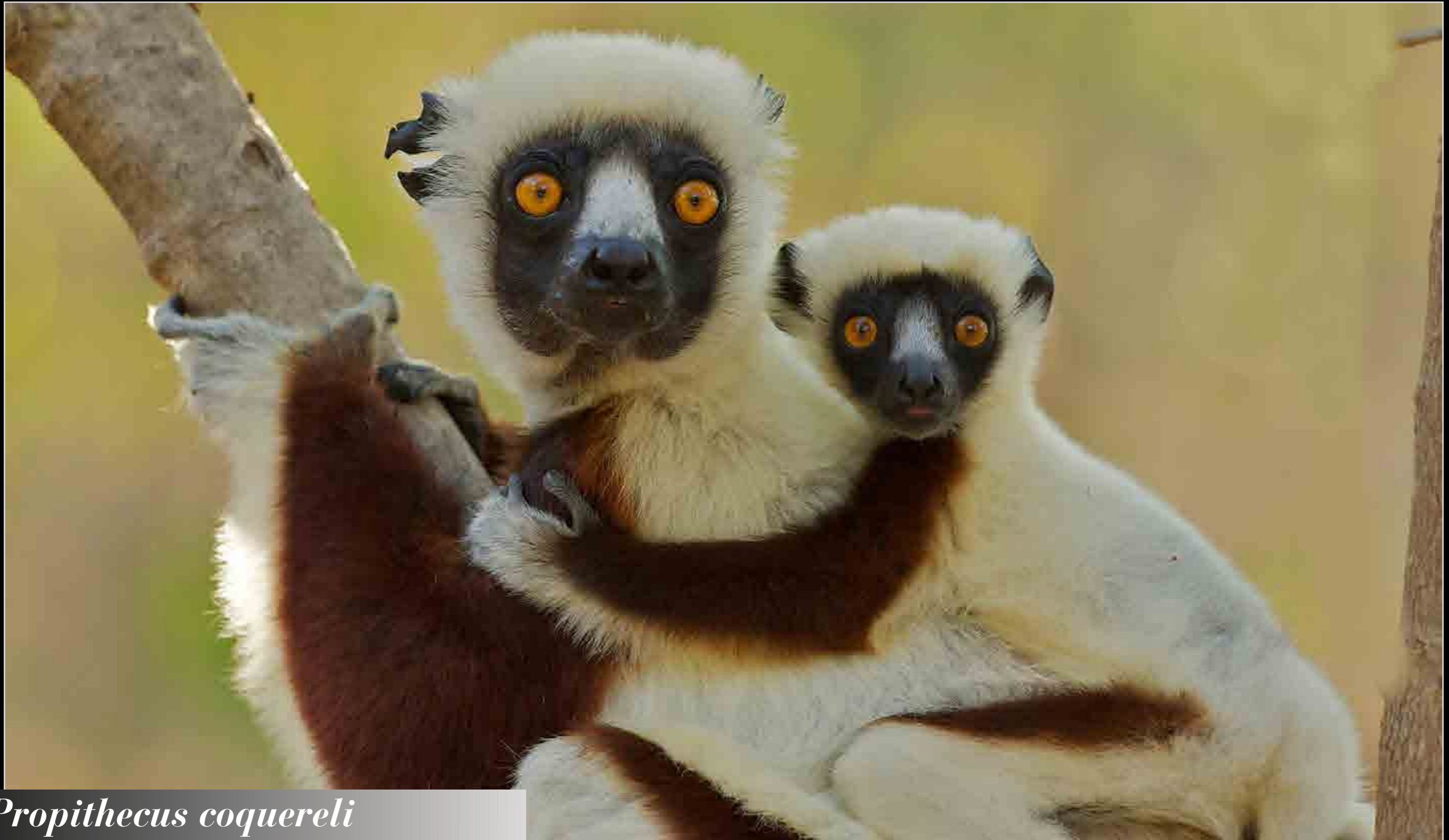
Beauty of the Beast



LEMURS OF MADAGASCAR

GENTLE GOBLINS

Ancient, harmless, much loved worldwide and desperately endangered at home - meet the adorable denizens of the Red Island's disappearing forests



