



Ringtails

The ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*) is a small mammal that resembles a fox with a raccoon-like tail. It is also known as the ringtail cat, miner's cat, Civet cat, and cacomistle. This secretive, nocturnal animal is not a cat, but a relative of the raccoon and coatimundi. The ringtail is also the official Arizona State Mammal. Their activities do not usually conflict with humans, but they are an interesting animal and residents may encounter them on their property or while out recreating.

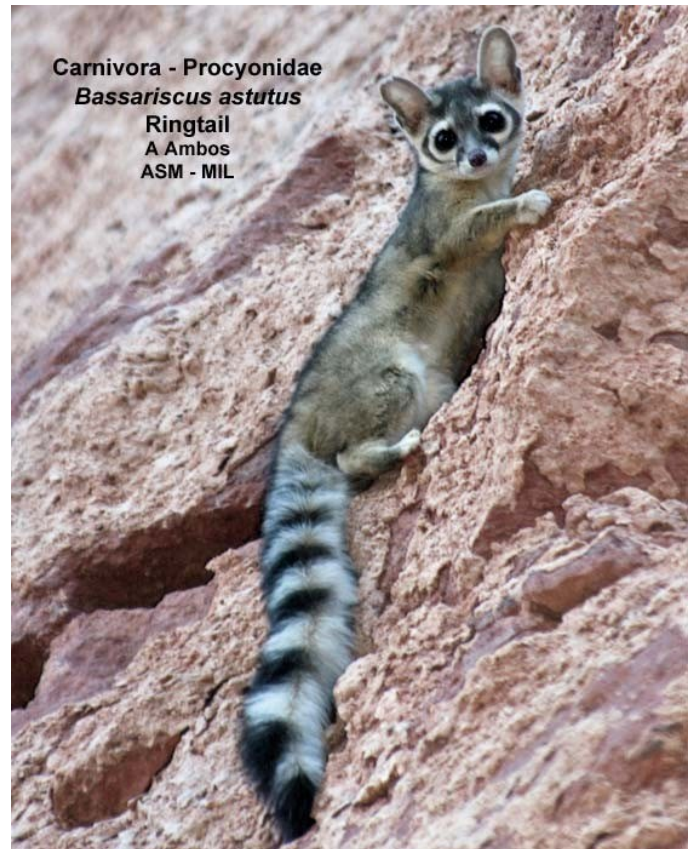
The ringtail has large brown and black eyes, a pointed nose, and a mask of fur resembling the raccoon. Like many nocturnal animals, they have long facial whiskers (called mystical vibrissae) which help them sense their surroundings. Their tail is as long as head-body length. Their fur color ranges from stony gray through light brown to golden tan, with longer black-tipped guard hairs. The tail is long and solidly white or pale buff underneath and marked by 14 to 16 alternating black and white rings and a black tip. An adult ringtail's total length ranges between 24 and 32 inches with a tail length of 12 to 17 inches.

They prefer rough, rocky areas with caves, crevices and broken ledges in which to den. Hollows in trees and burrows dug by other animals may also be used for den sites. They may also use abandoned buildings and attics of occupied dwellings. Ringtails will visit campsites and rummage through gear sometimes taking items, especially shiny ones. Several ringtails may occupy the same area.

Ringtails are agile climbers, negotiating trees and sheer rock faces with ease. The ringtail's considerable tail provides balance for negotiating narrow ledges and limbs, even allowing them to reverse directions by performing a cartwheel. They can rotate their hind feet 180 degrees, giving them the ability to rapidly descend cliffs or trees as well as saguaros. Furthermore, ringtails can ascend narrow passages by pressing all feet on one wall and their back against the other, pressing both right feet on one wall and both left feet on the other, and wider cracks by ricocheting between walls.

The ringtail's total range extends from southwestern Oregon south along Pacific coast to southern end of Baja and most of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Mexico. They are also found in parts of Nevada, Utah, Missouri, Louisiana and Kansas. In Arizona, ringtails can be found in most habitats except very flat, open desert areas and the highest mountains.

Ringtails are omnivorous and forage mainly at night on small birds, rodents, lizards, snakes, invertebrates, and fruit. Gardeners, remember that invertebrates include insects and their larvae. Consumption of fruit such as prickly pear may reduce its need for water. They also regularly consume carrion, adding many non-prey items to the diet. There are also some reports of them preying on poultry. Ringtails are prey for coyotes, bobcats, great horned owls, and occasionally other large predators.



Ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*, American Society of Mammalogists, <http://www.mammalogy.org/bassariscus-astutus-1689>).

Mating occurs between February and May. Females are receptive for only 24 hours and a litter consists of 3 to 4 young born between April and July. Gestation is 51 to 54 days and males help in providing for their family. The young are blind at birth and covered with downy white fur. They begin roaming and foraging with parents at 8 to 9 weeks and leave the mother in late summer. Ringtails become sexually mature at 10 months.

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