

Sloths

The woman who lost a dog and gained 200 sloths

Monique Pool first fell in love with sloths when she took in an orphan from a rescue centre. Since then many sloths have spent time in her home on their way back to the forest – but even she found it hard to cope when she had to rescue 200 at once.

It all began in 2005 when Pool lost her dog, a mongrel called Sciolo, and called the Animal Protection Society to see if they'd found it. They hadn't, but they told her about Lucia, a baby three-toed sloth they didn't know how to look after.

Pool offered to take it – and was instantly smitten. “They're very special animals to look at,” she says. “They always have a smile on their face and seem so tranquil and peaceful.”



Sloths are gentle creatures, but are far from easy to keep. Their diet presents enormous problems, and the local zoo had shied away from the task.

Pool sought advice from Judy Arroyo, who told her she must feed Lucia goat's milk – cow's milk would be fatal. But goat's milk had to be sent over from the US. The leaves that sloths eat are also hard to source – and must be fresh.

Lucia had a surprise in store – she turned out to be a “he”. Male three-toed sloths display a characteristic spot on their backs when they're a year old. “But we carried on calling him Lucia because he was used to the name,” says Pool. He was her very first charge but died after two years. Soon Pool became the go-to woman for sloths. If the police, the zoo or the Animal Protection Society hear about a sloth, they call her. On average, one or two sloths a week pass through her home before being released a few days later, unless they are hurt and need time to recover.

A piece of forest was being cleared and she was asked to remove 14 sloths.

“I'd never seen more than six together, so we knew we'd have a lot to cope with,” says Pool. As a machine operator carefully pushed over the 15 m (50 ft) trees, the sloths in the canopy would fall to the ground, where they were picked up by Pool and her volunteers. Sloths move very slowly on the ground – even when they'd like to get away fast.

A friend built enclosures in Pool's back garden for the adults. “There were so many of them it was hard to open the cage and keep them all in,” she says. “As soon as they saw the doors open they'd try and get out.” At night, males would sometimes fight and have to be separated. “Normally sloths are

solitary animals,” Pool says. “So to be so packed together was not a normal situation for them.” And they keep to different timetables – two-toed sloths are awake at night and three-toed sloths by day – so they had to be housed separately.

Four days into the rescue they realised they were dealing with more than 14 sloths – a lot more. “After a month we were close to 100, and at the end we got to 200,” says Pool. “On some days I had 50 animals at my house. We had 17 babies at one point, being fed with droppers by volunteers.” Pool had managed to source a steady supply of powdered goat’s milk by then.

Sloths were hanging everywhere – from the trees in her back garden, from the bars on the living room window, and anything else they could hold on to. “Two female adults sat on the TV stand and the babies would climb on the matriarchs.” One very young sloth, known as Lola, would pop up in the strangest places, like the stove top – though not when the gas was alight, luckily. “She was an amazing little thing,” Pool says. “She didn’t like to sit with the others, she preferred to hang behind the fridge where it’s nice and warm.”

The one thing Pool could not do was slow down. She was at full stretch for two months, spending whole days at the forest clearance site, and organising teams to feed and care for all the sloths at home.

The hardest thing was feeding them all. Although three-toed sloths are known to eat up to 50 types of leaves, they have very different preferences depending on the area they come from – young sloths learn which leaves to eat by licking leaf fragments from their mother’s lips. But luckily for Pool there is one tree all sloths eat, the cecropia. She was saved by a friend who worked in a forest resort in the interior. Every day, she sent Pool a load of fresh leaves via a bus that went back and forth with tourists. Two-toed sloths are easier to please – they will eat dagublad leaves (a relative of the sweet potato) which are sold by most greengrocers.

The sloth’s diet explains its peculiar behaviour. Most leaves are hard to digest, so some leaf-eating animals (folivores) cope by eating huge quantities, others by regurgitating their food and repeating the digestion process. Sloths simply allow lots of time; as a result, they have a very slow metabolism. They save energy by hanging from their formidable claws, rather than using muscles unnecessarily. In fact, they move so slowly that they’re an attractive place to live – three-toed sloths host a number of other organisms in their fur, including algae and the “sloth moth”.

Source

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Reading

1. Why didn't the local zoo want to keep sloths?

This question tests your ability to retrieve information from the text.

2. Name two groups that would call Pool if they had concerns about sloths.

This question tests your ability to retrieve information using deduction and inference skills.

3. In your own words, summarise what the charity can do with the donations they receive. You should find four points.

*This is a summarising question. You must select information from the text and convey it in your own words. **Do not** just copy from the text.*

4. In your view, what is the opinion of the writer of the article? Explain the reasons for your choice and pick out examples which support what you say.

For this question you will need to analyse the text. Remember to give your own opinion and use evidence from the text to back up your answer.

Oracy

8. Charities that support animals are often looking for funding. Work in groups of four to create ideas for raising funds in the local area. Discuss the reasons for your choices.

Remember to listen as well as talk. Make sure that every member of the group gets a chance to share their ideas and opinion.

Writing

9. Create a fact file for sloths based on the information that you have in this article. Write 200-300 words.
10. Create a guide to keeping an animal – you can choose the animal or use the information about the sloth from the article. Write about 300 words.