Propithecus coquereli

The endangered Coquerel's Sifaka *Propithecus coquereli* (also on the title page) has a matriarchal system where all adult females are dominant over males. Many local Malagasy traditions prohibit hunting of the Coquerel's Sifaka - however, these protective taboos are breaking down, so hunting is widespread including in and around National Parks. I took these images in Anjajavy Private Reserve.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 f/5.6 1/320 ISO 2500

TEXTS AND PHOTOS BY BJORN OLESEN



Daubentonia madagascariensis

The Aye-aye *Daubentonia madagascariensis* is the most remarkable mammal that I have ever seen: body of a cat, bat's ears, beaver's teeth, a very long bushy squirrel tail, a middle finger which looks like a long dead twig - and big eyes like those of ET! This photo has been taken in a captive environment in Madagascar.

Nikon D3s 24-70mm VR 2.8 f/2.8 1/50 ISO 3200

My greatest pleasure as a wildlife photographer is when my images can be used to promote conservation, and in all such cases I do this work on a pro bono basis. I am happy to say that many of my images have been used by WWF, Traffic, National Geographic News Watch, the Nature Society of Singapore, and the Malaysia Nature Society to name a few. During my travels, primates always fascinate me; this goes back to 1998, when I saw my first wild Orang Utan at the Kinabatangan River in Borneo. It was moving around in a huge fig tree, when suddenly it was attacked by a swarm of buzzing bees: it tried to ignore them, but eventually had to move. Another memorable encounter was in Mahale Nature Reserve, Tanzania, when I saw a female Chimpanzee feed its sick-looking youngster with what looked like a big wild lemon, presumably to make it get better. It is encounters like these which you remember forever. Nowadays I do most of my primate photography with Nikon D4 or D3s with the Nikon 600mm VR f/4 or 300mm VR f/2.8 lenses. With teleconverters these lenses give you a lots of flexibility without sacrificing too much of image quality. For landscape and close-ups I mostly use the D800E with the Nikon 14-24mm zoom or the Micro 105 mm VR. All that said, there is really too much emphasis on

equipment these days, and it is therefore nice to see that many award-winning wildlife photos have been taken with non-professional equipment. For primates, there is one place in the world that stands out, and that is Madagascar, with its 103 species of Lemurs - all of which are endemic. Unfortunately, 91% or 94 these lemurs are now assessed as being in one of the Red List threatened categories, according to the President of Conservation International, Russ Mittermeier. Madagascar today is suffering from a fluid political situation, which is affecting the good initiatives done by the previous democratically elected government, and at the moment conservation laws are poorly enforced there.

However, in spite of all the bad news coming out of Madagascar, it is a nature photographer's paradise, and one of my favourite destinations. My advice is: visit this veritable "Treasure Island" as soon as you can! ●

Bjorn Olesen is a retired corporate executive, award-winning wildlife photographer, and a passionate conservationist. He is a long-term resident of South-East Asia, and his photos and articles have appeared in local and overseas publications and on the web; all his 40,000+ premium images are available free-of-charge to non-profit NGOs, as his commitment to support to conservation. He can be contacted through his website <http://www.bjornolesen.com>.



Varecia variegata editorum

A curious Black and White Ruffed Lemur *Varecia variegata editorum* from Analamazaotra Special Reserve. In areas where there is no hunting pressure, the lemurs are very approachable and have little fear of humans. Moving slowly, I was able to approach this individual to a distance of only 6 meters.

