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Western gorillas have short gray or brown hair and tend to grow red hair on their heads.



Western gorilla

The basics

The largest of the great apes, gorillas are stocky animals with broad chests and shoulders, large humanlike hands, small eyes and hairless faces. Adult male gorillas weigh up to 390 pounds (177 kg) and can reach a height of 6 feet (1.8 m) when standing upright. Female gorillas tend to be shorter, weighing about half as much as males.

Food for thought

Gorillas are largely herbivorous (vegetarian), feeding on leaves, berries, plants, fruits, flowers, shrubs and vines, but they also enjoy termites and other insects. Occasionally, they will eat small vertebrates. Adult male gorillas eat about 45 pounds (20 kg) of food per day.

Communication

Gorillas communicate with vocalizations (grunts, barks and roars), gestures (chest slapping), body postures and facial expressions. Gorillas move low to the ground and approach from the side when being submissive.

Gorillas are usually quiet. Adults grumble softly and babies whimper, but angry males have a loud roar.



A gorilla's arms are longer than its legs.

Gorillas tend to walk on all fours, with feet flat on the ground and upper body supported on the knuckles. This is called **knuckle walking**.

SOURCES: *World Book Encyclopedia*, World Book Inc.; <https://www.britannica.com>; <https://en.wikipedia.org>; <http://www.sciencekids.co.nz>; <http://animalstime.com>; <http://nationalzoo.si.edu>; <http://www.berggorilla.org>; <https://www.worldwildlife.org>

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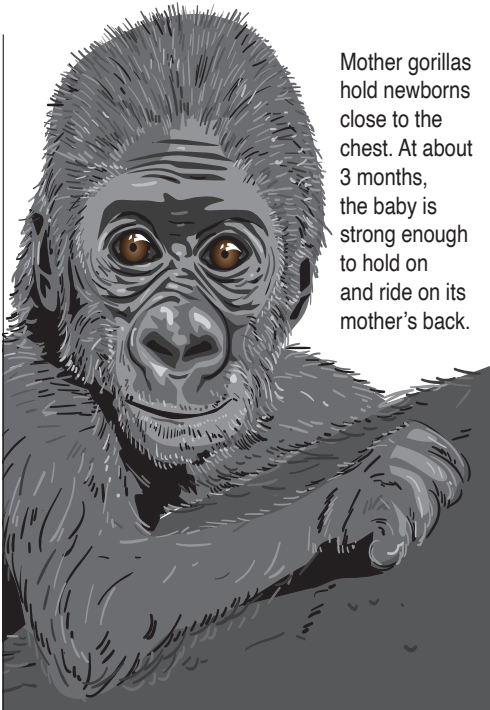
GORILLAS

These shy, smart apes managed to hide from most of the world until they were discovered by Europeans in the 1840s. Today, gorillas are critically endangered, largely due to habitat loss and commercial hunting. Humans are the gorilla's only predator.

Eastern gorillas are the larger species and have longer, darker fur.



Eastern gorilla



Mother gorillas hold newborns close to the chest. At about 3 months, the baby is strong enough to hold on and ride on its mother's back.

Growing up gorilla

Female gorillas mate at about 8 years old; males, at about 12 years old.

The gestation period of a female gorilla is about 9 months. Mothers usually give birth to one baby, but twins do happen. A baby gorilla starts to crawl around 2 months and walks at 5 to 9 months. When born, infant gorillas are smaller than human infants. Babies ride "piggyback" until about 3 years old. The youngsters stay with their mothers for three to four years.

Young male gorillas usually leave their family group when they are 11 or 12 years old. Most males have their own family group by the age of 15.

Forest families

Gorillas are ground-dwelling and live in groups of six to 30. Called a **band** or a **troop**, each group is dominated by an older male called a **silverback**. Gorillas forage for food in the mornings and evenings. The afternoon is spent sleeping, playing or grooming. At night, gorillas sleep in nests made of leaves and branches. They never sleep in the same nest twice.

