Rainforest Acrobat

By Guy Belleranti

High in the trees of Central and South America’s rainforests lives an animal acrobat. When it hangs from its tail, it looks like a big spider. It’s called the spider monkey!

Spider monkeys have long arms and hooklike hands. They use them to swing through trees. They also have a long prehensile tail. The tail acts like a fifth limb and can grasp branches. Its underside has a fleshy pad. The pad is unique to each monkey, just like a fingerprint is to humans.

Spider monkeys are smart and social. They gather in groups called troops. They communicate with barks, screeches, sobs, and other sounds. They also make faces. Sometimes they even hug or wrap their tails around each other.

Spider monkeys are most active in the morning. This is when they look for food in the trees. Fruit is their favorite. They also eat flowers, leaves, and nuts. Sometimes they eat bird eggs, insects, and spiders too.

Female spider monkeys usually give birth to a single baby. For the first ten weeks, the mother carries the baby on her stomach. At around four months, the child begins to explore and play with other babies. It also begins riding on its mom’s back. A baby spider monkey may wrap its tail around its mom’s tail. A spider monkey usually becomes independent by about three years old.

Like so many animals, spider monkeys are in danger. They’re hunted for food and taken to be sold as pets. Human activities also harm the monkeys’ habitats. Let’s hope efforts to protect them will help. Spider monkeys are not only interesting and cute, they’re also very important. As fruit eaters, they pass seeds through their stomachs and onto the rainforest floor. This creates new plants and keeps the forest growing.
1. Why are the animals in this article called spider monkeys?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

2. Reread the following sentences from the article:
They also have a long prehensile tail. The tail acts like a fifth limb and can grasp branches.
What is the best definition for the underlined word?
Use clues from the sentences to help you.

a. able to hold something by wrapping around it
b. able to smell nearby objects
c. small and thin
d. quick and dangerous

3. According to the article, what does a human have that is similar to a spider monkey’s tail pad?
________________________________________________

4. Which of the following is not listed in the article as a food spider monkeys eat?
   a. flowers   b. eggs   c. fish   d. spiders

5. What was the author’s purpose for writing this article?
   a. to teach about all the animals of the rainforest
   b. to teach about an animal that lives in the rainforest
   c. to help people learn about spiders
   d. to help people learn about forests
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Fill in the missing letters to create words from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. a __ r o __ __ t
   
   clue: someone who does stunts such as swinging, balancing, and tumbling

2. p r e ___ e n s ___ l ___
   
3. l __ m b
   
   clue: a leg or arm

4. g r __ s __
   
   clue: to grab and hold something

5. __ n __ q u e
   
   clue: unlike anything else

6. s __ c i __ l
   
   clue: spending time in groups or communities

7. i n d __ p e __ d __ n __
   
   clue: able to live without relying on others

8. h a __ i t __ t
   
   clue: the place where a plant or animal lives

9. c o __ m u n __ c __ __ e
   
   clue: to share information or ideas
In the article “Rainforest Acrobat,” you learned that spider monkeys are facing danger from hunting, being sold as pets, and habitat loss.

On the lines below, write about two ways you think humans could help protect spider monkeys from these dangers. Explain how these actions would help the animals.

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

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1. Why are the animals in this article called spider monkeys?
They are called spider monkeys because they look like big spiders when they hang from their tails.

2. Reread the following sentences from the article:
They also have a long prehensile tail. The tail acts like a fifth limb and can grasp branches.
What is the best definition for the underlined word?

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a fingerprint

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1. a c r o b a t
   clue: someone who does stunts such as swinging, balancing, and tumbling
   1. ___________________________

2. prehensile
   clue: able to hold something by wrapping around it
   2. ___________________________

3. limb
   clue: a leg or arm
   3. ___________________________

4. grasp
   clue: to grab and hold something
   4. ___________________________

5. unique
   clue: unlike anything else
   5. ___________________________

6. social
   clue: spending time in groups or communities
   6. ___________________________

7. independent
   clue: able to live without relying on others
   7. ___________________________

8. habitat
   clue: the place where a plant or animal lives
   8. ___________________________

9. communicate
   clue: to share information or ideas
   9. ___________________________

ANSWER KEY

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1. acrobat
   clue: someone who does stunts such as swinging, balancing, and tumbling
   1. ___________________________

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   clue: able to hold something by wrapping around it
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   clue: a leg or arm
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   clue: the place where a plant or animal lives
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