

# WESTERN LOWLAND GORILLA

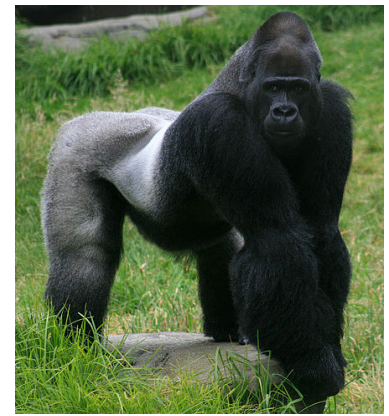
PRIMATA

Family: Pongidae

Genus: *Gorilla*

Species: *gorilla*

Subspecies: *gorilla*



**Range:** Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea

**Habitat:** tropical secondary forest

**Niche:** diurnal, terrestrial, herbivorous

**Wild diet:** leaves, stems & insects

**Zoo diet:** fruits, vegetables, cottage cheese, whole wheat bread, cooked rice

**Life Span:** (Wild) 35 yrs

(Captivity) 50 yrs

**Sexual dimorphism:** M larger than F, canines and sagittal crest is larger in M

**Location in SF Zoo:** Gorilla World

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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Largest of all living primates with very long arms that are longer than the legs and a short, bulky body with a wide chest. The elongated arms indicate a tree-dwelling ancestry even though gorillas are now primarily terrestrial. They have larger muscles in their arms than in their legs, primarily due to using their arms for bending and gathering foliage and for defense. Gorillas' stomachs are larger than their chests due to their enlarged intestines, which digest the bulky fibrous vegetation they consume. Gorillas' have opposable thumbs and an opposable big toe. The big toe less widely spread from the other toes than is usual in apes. Gorillas are able to grasp object with both their hands and their feet enabling them to grasp and manipulate objects. They have a bulging forehead which functions primarily to protect the eyes.

Mature adult males are referred to as "Silverbacks" arise from the silvery-white saddle that extends from mid back to rump and along thighs. This coloration does not appear until 12-14 years. A sagittal crest develops in both sexes but males' is much larger. The sagittal crest supports the large temporal muscles needed to grind coarse vegetation.

Dental formula:  $I2/2 - C1/1 - P2/2 - M3/3 \times 2 = 32$  with 20 baby teeth

<b>Wt:</b>	M 400-600 lbs
	F 155-200
<b>HRL:</b>	M 5.75 ft
	F 4.6
<b>TL:</b>	None

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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Critically endangered; CITES Appendix 1. Gorillas face three grave threats: hunting to supply bushmeat to urban markets and the souvenir trade; habitat destruction through logging, mining, and slash-and-burn agriculture; and devastating infectious diseases. The gorilla's numbers have declined by more than 60% over the last 20 to 25 years. The ebola virus is a major threat in areas where the majority of western lowland gorillas live and has the potential to eliminate the largest remaining populations of western lowland gorillas.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Gorillas communicate with each other using many complicated sounds and gestures. They use at least 25 recognized vocalizations, including grunts, roars, growls, whines, chuckles, hooting, and high-pitched barks. Gestures include chest-beating that may be self-asserting, threat, challenge or all three rolled into one.

Gorillas live in stable groups of 6-7 individuals, including one silverback, a few unrelated females, and their young. When females mature, they go off and join or form another band, where some sons of the silverback may remain to take over the leadership of the group. Grooming is important to maintain social bonds. Female groom their offspring, one another, and the silverback; the silverback does not groom others. Each evening, females and young construct a "nest" in which they will curl up and sleep. Nests are shared by a mother and her nursing offspring. Silverback makes nest at the base of the tree.

Locomotion is quadrupedal; "knuckle-walking" allows them to use their hands for terrestrial locomotion while retaining long fingers for climbing. It may also allow small objects to be carried in the fingers while walking on all fours.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Female gorillas have about 3-4 babies in their lifetime becoming pregnant for the first time at about 8 years of age. The offspring will be nursed and cared for by the mother for about the first four years of life. Silverbacks have been known to take on the role of caring for orphans that are part of their troop. The baby will hang on to the mother's front until about 6 months old when it rides on her back. Babies can't walk on their own at about 8 months of age. Babies are carried for about the first 2.5 years of life. It is believed this is to protect the young and to form a very strong bond.

Estrous polyestrous, men. 30 - 39 days	Sexual Maturity: M 7-10 yrs / 6-8 yrs
Gestation: 251 - 295 days (8-9.5 mo)	Weaning Age: 2.5 - 3 yrs
# of Mammas: 1 pair	Weight at birth: 3-4 lbs
# of Young: 1 rarely twins	

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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Gorillas each have a unique nose print (like we have unique fingerprints).

### Sources:

updated: 9/95, 3/08, 4/14

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