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VIGILANCE OF THE RING TAILED LEMURS AT BERENTY RESERVE IN THE SOUTH OF MADAGASCAR

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Vigilance is a common behavior performed by animals mainly to protect themselves from predators. The goal of this study was to determine which factors affect vigilance in maki's ring tailed lemurs. Vigilance behavior has been shown to depend on the presence and type of predators in the area, the number of conspecific group members in proximity to an individual, as well as other factors unrelated to predation. Using Focal Animal Sampling, we observed two groups of eight individuals living in two different habitats for a period of two months at Berenty Reserve in 2006. Our results show that predation pressure is an important factor mediating the vigilance of Ring tailed lemurs because vigilance varied according to the place that they occupy in their habitat. Furthermore, other factors also affected maki vigilance behavior, the most important of which being the presence of humans. Vigilance was also higher in adults than at other status, but did not vary according to sex. However, nursing females were more vigilant than females without dependent offspring. Furthermore, vigilance depended on social rank, with dominant individuals being more vigilant than subordinate individuals. These results clearly show that a range of factors can affect vigilance behavior in lemurs.

Keywords: vigilance, predators, factors, rank.