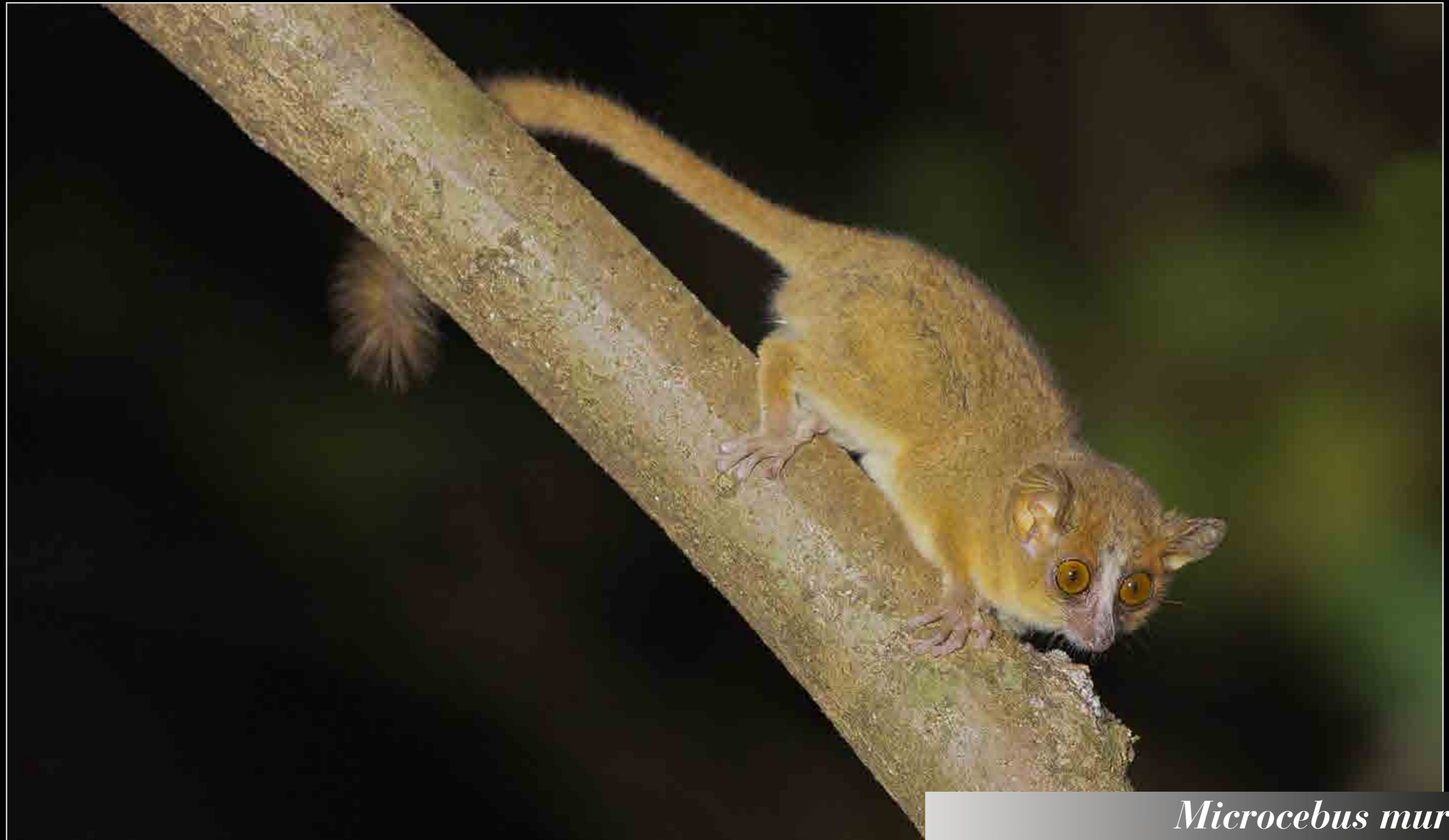
Nikon D3s 70-200mm 2.8 VR II f/9 1/50 ISO 640



Avahi laniger

The nocturnal Eastern Avahi *Avahi laniger* is native to the eastern rainforest belt up to at least 1,600 mt above sea level. These two owl-like individuals were watching me intensely from high up in the canopy, in the eastern Analamazaotra Special Reserve. Their white eyebrows are quite special.

