

### THE AYE-AYE

by Lanny and Marilyn Johnson

Billy, Mary and their father, were looking through a book with pictures of animals from Madagascar, an island off the coast of Africa. As Mary turned a page, Billy became very excited and squealed out, "Whoa! Look at that big-eared, ugly rat!"

Chuckling, Mr. Jones answered, "I admit that is a strange looking animal, probably one of the weirdest animals you have ever seen. However, it is not a rat."

"The picture says it is an Aye-Aye (*pronounced eye-eye*)," Mary observed.

"That's right, Mary. Because it looks like a mixture of several different animals – a face like a cat, teeth like a rodent, tail like a squirrel, claws like a sloth and body like a monkey – scientists were not sure what kind of an animal it was. Today, the aye-aye (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) is believed to be a type of lemur. Lemurs are primates found only in Madagascar and some tiny nearby islands."<sup>1,2,3</sup>

"How big are they?" asked Billy.

"Their bodies grow to be 14 to 17 inches

long (35.6 to 43.2 cm) but their tail can be up to 24 inches (61 cm) long. The adult males can weigh almost 6 pounds (2.72 kg) and the females a little over 5 (2.27 kg)," Mr. Jones explained.<sup>4,5</sup>

"It sure has big yellowish-orange eyes," exclaimed Mary.

"The aye-aye is *nocturnal*, which means it's most active at night. Those big eyes help it to see in the dark. Most of its life is spent in the treetops where during the day, it sleeps in a nest made of leaves and twigs in the fork of a tree. You can't see it in any of these pictures, but the aye-aye's eyes have a special transparent (see-through) third eyelid called a *nictitating membrane*. This keeps its eyes moist and protects them from debris."<sup>6,7</sup>

"Notice the large, rounded, spoon-like ears. The aye-aye is able to turn them towards the source of a sound and help it 'see' in the dark. When the aye-aye makes a noise, special ridges on the inner surfaces of its ears that are very sensitive, help it determine where the sound is coming from. The process of locating something by making sounds and then listening to their echoes is called *echolocation*."<sup>8,9</sup>

"Don't dolphins, whales and bats use echolocation too?" Mary asked.

"Yes they do, Mary. However, the aye-aye is the only primate known to use it. Using its bony, middle finger, the aye-aye rapidly taps (up to eight times per second) a tree trunk or branch. By listening to these vibrations it can tell not



Aye-aye teeth. Image credit: Andrew Ciscel, cc2.0

only whether there is a hole underneath the wood, but if there is a grub (*insect larvae*) in the hole! This amazing way of finding food is called *percussive foraging*.<sup>10, 11, 12, 13, 14</sup>

"The aye-aye eats fruits, nuts, nectar, seeds, and mushrooms, but its main diet is wood-boring grubs. If

the aye-aye detects grubs in the tree, it chews a hole into the wood with its sharp teeth. Chewing tough wood eventually wears down the aye-aye's teeth. However, their teeth are designed to grow back continuously their entire life – just like the teeth of rodents. After the aye-aye chews into the hole, it uses its specially designed middle finger to scoop the grub out."<sup>15, 16</sup>

"The middle finger is much thinner and three times longer than the other fingers on the aye-aye's hands. It is also more flexible than the others because of special ball-and-socket joints."<sup>17, 18</sup>

"So, Mary and Billy, what did you learn from studying the aye-aye?" asked Mr. Jones.

"It's really weird and kinda ugly, but really cool!"

"That's true Billy," Mary smilingly replied, "but I think most of all, it shows me that Our God created His creatures with special designs to help them survive in this world."

"I totally agree kids. Now let's find your mother for prayer time. Then it's off to brush your teeth and bed."

Giggling and saluting, Billy piped out, "Aye-aye, Dad!", and scampered off to find his mother.



