

# GORILLA



## FACTS

Gorillas are gentle giants and display many human-like behaviors and emotions, such as laughter and sadness. In fact, gorillas share 98.3% of their genetic code with humans, making them our closest cousins after chimpanzees and bonobos. The largest of the great apes, gorillas are stocky animals with broad chests and shoulders, large, human-like hands, and small eyes set into hairless faces. The two gorilla species live in equatorial Africa, separated by about 560 miles of Congo Basin forest. Each has a lowland and upland subspecies. Gorillas live in family groups of usually five to 10, but sometimes two to more than 50, led by a dominant adult male—or silverback—who holds his position for years.

## WHY THEY MATTER

Gorillas are mainly vegetarian and spend almost half of the day feeding on stems, bamboo shoots, and a variety of fruits, supplemented with bark and invertebrates. Gorillas play a key role in maintaining the biodiversity of their forest homes by spreading the seeds of the trees they eat and by opening up gaps in the trees as they move around, letting in light and helping sun-loving plants grow.

## THREATS

Like humans, gorillas reproduce slowly, giving birth to only one baby at a time and then raising that infant for several years before giving birth again. This slow reproduction rate makes gorillas especially vulnerable to any population declines.

Habitat destruction is a problem across their central African range. Gorillas are also killed for the bushmeat trade, or accidentally killed or maimed by iron snares that are set in the forests in search for other bushmeat species such as pigs (red river hog). That trade has helped spread the Ebola virus, which is deadly to both gorillas and humans. Efforts to protect gorillas are often hampered by weak law enforcement, lack of rule of law, and civil unrest in many places where gorillas live.

## PROTECTION

Because poaching is a problem across central Africa, WWF works with TRAFFIC, the world's largest wildlife trade monitoring network, and the World Conservation Union to monitor the illegal trade of gorillas and other great apes. WWF also advocates for nations to more effectively enforce wildlife laws and raises awareness in local villages of the dangers of eating bushmeat. In addition, WWF has trained local wildlife authorities in modern methods of antipoaching and gorilla monitoring and provided equipment and provisions for antipoaching teams in several nations.

All information comes directly from the World Wildlife Fund Website

