



# SOUTHERN TWO-TOED SLOTH

PILOSA

Family: Megalonychidae

Genus: *Choloepus*

Species: *didactylus*



**Range:** Northern South America; Colombia, Venezuela, the Guianas, Ecuador, Peru, and northern Brazil up to 7,999 ft

**Habitat:** Canopies of tropical and cloud forests

**Niche:** nocturnal, arboreal, herbivorous

**Wild diet:** leaves, twigs, buds, fruit, and occasionally rodents, and insects

**Zoo diet:**

**Life Span:** (Wild) 10 - 25 years, (Captivity) 30 years

**Sexual dimorphism:** none

**Location in SF Zoo:** South American Tropical Rainforest and Aviary

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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Southern Two-Toed Sloths have two long, hook-clawed toes on each of their front feet, which are closely bound together with skin for their entire length. The hind feet have three clawed toes. The head is short and flat, with a snub nose and good sense of smell, rudimentary ears, and large eyes. They lack a tail. An external coat of long coarse hair and dense smooth undercoat provides good insulation. Individuals can have 6, 7 or sometimes 8 cervical vertebrae. They are quite light weight for a mammal their size, which is helpful when harvesting leaves from long, thin branches.

<b>Wt:</b> 8.75 - 19 lbs
<b>HRL:</b> 21 - 29 in
<b>TL:</b> .5 - 1.5 in

Sloths move slowly and deliberately, spending a large portion of their time hanging upside down. Limbs are extremely mobile, allowing support for their body in many positions. The long, brownish, coarse fur curves from stomach to back, opposite that of most mammals, and may help slough off water. These hairs have longitudinal furrows and due to the sloth's sedentary lifestyle collect algae; this gives a greenish tint to the sloth and camouflages it from predators.

Ever-growing peg-like teeth with Dental Formula: P/M 5/4. There are no incisors or canines; first tooth is canine-like and used for aggression; it is separated by diastema from other teeth. They use their hardened lips to shear and crop leaves. The large thick tongue is densely covered with sharp, backward-directed spines and can protrude from their mouths 10 to 12 inches, an ability that is useful for collecting leaves just out of reach. A slow metabolic rate means they can survive on a small amount of nourishment; food remains in their relatively short digestive tract for about one month. Bacteria in four-chambered stomach help ferment the cellulose in plant matter.

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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Two-toed sloths are in serious danger of losing their habitat due to logging, agriculture and urban expansion. Traffickers buy young sloths from children (\$5-\$30) who take them from deforested areas. Mothers are frequently killed and sold for bush meat. Sloths are hit by cars as they slowly crawl cross the street.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Two-toed sloths are generally silent but can let out hisses and low cries or moans if distressed. Sloths are typically solitary but females occasionally feed in the same tree. They sleep in the trees 15 to 20 hours every day and are active at night. They only descend from the tree canopy to move to a different tree or to defecate; they prefer descending head first. They defecate in the same spot each week, digging a hole and covering it afterwards. They have a low metabolic rate and defecate only once each week. They obtain water from vegetation and by lapping dew. Most two-toed sloths change to a different tree each night. Sloths are extremely clumsy on land but are efficient swimmers with their long arms.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Females in estrus appear to initiate mating and are able to reproduce about every 16 months. Mating occurs throughout the year, although some have observed a marked mating season in March and April. Sloths mate and give birth while hanging in the trees. Mother gives birth on ground or in upside down, hanging position; infant grabs onto her fur and makes its way to her chest to nurse. Milk is higher in fat (6.9 %) and protein (61%) than cow's milk. Young are carried for six to nine months and are independent at 12 months but may keep a close association for up to two years. By 6 months, elimination occurs in adult manner.

Estrous	Sexual Maturity: F 3 yrs; M 4 -5 yrs
Gestation: 10 months	Weaning Age: 1 mos
# of Mammae: 2 located on chest	Length at birth: 10 inch.
# of Young: 1	Weight at birth: 12 oz

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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Sloths are identified by the number of long, prominent claws that they have on each front foot. There are both two-toed and three-toed sloths. There are two species of two-toed sloths: *C. didactylus* and *C. hoffmanni*. Common names for *C. didactylus* are Southern two-toed sloth or Linnaeus's two-toed sloth.

Sloths metabolic rate is only 40 - 60% that of similar sized animals and they maintain a low body temperature as well. Their body temperature may vary depending on the temperature of their surroundings and their activity level. Body temperature may vary from 24 °C – 33 °C (75.2 °F – 91.4 °F).

Hair structure may encourage colonization by algae. Sloths may gain nutrients either by absorption through the skin or by licking the algae.

### Sources:

Walker's Mammals of the World, Sixth Edition Vol 1 © 1999 Ronald M. Nowak, pgs 147-152.  
Neotropical Rainforest Mammals, Second Edition © 1997 Louise H. Emmons, University Of Chicago Press  
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created: 4/14