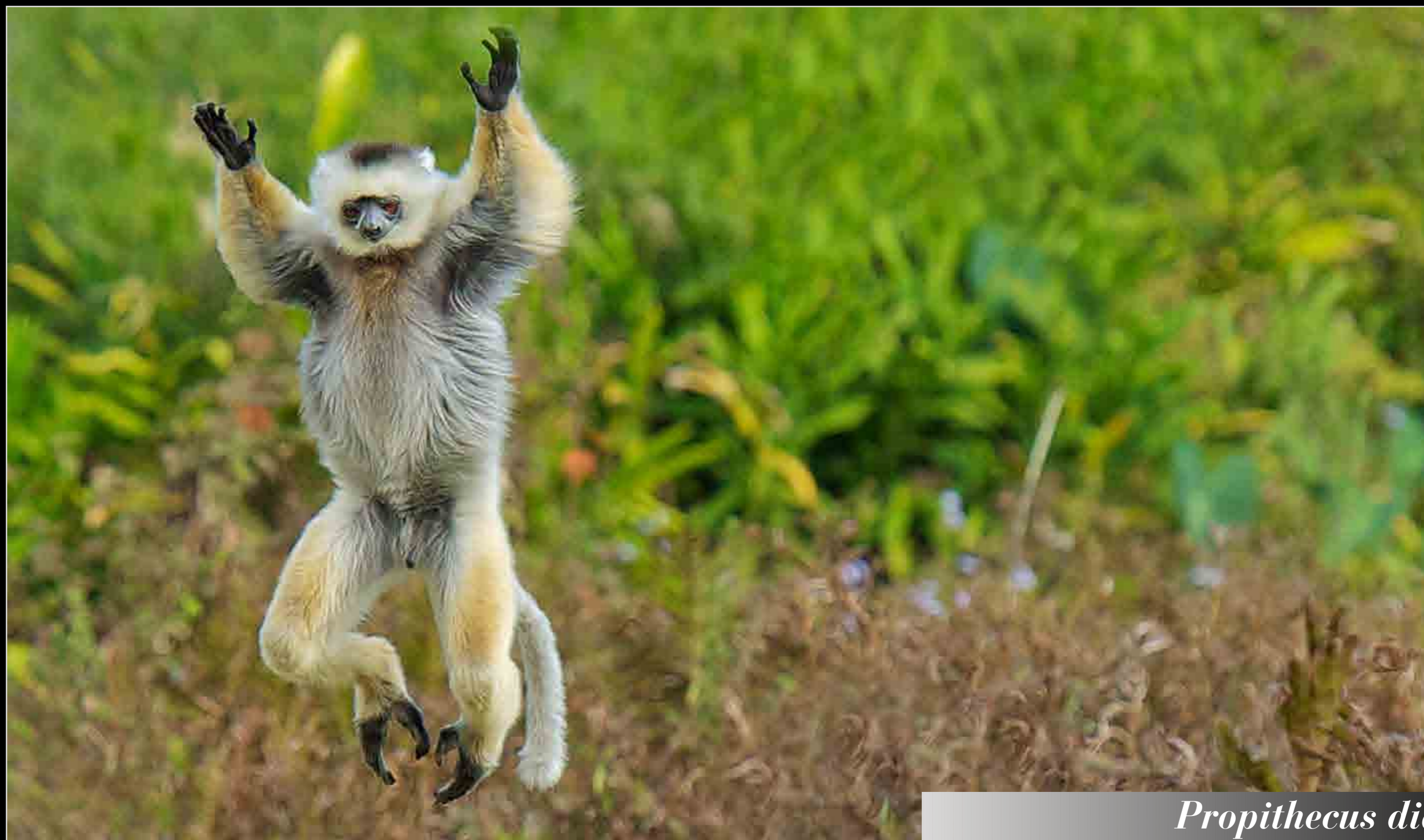
Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II f/3.5 1/200 ISO 1600 SB900 flash



Microcebus murinus

Grey Mouse Lemur *Microcebus murinus* in Ankarafantsike National Park. They are nocturnal and omnivorous, and found along the western coast in various types of forests. Sleeps during the day in tree holes lined with leaf-litter, and may use up to a dozen different tree holes that are shared with up to 15 other individuals. At a body length of around 13 cm they are tiny - this individual was quite unconcerned by my presence, and the photo was taken at a distance of less than 4 m.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II f/5.6 1/60 ISO 1600 SB 900 flash



Propithecus diadema

The endangered Diademed Sifaka *Propithecus diadema* is here seen in Mantadia National park; I think it is one of the most beautiful of all Malagasy lemurs.