Facing extinction

Gorillas face an uncertain future. It is estimated that there are only 125,000 western gorillas and 3,000 eastern gorillas left in the wild.

The number of mountain gorillas has improved over the past decade — from about 700 to more than 1,000. These apes live high in the mountains in two protected parks in Africa.

The most endangered great ape in Africa is the Cross River gorilla. There are only 200 to 300 of these gorillas left in the world. They are usually found at the border between Nigeria and Cameroon.

The Ebola virus killed about 90% of western lowland gorillas in the Congo and Gabon.

Where in the world?

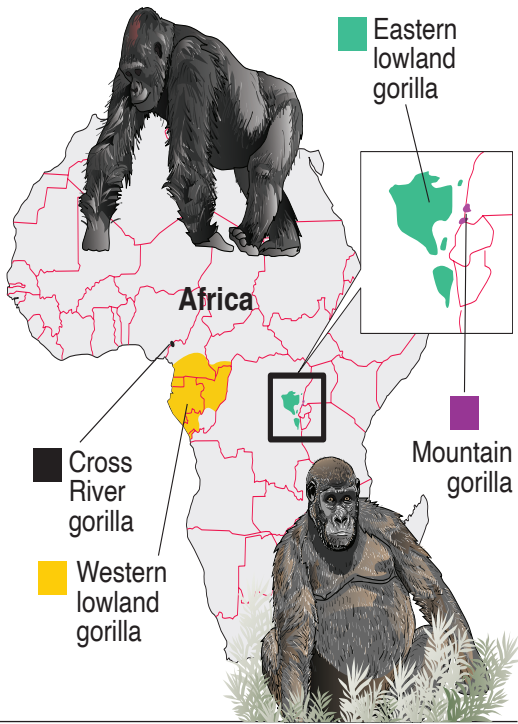
There are two main species of gorilla, the **eastern lowland** and **western lowland**.

Eastern gorillas live in the tropical forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and along the borders of Uganda and Rwanda.

Mountain gorillas are a subspecies of eastern gorillas.

Western gorillas live in the forests of Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Angola and Nigeria.

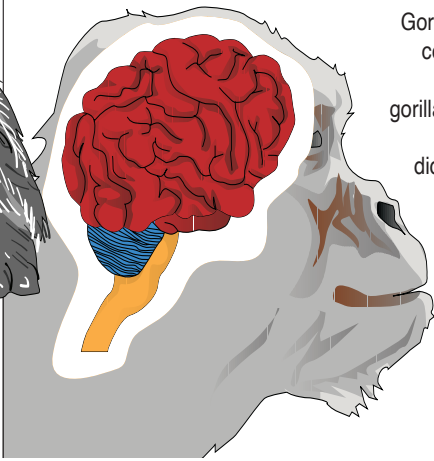
Cross River gorillas are a subspecies of the western gorilla.



How smart are they?

Gorillas are among the most intelligent animals. In captivity, they have been taught to use tools and sign language. Compared to chimpanzees, gorillas are calm and patient but less outgoing, less curious and less eager to perform tricks.

Scientists disagree on whether gorillas are conscious of their own identity or not.



Gorillas seem to need companionship and attention. The first gorillas kept in captivity were isolated and did not live long. It is possible that they died of loneliness.

True hands

True hands are found among many primates. True hands have opposable thumbs that are capable of touching the fingers and palm. It is this movement that allows us to grab, pick up and delicately manipulate objects.



Human



Gorilla

Did you know?

Gorillas live for about 35 years in the wild and 50 years in captivity.

Gorillas don't need to drink water. They get all the moisture they need from food and morning dew.

Gorillas have individual personalities and have been observed displaying emotions.

Gorillas don't have the same facial muscles as humans, so they can't smile.

Some fruit trees that have traditionally depended on gorillas for seed dispersal have become very rare.

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