

Choices proudly presents...



a film by Jeri Ledbetter



Why Sloths?

Those familiar with sloths often associate the poor things with their namesake, the deadly sin. Sloths were described by the great French naturalist Georges Buffon in 1772 as "the lowest form of existence." He wrote, "One more defect would have made their existence impossible." Hence these placid and inoffensive creatures have acquired an entirely undeserved public relations problem that Ms. Ledbetter's delightful film completely dispels. It will make you fall in love with the sloth. And you will likely strive to be more sloth-like.

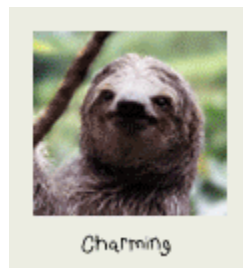
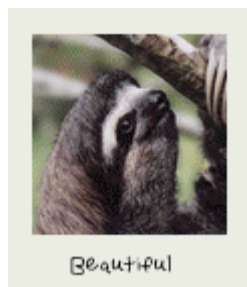
Jeri Ledbetter knows all about this. She fell in love with these animals years ago. "When I encountered a sloth for the first time, I was struck by its beauty and grace," she says. Traveling in Costa Rica in 1992 she stayed at a bed and breakfast called Aviarios del Caribe. There she met Buttercup, an orphaned three-toed sloth whose mother had been hit by a car. Judy Arroyo, the owner of Aviarios, had rescued and raised Buttercup, and said perhaps Jeri could hold her. But under no circumstances was she permitted to wake her.

Jeri recalls, "The first thing I had to learn in pursuit of sloths was patience. Sloths sleep a lot--up to 18 hours a day. Buttercup was sleeping in her hanging wicker basket, and I waited for hours for her to wake up. Once she opened her eyes and blinked, I was permanently smitten. I haven't been quite the same." Today Buttercup can still be seen at Aviarios, reclining in her basket and beaming regally at her caregivers and guests. She basks in the adoration of all--in between naps, that is. Her priorities remain unaffected by her fame.

Why a film about sloths? Jeri laughs. "A lot of people ask if I run the show in fast motion, assuming that terminal boredom would set in after about 15 seconds of watching a sloth creep around or merely sleep." Actually, sloths are quite engaging. "Each one's facial markings are unique, and they have the sweetest perpetual smile."

Sloths are physically incapable of rapid movement; this allows them to escape the notice of predators. Jeri readily admits that this made them an attractive subject for a new filmmaker. "The sloths were endlessly patient while I was learning to film. They wouldn't run away, nor would they hurt me. It sure beat taking on jaguars for my first project."

In this film Jeri embraces the philosophy of sloth as well as the animal. In these days of high stress, fast food and cheap sound bites, there is much we can learn from the sloth. Jeri explains, "They aren't lazy; they are calm and deliberate. They remain completely at peace, no matter what is going on around them." She is proud that her friends say she has become more sloth-like since she began working on this film. "I accept that as a huge compliment."



About the Documentary

In order to produce a film about sloths, Jeri Ledbetter spent the past several years learning the ways of the sloth. She studied and filmed extensively at the Aviarios Sloth Rescue Center in Costa Rica, as well as in the wild rainforests of Costa Rica and Panama. "There is very little information available about sloths," she says. "And much of what has been printed is incorrect."

Early in 2005 Jeri and photographer Bill Hatcher received a grant from the National Geographic Expedition Council to film a species of sloth that was just described in 2001. The three-toed pygmy sloth is found only on a tiny remote island off the coast of Panama. During the expedition she captured some priceless footage of a pygmy sloth entering the water and swimming with surprising grace and poise. This behavior had been theorized by scientists but never previously documented.

Hanging with the Sloth is a delightful, slow-motion romp with the world's most charming mammal. Slow of movement and fond of sleep, this animal has long been considered dim-witted, primitive and noteworthy only in that it survived at all. It didn't help to be named for one of the Seven Deadly Sins. This engaging documentary, filmed in Costa Rica and Panama, dispels that image and introduces you to a unique, intriguing and extraordinary animal. Prepare to fall in love.



Sloths spend most of their time in trees, but descend to the ground to urinate and defecate--only about once a week.

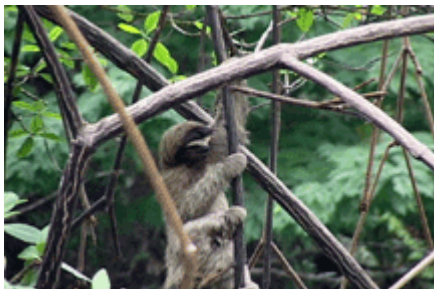
What is a sloth?