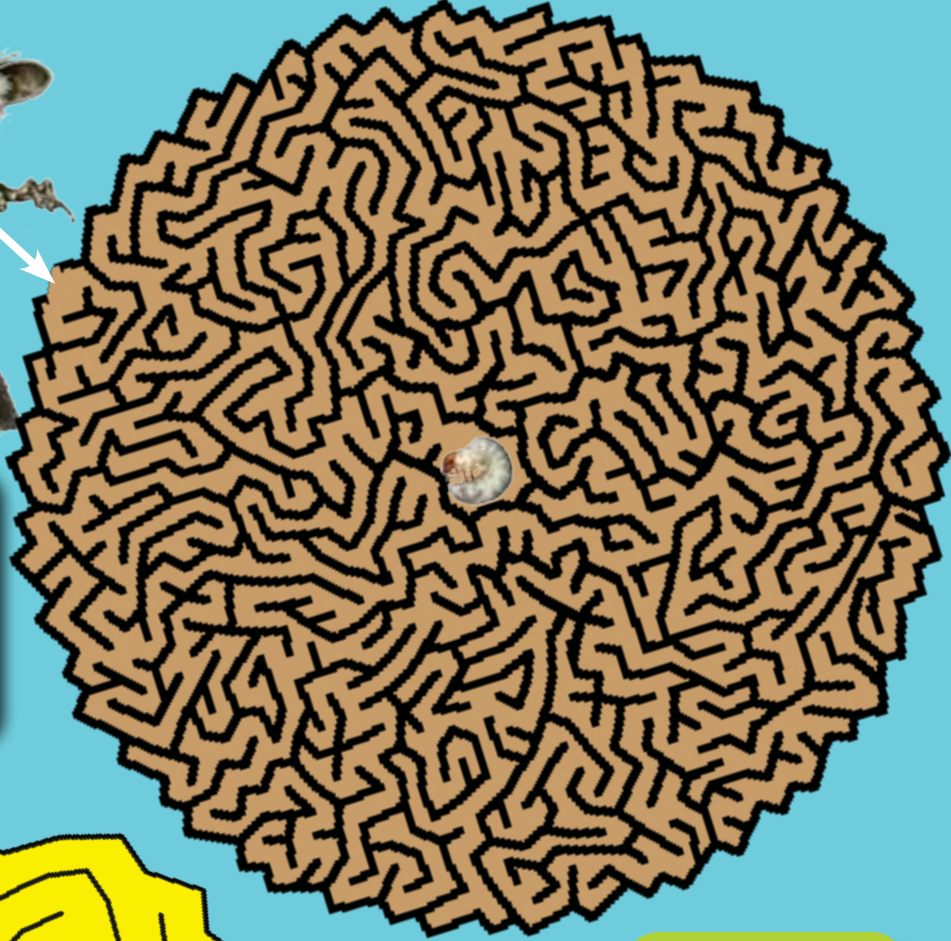
Wild aye-aye. Image credit: Nomis-Simon, cc2.0



Aye-aye's fingers. Image credit: Rama, cc2.0.



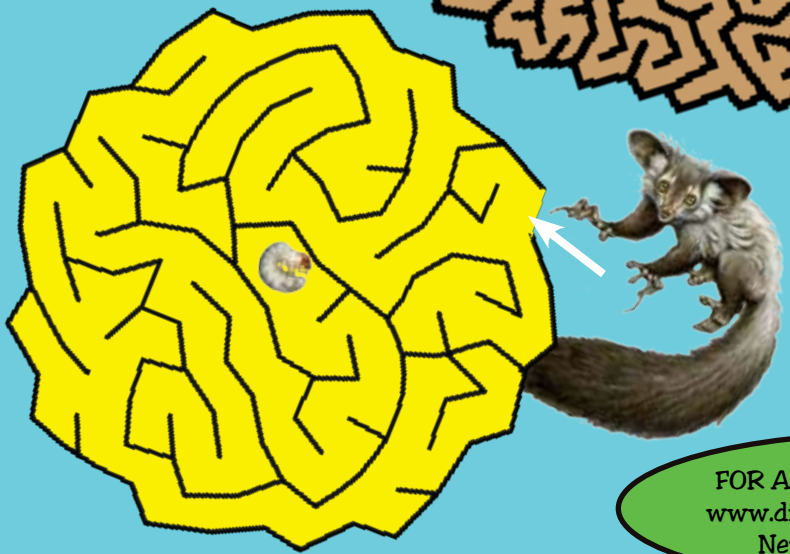
(stuffed) Image credit: MatthiasKabel, GFDL.



**CHALLENGING**  
 Help the adult Aye-Aye find the path through the maze to get to the juicy grub.

**WORDSEARCH**  
 Look for the words from the WORD LIST below. The hidden word might be up, down, sideways or slanted, but not backwards.

**WORD LIST**  
 AYEAYE    CHEW    CLAWS    DESIGN  
 ECHOLOCATION    FINGER    GRUB    LARVAE  
 LEMUR    MADAGASCAR    NOCTURNAL  
 TAP    TEETH



**EASY**  
 Help the baby Aye-Aye find the path through the maze to get to the juicy grub.

FOR ANSWERS GO TO: <http://www.discovercreation.org/kids/NewsletterAnswers.htm>

Puzzles by Lanny Johnson © AOI 2019  
 Mazes adapted from [krazydad.com/puzzles](http://krazydad.com/puzzles)