What do they look like?
Squirrel monkeys have thick fur ranging in color from olive to grey on the body and reddish to yellow on the back and limbs. They have white patches of fur on the chest, neck and face. Their muzzle is hairless, showing black skin around the lips and nostrils. Their bodies are around twelve inches long and their tails around fifteen inches. They have five clawed digits on each hand and foot, with pseudo-opposable thumbs for climbing and grasping. Their large close-set eyes give them good binocular vision.

How do they behave?
Squirrel monkeys live in large troops, often split up into subgroups of juveniles, adult males and adult females with young. Squirrel monkeys are very vocal, using screams, peeps, barks and purrs to communicate. They are arboreal and spend most of their time climbing in the treetops. Their tails are not prehensile (cannot wrap around or grasp things) but are useful for balance. They are diurnal and most active in the morning and afternoon, resting during the hottest part of the day.

What’s on the menu?
In the wild, these omnivorous monkeys eat fruit, flowers, insects and small vertebrates. At the Zoo they eat fruit, vegetables, and primate biscuits.

How are they born?
Male squirrel monkeys compete for mates by gaining excess weight, called “fattening.” Females then choose the largest male in their troop to breed with. Squirrel monkeys are born in June, July, and August after a gestation period of 150-170 days. Juveniles tightly cling to their mother’s back during travel and for protection. They will stay with their mother for up to one year and reach sexually maturity at two and a half to three years of age.

What should you know about them?
Common squirrel monkeys have been observed “urine washing,” spreading urine over their hands, feet, and fur. This helps spread their scent throughout their territory, allows others in their troop to follow their trail, improves their grip on branches, and can help cool their body through evaporation. Although they are territorial and will defend their home range from other squirrel monkey troops, they sometimes team up with other monkey species, both to help find food resources and to avoid predators.

What can you do to help?
Some subspecies of squirrel monkey are listed as endangered or threatened due to loss of habitat; their forest homes are being cleared for forestry and agriculture. They are also often captured and smuggled out of their home countries for the illegal pet trade. What you buy can help protect forest habitat. Buy wood products that are sustainably harvested, coffee which is shade-grown, and produce grown locally to you. Research your options carefully and check state laws before deciding to keep exotic pets.