There are two types of sloth: two-toed (*choloepus*) and three-toed (*bradypus*). Two-toed sloths are omnivores, eating leaves, fruits, slow-moving animals and bird eggs. Three-toed sloths are foliivores, subsisting on a variety of leaves.

Sloths live in the rainforest canopies of the Americas, sleeping up to eighteen hours a day. Adept in the trees, they are awkward on the ground, but oddly enough they are strong and graceful swimmers.

Their main defenses are camouflage, stealth and stillness. Should they be attacked they often survive due to their tough hides, tenacious grips and extraordinary ability to heal from grievous wounds. Sloths have been known to survive a ninety-foot fall to the forest floor, and to withstand respiratory arrest for forty minutes.

But the sloths' world has begun to crumble in recent decades as man encroaches ever further into New World jungles. Rain forests are felled, roads sever their ranges, power lines burn and electrocute them, and dogs attack them. Sometimes children, knowing no better, abuse them. Of the six species of sloths, the Hoffmann's *choloepus* is threatened and the *bradypus torquatus* nears extinction. Another recently discovered species, the *bradypus pygmaeus*, is very likely endangered but has not yet been listed.



The recently-discovered *bradypus pygmaeus*



The endangered *bradypus torquatus*
photo by © [Kevin Schafer](#)



Strong and graceful swimmers

About the Director

Hanging with the Sloth was conceived, produced, and edited by Jeri Ledbetter. Jeri was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She is a pilot, environmental activist, and a river guide in Grand Canyon.

In 2003 Ledbetter returned to Prescott College to study filmmaking and revive her fascination with sloths. Ten years earlier she had been introduced to Buttercup, a hand-raised orphan sloth that still lives at Aviarios del Caribe, a sloth rescue center in Costa Rica. While she was working at the sloth rescue center, she noted the lack of good video to show people who came to visit the sloths. She had a video camera, a computer, and some time. She could make a little movie for Aviarios and get course credit for the project from Prescott College. Shouldn't take too long, she thought. The result, *Sloth Ballet*, was a huge success with visitors to the rescue center. Each year nearly 20,000 visitors to the rescue center watch the twelve-minute film and become hopelessly enamored with sloths.

Next Jeri went to work on a longer version of her film, *Hanging with the Sloth*. Thousands of hours later, what began as a "class project" has led to two award-winning films and a deeper infatuation with sloths.

In addition to her filmmaking career, Jeri is still a professional river guide, a private pilot, and an avid kayaker and skier. She lives in Flagstaff, Arizona with her cat Kaibab.



Jeri and Mobley, a
baby two-toed sloth



Jeri with Leno, a
three-toed sloth



Junior lives at Aviarios Sloth Rescue Center.

Festivals

- Flagstaff Mountain Film Festival - **WINNER** Best Cultural/Human Interest Film
- Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival – **FINALIST** Marion Zunz Newcomer Award
- Mountainfilm Telluride

Director's Statement

I had spent the afternoon paddling my canoe through a swamp in Panama, on a solo five-day trip, searching for three-toed sloths. It had rained most of the day, which made peering into the trees somewhat problematic. In a tropical rainforest it is a rare raindrop that falls directly from cloud to eyeball. Most cascade through a series of leaves and off ingeniously designed drip tips engineered to shed water. This helps to protect the leaves from terminal fungus. On the journey downward, the rain picks up dirt, slime and insect fragments. All this plops onto upraised camera lenses or eyeballs.

Over the past couple of years I've spent quite a few special days dangling from trees, slogging through swamps, swatting mosquitoes and waiting for sloths to wake up. A bout of malaria and *Hanging with the Sloth* are the result.

I simply love sloths, and have always been intrigued by these remarkable animals. They are in trouble, of course, as man encroaches ever farther into New World jungles. They are also misunderstood. Those familiar with sloths often associate the poor things with their namesake, the deadly sin. Sloths were described by the great French naturalist Georges Buffon in 1772 as "the lowest form of existence." He wrote, "One more defect would have made their existence impossible." Hence these placid and inoffensive creatures have acquired an entirely undeserved public relations problem. I hope that this film will dispel that image.



Adapted to life in the trees, sloths move slowly and laboriously on the ground.

