

BINTURONG



notes

ADELAIDE ZOO
EDUCATION SERVICE

ZOO

Binturongs are unique black, furry animals from the tropical and sub-tropical forests of South East Asia. They have sharp, curved claws, long whiskers and a long, bushy tail. Their body can be up to one metre in length, with the tail as long again. Adults weigh between 18 and 27kg with females considerably bigger than males. They are sometimes referred to as “bear cats” due to their resemblance to both of these animals.

Binturongs belong to the order Viverridae which makes them a relative of Meerkats and Mongooses or more closely with the Civet.

Binturongs are arboreal which means they spend the majority of their time in the trees. The sharp claws and prehensile tail (a tail that can grip things) are used to help the Binturong move easily through the branches in search of food.

The tail is also used as a brake when they climb quickly, head first down the trees.

Binturongs are nocturnal, resting on branches or in the forks of trees during the day. However, they do sometimes venture out to bask in the sun. They are often seen sunning themselves on a branch with all four limbs hanging down, their strong tails the only thing holding on.

They have very good senses of smell, sight and hearing. These help the Binturongs to move safely through the rainforest in search of food such as fruit, small animals, leaves, nuts and eggs. The majority of their diet is made up of fruit and by passing undigested seeds they assist in seed dispersal throughout the forest. They are often heard making grunting and hissing noises when they move and when threatened will make a high pitched scream.

Binturongs have a distinct smell; some say it is like buttered popcorn! This odour is omitted from a scent gland that is used to mark their territory.

Binturongs usually live in breeding pairs. Females will give birth to between 1 and 3 young after a 90 day gestation period. Both parents care for the young in nests in the lower branches of trees or in protected areas on the forest floor. The young will stay in the nest with one of their parents while the other looks for food. When the young reach 2 to 3 weeks of age they will begin to follow the adults. After 8 weeks young Binturongs will begin to venture out on their own. Binturongs reach sexual maturity at about 2 years of age and it is at this time that they will begin to look for a partner and a territory of their own.

As well as being excellent climbers, Binturongs are great swimmers and can be very playful. Young Binturongs will play together as well as with the adults and will climb almost anything. They use their prehensile tail to grip onto food, branches and each other at a very early age.

Binturongs are very intelligent animals. They are able to be trained easily and can watch and copy the actions of other animals and humans. They can recognize and remember individual people. Binturongs have been known to open door handles, pull out pins in doors, open wrappers and lift objects to climb inside. Being such agile climbers they are also very good escape artists.

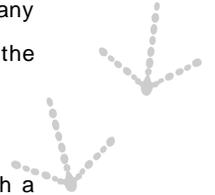
Although the number of Binturongs in the wild is low, they are wide spread throughout South East Asia. They are found in Malaysia, Indonesia, Burma, and Thailand and as far as India and Nepal.

The main threat to Binturongs is the destruction of their habitat. They are also hunted for their fur and meat and various body parts are used by indigenous people for traditional medicines.

Although their numbers have declined in recent years they are not yet considered to be a Threatened Species



The Adelaide Zoo's first Binturong, Perak, arrived from Singapore Zoo in 2005. He is one of the many animals that the Adelaide Zoo displays from the South East Asian Rainforests.



Being such a good climber, Perak was fitted with a radio collar when he arrived at the zoo. This was to ensure that keepers would be able to find and retrieve him easily if he escaped from his enclosure.

Perak spends a lot of his day sleeping in a heated hut in his enclosure. In the afternoon he often ventures out to bask on a branch in the sun. Perak eats a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as boiled eggs and the occasional piece of meat.

The Keepers work closely with Perak, training him to display various body parts so they can easily give medical examinations. This training also helps with the everyday management of this animal.

To keep Binturongs off the Threatened Species list it is important to protect the tropical forests that they live in. The Adelaide Zoo aims to raise awareness of the destruction of this unique and important habitat and ultimately to protect the millions of animals like the Binturongs that call it home.