Nikon D3s 70-200mm VR II 2.8 f/5 1/2000 ISO 3200.



Propithecus diadema

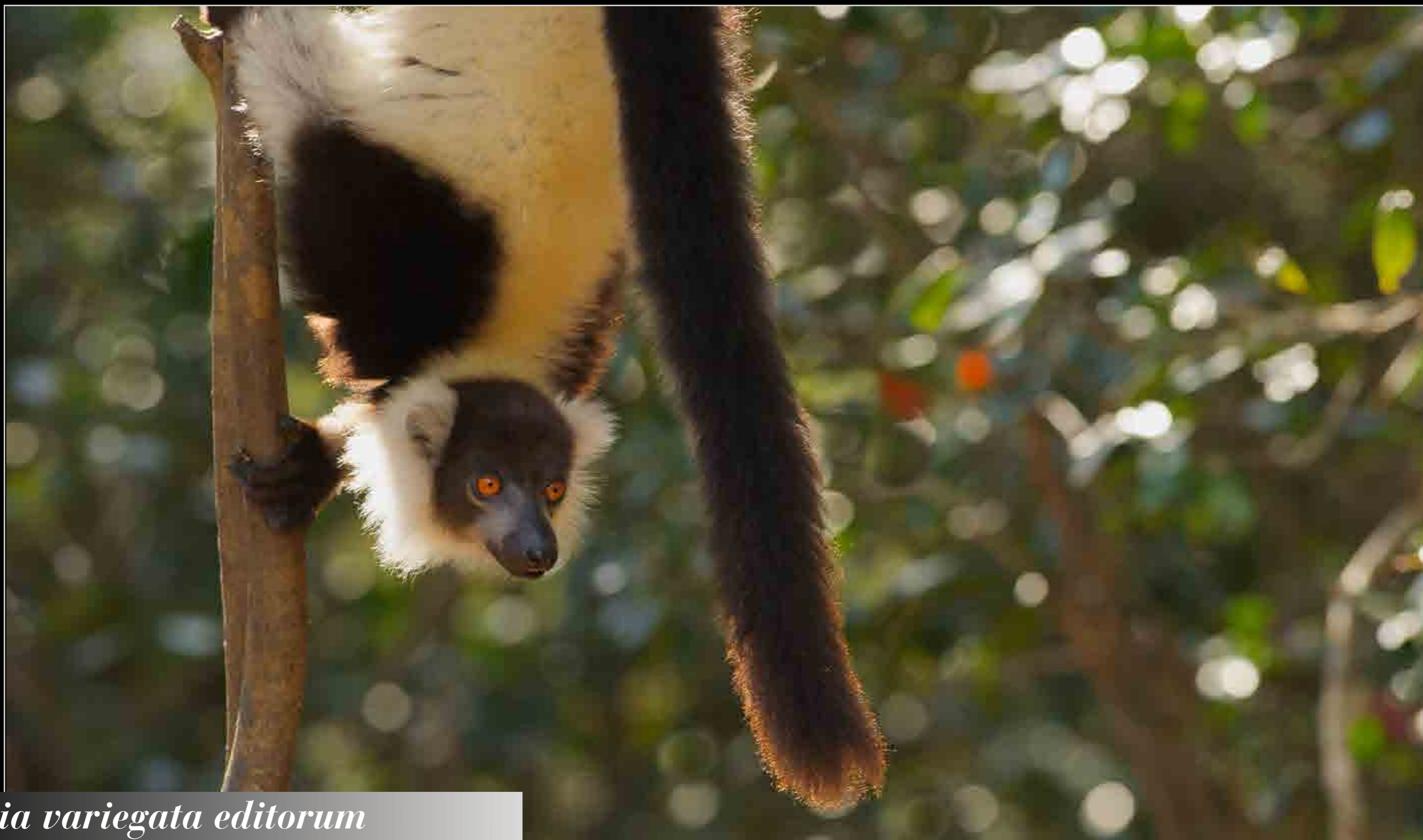
Nikon D700 70-200mm VR II 2.8 f/10 1/80 ISO 500



