

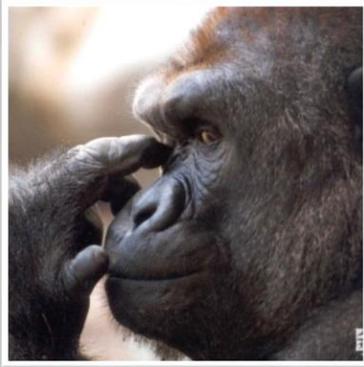
Western Lowland Gorilla

Scientific Name: *Gorilla gorilla gorilla*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Primates

Family: Hominidae



Western lowland gorillas are the largest of the great apes. They are sexually dimorphic with males weighing on average 374 pounds while females weighing on average 154. Adult males are called silverbacks due to a streak of silver hair that runs the length of their back from their shoulders to rump. Adult males also have a prominent sagittal crest, a large protrusion on the top of their head which is made of the skull, connective jaw muscles and fatty tissue. Gorillas have dark brown to black hair and black skin, with bare faces, hands, feet and chests. The population is estimated at 130,000, although it is declining due to human induced habitat loss and degradation, disease and hunting for the bushmeat trade.

Range

Western lowland gorillas are found in Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Angola, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Habitat

The western lowland gorilla inhabits lowland tropical forests and swamp forests.

Gestation

Gestation in the western lowland gorilla lasts about 8.5 months (on average 256 days).

Offspring

Western lowland gorillas give birth to one offspring at a time, though rare instances of twinning have occurred.

Behavior

Although western lowland gorillas are primarily terrestrial, like other primates they are capable of climbing. Surface locomotion is quadrupedal, with the soles of the feet and the middle phalanges of the fingers placed on the ground during locomotion. Gorillas are social, living in groups. When two groups meet they may ignore each other, temporarily associate, or express hostility. Groups can range from 2 to 30 in number and are commonly composed of an adult male, several adult females and their immature offspring. Males who are unable to acquire females will either form all male groups, referred to as bachelor groups, or will live alone. Gorillas communicate through a combination of vocalizations (including grunts, rumbles, whimpers, whines, and play chuckles), gestures and body posturing.

Reproduction

There is no evidence of a breeding season for western lowland gorillas, and females give birth once every 3½ to 4½ years unless the infant dies. The estrous cycle lasts 26 days, with estrus being 1 to 3 days. Physiologic sexual maturity is 8 years for females and 10 for males, although breeding does not usually occur until 10 in females and 15 in males. Females will often give birth to only 2-3 offspring in her lifetime.

Wild Diet

In the wild gorillas have a diverse diet of 180 species of plants. From these plants gorillas will consume bark, fruit, flowers, herbs, leaves, pith, roots, seeds, shoots and stems. In addition, wild gorillas have been observed to consume ants and termites.