

Western Lowland Gorillas



The western lowland gorilla is the most numerous and widespread of all gorilla subspecies. Populations can be found in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea as well as in large areas in Gabon and the Republic of Congo. The exact number of western lowland gorillas is not known because they inhabit some of the most dense and remote rainforests in Africa. Significant populations still exist, including in isolated swamps and the remote swampy forests of the Republic of Congo.

Western lowland gorillas can be distinguished from other gorilla subspecies by their slightly smaller size, their brown-grey coats and auburn chests. They also have wider skulls with more pronounced brow ridges and smaller ears. Large numbers have not protected the western lowland gorilla from decline. Because of poaching and disease, the gorilla's numbers have declined by more than 60% over the last 20 to 25 years. Even if all of the threats to western lowland gorillas were removed, scientists calculate that the population would require some 75 years to recover.

New Protection for Elephant and Gorilla Habitats

A new designation by the Republic of Congo provides vital habitat to endangered species and preserves nature's value for surrounding communities.

POACHING

The hunting and killing of gorillas is illegal but still the animals are killed for bushmeat or during the capture of baby gorillas for pets. In Northeast Congo, about 5% of western lowland gorillas in that region are killed each year. Timber and other companies have opened areas of once remote forest, facilitating poaching and the bushmeat trade. Poaching also carries dangers for humans as it is thought that Ebola may be spread through the butchering and handling of gorilla and other primate meat.

DISEASE

Central Africa is home to not only gorillas, but also the deadly Ebola virus. Ebola has caused a number of massive gorilla and chimpanzee die-offs in the remote forests at the heart of the primates' ranges. Some scientists estimate that it has killed about one third of the wild gorilla population, mostly western lowland gorillas. The toll has been even greater in some areas, such as the Minkébé Forest—once considered one of

the most important populations—where the virus may have killed more than 90% of the region’s gorillas and chimpanzees.

WHAT WWF IS DOING



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WWF and its partners are working to establish a network of protected areas across the Congo Basin and are promoting development of logging and mining industries that are well managed both ecologically and socially.

GORILLAS OF DZANGA-SANGHA

One of the few places that humans can see western lowland gorillas in the wild is the Dzanga-Sangha Protected Areas in the Central African Republic. These opportunities for gorilla viewing are so rare, in part, because it takes three or more years of careful and patient gorilla tracking and following to habituate the animals to the presence of humans.

“The follow and habituation of gorillas in Dzanga-Sangha would never have been possible without the extensive knowledge of the BaAka trackers, which are the real backbone of our program,” says Chloe Cippoletta, who led the Dzanga-Sangha habituation field staff for years.

WWF has long worked with local BaAka trackers as part of the habituation program, capitalizing on their knowledge of their forest homeland and their ability to locate the gorillas even when traces of the animals are elusive. Tourism dollars are a key part of forest and gorilla protection in this region. Forty percent of the money from park entry fees at Dzanga Sangha, for example, is dedicated to programs in the local community that promote rural development and sustainable use of natural resources.

