

The troubling truth about selfies with sloths

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

Answer the questions about sloths, a type of animal. Then scan the article to check your answers.

- Sloths live in ...
 - Asia.
 - Central and South America.
 - Africa.
- Sloths live ...
 - in trees.
 - in water.
 - in caves.

Have you ever seen a sloth or a picture of a sloth? What do they look like?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

campaign

handle

hug

obsessed

threat

unique

- always thinking about something, in a way that seems extreme to other people _____ (para 2)
- very special; different from other things of the same type _____ (para 2)
- put your arms around someone to show that you like them _____ (para 3)
- touch or hold someone or something _____ (para 4)
- something that could cause harm or danger _____ (para 6)
- a series of actions that try to make things better _____ (para 8)

at risk

balance

cruel

illegal

interaction

scratch

- being with and talking to other people (or animals) _____ (para 8)
- not allowed by the law _____ (para 8)
- used to describe someone who causes pain or unhappiness to other people or animals _____ (para 8)
- be in a situation in which something unpleasant or dangerous could happen to you _____ (para 9)
- cut someone's skin with your nails or claws _____ (para 9)
- mental and emotional calm _____ (para 12)

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Why can't we leave them alone? The troubling truth about selfies with sloths

Patrick Greenfield

2 June, 2020

- 1 The sloth has become the rock star of the animal kingdom. The strange animal, which lives in the Latin American rainforest, is on bank notes, adverts, T-shirts and Instagram fan pages.
- 2 "People are obsessed," says Costa Rica's President, Carlos Alvarado Quesada. "The sloth is a unique animal. It's closely connected with the forest. People love the way it moves."
- 3 But its popularity has started to cause problems for the sloth. The wildlife charity World Animal Protection says too many people take selfies with sloths. Seventy per cent of selfies with sloths on Instagram – from the Brazilian Amazon to Central America – show people hugging or holding them.
- 4 In the wild, sloths spend most of the day asleep. Stress from constant handling and noise is very bad for them.
- 5 "If people look at images of sloths and don't really think of them as wild animals, then it could do more harm than good," says Sam Trull, who runs the Sloth Institute. The institute rescues the animals and reintroduces them into the wild in Manuel Antonio, on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica.
- 6 The brown-throated three-toed sloths and Hoffmann's two-toed sloths that hang from the rainforest in Manuel Antonio are a part of life in the national park area. Seeing a sloth makes most people happy. But tourists have become a threat.
- 7 "The photo trade is a really big problem. People take sloths out of the forest and charge money for tourists to hold them and take pictures with them. That's the negative side of them being popular," Trull says.
- 8 The Costa Rican government has a #stopanimalselfies campaign to stop this. Human and wildlife interaction is illegal in Costa Rica, but the 2017 World Animal Protection report said Costa Rica is seventh in the world for "cruel" animal selfies.
- 9 "These interactions put wild animals at risk, but they also put tourists at risk. Animals can give humans illnesses through biting and scratching," says Shirley Ramírez Carvajal, a wildlife biologist who works on the campaign.
- 10 "We have a law to stop contact with wild animals and to stop people feeding them. In some national parks, monkeys and racoons eat human food and have teeth, bone and weight problems."
- 11 The Costa Rican government is asking tourists to report illegal behaviour to try to stop this happening.
- 12 "I think that sloths are a really good example of balance. Maybe this is one of the reasons why they are popular. A lot of people don't have a lot of balance in their lives," says Trull.
- 13 "Sloths are a really good example of how everyone should live. I think if more people were like sloths, we'd have world peace. They are excellent role models for all of us."

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F)? Correct any that are false.

1. Sloths are a threat to tourists in Costa Rica.
2. Hugging and handling wild animals causes them a lot of stress.
3. Interaction between tourists and sloths is always stressful for the tourists.
4. Wild animals can make people ill by scratching and biting them.
5. Human interaction with sloths is illegal in Costa Rica.
6. Many people are obsessed with sloths and want to get a selfie with them.
7. Sloths are unique animals that live a life of balance.
8. Animal selfies are cruel to humans.

4 A phrase

Find and underline this phrase in the article. Then choose the correct meaning for the phrase.

“do more harm than good”

- a. make something worse, not better
- b. make something better, not worse

Which of these things do you think might do more harm than good? What other things might do more harm than good?

cheating in an exam
wearing face masks
brushing your teeth after every meal
giving lots of money to help someone
exercising every day
buying children all the toys they want

5 Quote

Sam Trull, the Sloth Institute

A lot of people don't have a lot of balance in their lives. Sloths are a really good example of how everyone should live. I think if more people were like sloths, we'd have world peace. They are excellent role models for all of us.

Do you agree with Sam Trull? Why? Why not? What can we learn from animals?

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6 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

I agree / don't agree with this statement. I think tourists ...

- should not be allowed into national parks.
- should only be allowed to enter a national park with a local guide.
- can help local people by paying for photos with animals.