

# Brown-Throated Three-Toed Sloth

---

*Bradypus variegatus*



Photo by Art Wolfe ©

## ***Anatomy-***

This cat-sized mammal typically weighing 8 to 9 pounds has a round head, a short snout, small eyes, long legs, tiny ears and a stubby tail. Sloths have long, coarse fur that is light brown in coloration, but often appears green due to the blue-green algae that grow there. Instead of toes, their front and hind feet have three curved claws that allow them to easily hook onto tree branches and hang upside-down. Sloths can rotate their heads nearly 90 degrees, and their mouths are shaped so they look like they are always smiling. Males are distinguishable from females because they usually have a bright yellow or orange patch of fur located between their shoulders.

## ***Habitat-***

The three-toed sloth is an arboreal animal, inhabiting the tropical forests of Central and South America. Their algae-covered fur helps camouflage the sloth in its forest environment. Sloths spend nearly all of their time in trees, descending to the ground only once a week to defecate.

## ***Diet-***

Sloths are herbivores (plant-eaters), feeding on a low-energy diet of leaves, twigs and fruit. Because of their slow movement and metabolism, it can take up to a month for the sloth to digest a single meal.

## ***Threats-***

Sloths are among the slowest-moving animals on Earth; They can swim but are virtually unable to walk. This makes them an easy target for jaguars, eagles and people that hunt sloths for their meat. The brown-throated three-toed sloth population is threatened by deforestation, habitat fragmentation, and human encroachment. In addition, their restricted diet prevents them from thriving in captivity.

Jukofsky, Diane. *Encyclopedia of Rainforests*. Connecticut: Oryx Press, 2002.

San Francisco State University (<http://bss.sfsu.edu/geog/bholzman/courses/fall99projects/sloth.htm>)

Enchanted Learning (<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/mammals/sloth/Sloth3printout.shtml>)