

GORILLA, WESTERN LOWLAND

RANGE:

Gorillas inhabit three small separate regions of Africa. Western lowland gorillas are found in west central Africa between the Congo and Niger rivers. Eastern lowland gorillas are found in the lowlands of eastern Zaire surrounding the Virunga Volcanoes. Mountain gorillas are found at high altitudes on mountain forests in the chain of the Virunga volcanoes.

HABITAT:

Western and Eastern lowland gorillas live in lowland rainforest areas, and will venture into forest clearing wetland areas called "bais". Mountain gorillas are found in cooler cloud forests at high altitudes.

SIZE:

Males: average height -about 5 ½ feet. Average weight – about 400 pounds

Females: average height - about 4 ½ feet. Average weight - about 200 pounds.

LIFE EXPECTANCY:

Zoo: 25 - 35 years

Wild: possibly into their 30s

DIET:

Wild: mainly vegetation – known to eat about 200 different species of plants –leaves, stems, fruit, flowers, shoots, bulbs.

Zoo: a variety including kale, celery, lettuce, apples, melon, corn, sweet potatoes, bananas, primate biscuits, seeds, nuts, raisins

REPRODUCTION:

Females reach sexual maturity at 7-8 years of age, but normally will not breed until several years later. Males reach sexual maturity about 11-13 years, but normally do not father offspring until they reach silverback status and have a family group of their own (about 15-20 yrs of age).

Gestation: 8 ½ months. Baby gorillas weigh an average of 4 pounds. Newborns are basically helpless, but can cling to the mother. Development is rapid. Females care for young for several years, and will not mate while nursing – a period of 2-4 yrs.

BEHAVIOR:

Gorillas live in family groups of anywhere from 2-20 individuals. The silverback is the dominant, mature male. He makes decisions concerning where and when to eat and sleep, and protects the family from danger. He has the reproductive privileges with the adult females. Young adult males are called blackbacks, and will leave their birth group to eventually start a family group of their own. Non-related adult females are part of gorilla groups. Females leave their birth group at puberty and establish new bonds elsewhere. Youngsters and infants round out the family group.

Gorillas spend much time each day finding and eating food. They often take time to rest in the afternoon, before they continue looking for food. At night they will stop and build nests on the ground or in trees.

Gorillas communicate with each other through a wide variety of sounds, facial expressions, gestures and scents. Generally they lead a very peaceful existence.

theZOO
LOUISVILLE



Photo by Carol Weerts, Saint Louis Zoo

Order:	Primates
Family:	Pongidae
Genus:	Gorilla
Species:	gorilla
Subspecies:	gorilla

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POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Gorillas normally walk on all fours with the front knuckles of their hands curled under to support their weight (knucklewalking). Their thumbs and big toes are opposable.
- Gorillas can be identified individually by their unique noseprints (the shape of the nostrils and the pattern of crinkles on the bridges of their noses).
- Gorillas have a pot-bellied appearance. They have a huge abdomen to accommodate the large intestines necessary to digest all the bulky, fibrous food they eat. An adult may eat 40 – 50 pounds of food per day.
- The high, bony ridge on top of the gorilla skull is called the sagittal crest. The powerful jaw muscles attach to this area. It is quite prominent on the males.

STATUS:

All 3 subspecies are endangered. Recent data show the number of Western lowland gorillas to be about 100,000, Eastern lowland gorillas about 10,500, and mountain gorillas about 850.

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