

**Why can't we leave them alone? The troubling truth about selfies with sloths –**  
**2 June, 2020**

The sloth is the rock star of the animal kingdom. The strange animal, which lives in the Latin American rainforest, is on bank notes, adverts, T-shirts and Instagram fan pages. "People are obsessed," says Costa Rica's President. "The sloth is a unique animal. It's closely connected with the forest. People love the way it moves."

But its popularity has started to cause problems. The wildlife charity World Animal Protection says too many people take selfies with sloths. 70% of selfies with sloths on Instagram – from the Brazilian Amazon to Central America – show people hugging or holding them. In the wild, sloths spend most of the day asleep. Stress from constant handling and noise is very bad for them.

"If people look at images of sloths and don't really think of them as wild animals, then it could do more harm than good," says the Sloth Institute. The institute rescues the animals and reintroduces them back into the wild on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica.

The sloths that hang from the rainforest in Costa Rica are a part of life in the national park area. Seeing a sloth makes most people happy. But tourists have become a threat. "The photo trade is a really big problem. People take sloths out of the forest and charge money for tourists to hold them and take pictures with them."

The Costa Rican government has a #stopanimselfies campaign to stop this. Human and wildlife interaction is illegal in Costa Rica, but the 2017 World Animal Protection report said Costa Rica is seventh in the world for "cruel" animal selfies. "These interactions put wild animals at risk, but they also put tourists at risk. Animals can give humans illnesses through biting and scratching," says a wildlife biologist who works on the campaign.

"We have a law to stop contact with wild animals and to stop people feeding them. In some national parks, monkeys and racoons eat human food and have teeth, bone and weight problems." The Costa Rican government is asking tourists to report illegal behaviour to try to stop this happening.

What is the sloth described as?

Where do sloths live?

Where might you see images of the sloth?

What does the Costa Rican president say about the sloth?

What do 70% of selfies on Instagram show?

Where were these selfies taken?

What affect do selfies have on sloths?

What does seeing a sloth do to people?

What are some unscrupulous people doing in Costa Rica?

What is the name of the campaign from the Costa Rican government who are trying to stop this?

What is illegal in Costa Rica?

Who is also at risk from these selfies and why?

What are the Costa Rican government asking tourists to do?