

# GORILLAS



Mountain gorilla

There are two populations of mountain gorillas. One is found in the Virunga volcanic mountains of Central Africa, within three National Parks: Mgahinga, in south-west Uganda; Volcanoes, in north-west Rwanda; and Virunga in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The other is found in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The fur of the mountain gorilla is often thicker and longer than that of other gorilla species but it helps them to live in colder temperatures. Gorillas can be identified by nose prints that are special to each individual. Males usually weigh twice as much as the females. Adult males have a big bony crest on the top and back of their skulls. These crests anchor powerful muscles that attach to the lower jaw (mandible). Adult females also have these crests, but they are less noticeable. Adult males are called silverbacks because a saddle of gray or silver-colored hair on their backs as they get older. The hair on their backs is shorter than on the rest of their body but their arm hair is especially long. Standing up, males reach 6 ft. 3 in. in height, with an arm span of about 7 feet 7 inches. They weigh about 490 lb. Male Silverback Gorillas are

about 10 times stronger than the biggest American football players. Like all great apes other than humans, its arms are longer than its legs. Like all gorillas they have dark brown eyes. They move by knuckle-walking (like the common chimpanzee), supporting its weight on the backs of its curved fingers rather than its palms of its hands. The Mountain Gorilla is diurnal, meaning they are most active between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Many of these hours are spent eating, as large quantities of food are needed to sustain its massive bulk. It forages (looks for food) in early morning, rests during the late morning and around midday, and in the afternoon it forages again before resting at night. Each gorilla builds a nest from surrounding leaves and limbs to sleep in, constructing a new one every evening. Only infants sleep in the same nest as their mothers. The Mountain Gorilla is primarily an herbivore meaning a large part of their diet is leaves, shoots and stems. They also eat bark, roots, flowers and fruit. They will also eat small invertebrates.



Young mountain gorilla

The decline of a population is caused by pollution, habitat destruction and fragmentation (meaning one group is not able to get to another group), illegal poaching, agriculture, and the introduction of diseases are some of the usual suspects being human beings. War and civil unrest in Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo has gone on for a very long time and civil unrest has lasted for decades.

The result of this is the death of many gorillas. Mountain Gorillas are not usually hunted for bushmeat, but they are often maimed or killed by traps and snares intended for other animals. They have been killed for their heads, hands, and feet, which are sold to collectors. Infants are sold to zoos, researchers, and people who want them as pets. The stealing of infants generally involves the loss of at least one adult, as members of a group will fight to the death to protect their young. The Virunga Gorillas are particularly susceptible to animal trafficking for the illegal pet trade. With young Gorillas worth from \$1000 to \$5000 on the black market, poachers seeking infant and juvenile specimens will kill and wound other members of the group in the process. Those of the group that survive often disband.

As a bit of ancient history; Mountain gorillas have been isolated from Eastern lowland gorillas for about 400 000 years and these two separated from their western ancestors approximately 2 million years ago. There has been a lot of debate over the classification of mountain gorillas. Gorillas were first called Troglodytes in 1847, but renamed to Gorilla in 1852. It was not until 1967 that the taxonomist Colin Groves proposed that all gorillas be regarded as one species. The fossil record provides evidence of the hominoid primates (apes and humans belong to this group) found in east Africa about 18-22 million years ago.



Lowland gorilla

The Eastern lowland gorilla has longer teeth, stronger jaws, and a broader body than the Western lowland gorilla. The Eastern lowland gorilla is only found in the tropical forests of eastern Zaire, Africa. Eastern Lowland Gorillas are predominantly herbivorous that means, eating mostly leaves. They are known to eat only a few leaves from a single plant, allowing the plant to regrow. They will also eat fruit, seeds, bamboo shoots and insects. Gorillas also engage in Coprophagia, They eat their own feces (poop), as well as the feces of other gorillas. Chimpanzees have been seen doing the same thing. This behavior may help to improve the used of vitamins or other nutrients made available by the gorillas re-eating of seeds. The Eastern Lowland Gorilla is the largest of the gorillas and the largest living primate. The maximum size of a male Eastern Lowland Gorilla can be over 550 lbs. and when standing 6.6 ft. in the wild. Large males can have an arm span of 8 ft. 6 in. Some males are recorded to have weighed in at 750 lb.



The Western lowland gorilla lives in Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo. The western lowland

gorilla is the smallest subspecies of gorilla. A male can stand full erectly 5 ft. 7 in. tall and weigh almost 400 lbs.