



Photo by George Tapan

## Tarsier (*Tarsius syrichta*)

THE TARSIER (*Tarsius syrichta*) is one of the smallest primates, which is more closely related to the African Bushbobier and slow loris. Its head to body length ranges from 90 to 160 mm and weighs from 70 to 165 grams. It has a pair of large membranous and paper ears that look like a bat. The ears, which can be crinkled or moved in opposite directions, usually turn towards the direction of the sound. Its good hearing is complemented by its acute vision, making it a great hunter at night, especially of insects, which are its main diet.

The tarsier is confined to the islands of Bohol, Samar, Leyte, Basilan, Dinagat and Mindanao. It is found in various habitats particularly in dense patches of bushes, tall grasses, bamboos and small trees. It prefers the secondary growth forest probably because of the numerous saplings, creepers as well as bamboos, which are good for its clinging and leaping mode of travel, and it is rich in insect prey.

Tarsiers live in territorial family units; protecting their territories by urine marking and by shrill singing calls given at dawn as family members climb into tree holes or a tangle of vines for the day.



Its interesting features and anthropoid appearance have made it popular as a house pet. A tarsier is usually sold for as low as 100 pesos. Hunters and trappers employ various ways to catch a tarsier. Some would shake the trees and branches or cut down bamboos until the Tarsier falls to the ground. Then they would throw a burlap sack on it, catch it by hand, or set specially trained dogs to get it. However, it rarely lives long in captivity. Usually traumatized by its capture, it rarely socializes with its human captors. Despite hunting and logging of its habitat, the tarsier remains widespread and locally common.

