

Remember the shiny-eyed, long-tailed “party animals” from the movie *Madagascar*? Those were lemurs. Mireya Mayor studies lemurs in the wild. And she has a lot in common with them.

Lemurs rely on their agility to leap acrobatically through the rain-forest canopy. As a primatologist working in the rain forest, Mireya draws on her experience as a ballet dancer and a cheerleader for the Miami Dolphins.

“Having danced ballet for so many years actually helped me get around the rain forest,” she says. “You need a lot of balance and flexibility, and you need to be very quick on your feet.”



Mireya Mayor DANCING THROUGH THE RAINFOREST

In college, Mireya took an anthropology course. Right away, her curiosity was piqued. In 1996, she went to Guyana in South America to study primates. Mireya, who had never even been camping, found herself clambering through jungles, trying to avoid “snakes and tarantulas that would somehow

appear on my backpack!” A year later, in Madagascar, Mireya and a colleague discovered the world’s smallest primate, the pygmy mouse lemur. It weighs less than an ounce. Mireya’s efforts led Madagascar to triple its protected regions and established a \$50 million conservation fund.

Be Prepared!

Be Open to Using What You Know in More Than One Way

How has something you’ve learned prepared you to do something else entirely different?

What else do you want to be prepared to do in your life?

Do you like big animals? Scientists and conservationists have a term for animals that people seem to like enough to want to save from extinction. It’s “charismatic megafauna,” or “charismatic species.” The giant panda, the tiger, and the blue whale are charismatic species.

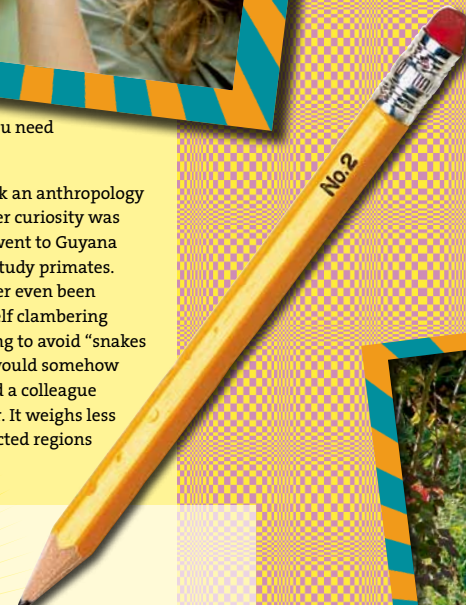
So is the Asian elephant.

As manager of a conservation lab at the Smithsonian National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C., Melissa Songer tracks the movement of Asian elephants. It’s important work because Asian elephants face extinction. Only about 30,000 of them remain in the wild.

Melissa Songer ELEPHANT WATCH

Elephants can get down steep, muddy hillsides better than humans or machines, so Melissa and her team use them for transportation during the rainy season in remote parts of Myanmar, in Southeast Asia. “They just have this incredible balance—it’s amazing what they can do,” she says.

Asian elephants are also astonishingly dexterous. “They can pick up tiny little things with their nose ‘fingers,’” Melissa marvels.



Being so big, Asian elephants need a lot of energy to move around. But they eat low-energy foods such as roots, grasses, fruit, and bark. So they consume up to 300 pounds of food each day over as many as 18 hours! To find that much food, they must move around a lot.

Elephants can run faster than people, but they usually conserve their energy and move slowly.

Being big, they don’t have to worry about predators. “There’s not much that can mess with them,” Melissa says.