Eulemur fulvus

A curious Common Brown Lemur *Eulemur fulvus* watching with a two-weeks' old infant in Anjajavy Private Reserve. I selected September to visit Madagascar, when the Lemurs have babies.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II f/6.3 1/125 ISO 2000



Varecia variegata editorum

Another inquisitive Black and White Ruffed Lemur *Varecia variegata editorum* from Analamazaotra Special Reserve. In areas where there is no hunting pressure, the lemurs are very approachable and have little fear of humans.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II f/8 1/800 ISO 800 SB 900 flash



Cheirogaleus major

This Greater Dwarf Lemur *Cheirogaleus major* watched me calmly during a night walk in Amber Mountain National Park. Interestingly, most of their fat reserves are stored in the tail - before "hibernation" the normal weight is around 600 gr., which drop to 250 gr. in September.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II f/2.8 1/60 ISO 1600 SB 900 flash



Eulemur coronatus

The Crowned Lemur *Eulemur coronatus* remains active both day and night throughout the year, and fruit dominates its diet. Location: Amber Mountain National Park.

Nikon D3s 70-200mm 2.8 VR II f/7.1 1/60 ISO 2500 SB 900 flash



Lepilemur ankaranensis

The Ankarana Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur ankaranensis* is a vertically clinging lemur and one of the smallest Sportive Lemurs with a body length of 280 mm. It is nocturnal, with leaves forming the bulk of its diet. From Ankarana Special Reserve.

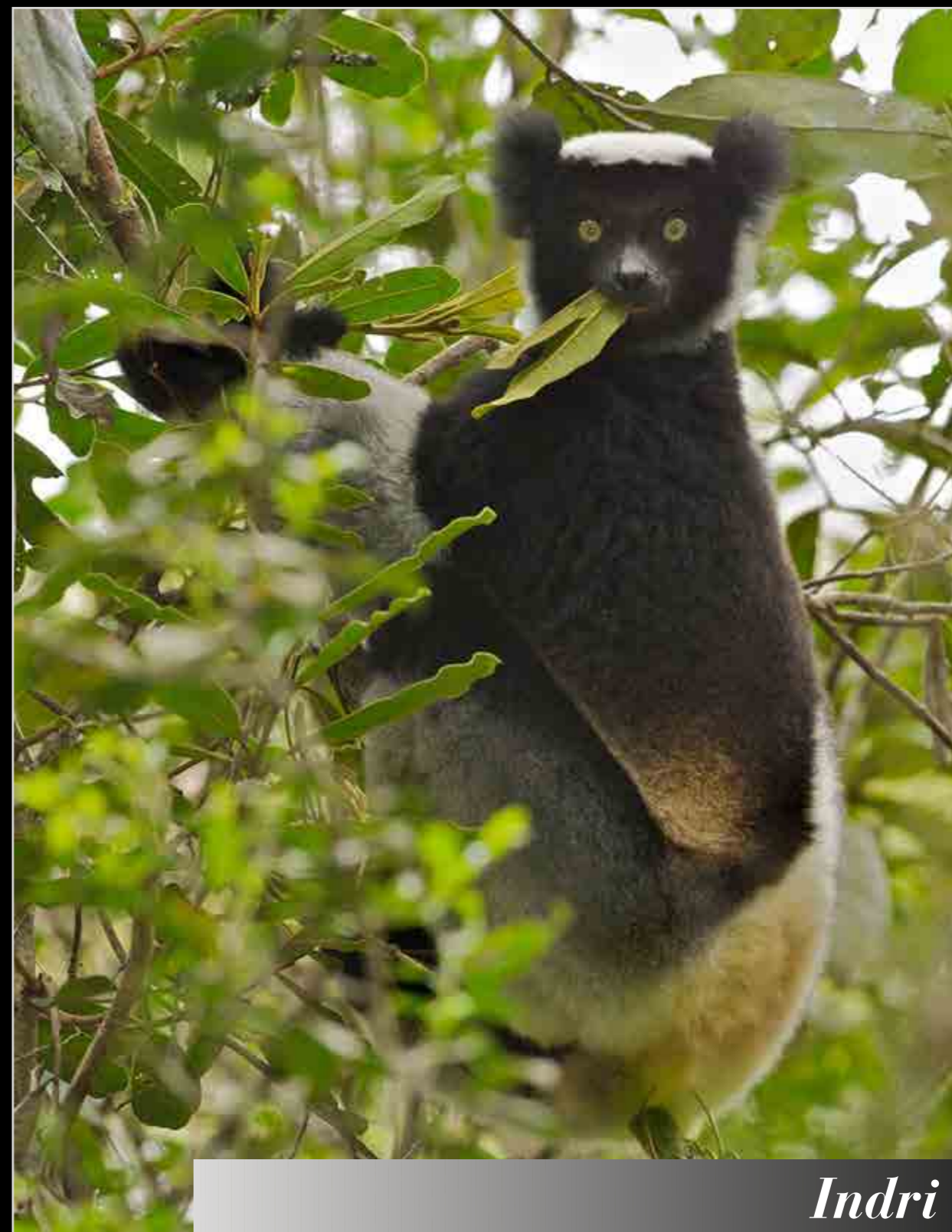
Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II Tele-converter 1.7 f/6.3 1/400 ISO 2000



Eulemur rufus

A Red-fronted Brown Lemur *Eulemur rufus* with a 3-week-old baby in the Analamazaotra Special Reserve. They are found in two distinct populations in the Eastern and Western parts of the island.

Nikon D3s 70-200mm 2.8 VR II f/8 1/1600 ISO 1600



Indri indri

Among the lemurs being indiscriminately hunted is the Indri *Indri Indri*, the largest of the living lemurs. This spectacular species leaps from tree to tree like an arboreal kangaroo and looks like a cross between a teddy bear and a giant panda.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II f/5.6 1/250 ISO 1600 SB 900 flash



Eulemur sanfordi

A Sanford's Brown Lemur *Eulemur sanfordi*. Amber Mountain National Park, in the extreme North of the island. Taking photos in the forest is not always easy with the backlights, and many times a flash is necessary, something that I always try to avoid.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II Tele-converter 1.7 f/6.3 ISO 1600 SB900 flash



Microcebus tavaratra

The rare Northern Rufous Mouse Lemur *Microcebus tavaratra* has been only recently described, and is currently found in one location only, Ankarana Special Reserve. Without an experienced local guide I would never have spotted this individual hiding in a tree hole. Head/body length is only around 12 cm. It is yet to be studied.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II Tele-converter 1.7 f/4.8 1/640 ISO3200 SB 900 flash



Cheirogaleus crossleyi

This Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur *Cheirogaleus crossleyi* was observed in the Analamazaotra Special Reserve in the eastern part of the island. They are only seen during the summer (April-October) when they are most active.

Nikon D3s 300mm 2.8 VR II f/5.6 1/60 ISO 1600 SB900 flash



Sadly, Madagascar is one of the world's most heavily impacted countries in terms of recent habitat destruction. Nearly 90 percent of its original vegetation has already been lost (an incredible 89.2% of all plants on Madagascar are endemic), and erosion on the island is severe. On a more positive note, it is remarkable that we still continue to discover new lemur species, actually more than 40 new species have been described since 2000, and there are now 103 different lemurs known to man. I am sure that Madagascar, the "Red Island", still has many natural treasures yet to be discovered.