

GREAT APES

FACTS ABOUT GREAT APES

- Great apes are comprised of four general species: gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees, and bonobos.
- Gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos are found throughout central Sub-Saharan Africa, while orangutans are found in either Malaysia or Indonesia.
- Mountain gorillas live in Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Lowland gorillas live in the forests of central and western Africa in Angola, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Although the populations of great apes have been in constant decline, mountain gorilla population has now risen above 1,000 or 25% since 2010, even though they are still one of the most endangered species. It is a rare success story, mostly due to sustained and well-funded conservation efforts. Tourism also contributes to this effort as well. Tourists pay up to \$1,500 an hour to watch gorillas, and the funding pays for rangers that must constantly follow and protect mountain gorillas against poachers.
- Conversely, the eastern lowland gorillas have been declining the fastest: 77% of its overall population has been lost in the last two decades.
- Also in the last century, the population of chimpanzees has declined severely, from two million to around 300,000 left; the Bornean orangutan, native to the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia, has lost over half of its population - 150,000 - since 1999; bonobos are anticipated to decline by 50% over the course of the next few decades.
- The size of these animals differs greatly: the eastern lowland gorilla, found in the eastern mountains of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is a towering six feet when fully upright and weighs nearly 460 pounds, while the bonobo, also found in the central regions of the DRC, stands just over 3½ feet tall and weighs 85 pounds.
- Great apes are the animals with the closest DNA to humans; they also share another similarity with us: our altruism. Bonobos, to take one species, has been observed to share its food with 'strangers' outside of their immediate group to ensure that every animal has enough to eat.
- Although many animals have been observed to use tools, great apes have shown the greatest intelligence in their use of the tools. Most notably, great apes have been known to gather tools and save them for a future task, demonstrating cognitive abilities much like humans.



WHY WE NEED TO PROTECT GREAT APES

Role in the Ecosystem: Great apes are especially important in helping spread the seeds of trees in the forests they inhabit. In some areas, the survival of the ecosystem is wholly dependent on the role that apes play in spreading seeds through their fecal matter. Without great apes, new trees could not grow.

Ecosystem Services: Great apes provide significant supporting services to the spread and distribution of seeds that their ecosystem depends on. In Gabon, the western lowland gorilla and central chimpanzee had a 68% germination rate for the seeds of vital tree species.

Economic Contribution: When conducted in a sustainable and eco-friendly way, great ape tourism can be an important source of revenue for local communities. Rwanda's travel and tourism industry in 2016-2017 contributed over \$400 million to the national economy – 10 percent of which is returned to local communities. Revenue from ecotourism differs greatly from country to country. At an orangutan rehabilitation center in Malaysia, the site brought in annual revenue of \$243,000, which helped to protect the orangutans and their habitat.

THREATS TO GREAT APES

Habitat Loss: Since 1900, great apes have lost around 50% of their habitat globally. The most prevalent reasons for habitat destruction include the expansion of agriculture, logging, and urban development. The degradation affects the survival of great apes by removing both their food supply and shelter.

Palm oil: The production and consumption of palm oil in a wide range of products - from food to beauty products - and is the main driver of deforestation in the orangutan's habitat. If consumer trends for palm oil are not reversed soon, a substantial amount of the species' habitat will be lost in the coming years.

Competition for Resources: As humans continue to encroach on the habitat of great apes, resource contention will harm both them and us. This increased contact and interaction threaten the great apes through greater susceptibility to disease, restrictions on their dietary habits, and even the distribution of the animals themselves.

Climate Change: The greatest threats from climate change are prolonged droughts and decreased rainfall that limits the available supply of food, along with an increased likelihood of forest fires as a result of increased temperatures.

Illegal Trade and Captivity: Over the last decade, close to 1,000 orangutans, most in their infancy, were illegally hunted and sold. Great apes are either killed for their bushmeat, a valuable commodity on the black market, or they are captured and sold for personal captivity in zoos and homes around the world.



HOW TO HELP

Avoid Palm Oil: The presence of palm oil in everyday products - from the food we eat to the products we use for skincare - is widespread and is one, if not the main driver of habitat destruction for bonobos and orangutans. As consumers, one of the first steps we can take is to refuse to buy products that contain palm oil, thereby reducing the continued demand. Additionally, pressure must be put on companies that use palm oil to adopt sustainable and ecological-friendly practices for palm oil cultivation.

Promote Sustainable Forestry: The population growth of humans does not mean that the survival of great apes is automatically threatened. Sustainable forestry can lead to both the protection of great apes and further economic development. A good starting point for promoting sustainable development can be when you commit to purchasing paper and wood products that have been certified as sustainable by a reputable entity. To learn more about the different types of [eco-labeling](#), click [here](#).

Help End Plastic Pollution by learning about the actions you can do with our [Plastic Pollution Primer and Action toolkit](#).

Check out all of Earth Day Network's [resources](#) to help Protect our Species.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ARTICLES/BLOGS/READINGS

Is There Hope for These Great Apes? - *The New York Times*

<https://nyti.ms/2XgOPYs>

But the mountain gorillas are in fact doing better, according to the announcement from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. It bases its decisions on information gathered from scientists and conservation experts. The gorillas' population has been increasing for about 30 years. And it has taken a tremendous amount of struggle and work to get this far.

VIDEOS

Orangutans are the only great apes—besides humans—to ‘talk’ about the past - *Science Magazine*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPsY9ExoEs4>

Studies into the evolution of language are beginning to uncover the ability of this species of great ape to communicate about the past.

STORYTELLING

How Smart Are Orangutans? *Lu Gao*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFzqqaBA9wQ>

Along with humans, orangutans belong to the Hominidae family tree, which stretches back 14 million years. But it's not just their striking red hair that makes orangutans unique among our great ape cousins. Lu Gao shares some amazing facts about these incredibly intelligent great apes from Asia.

OTHERS WORKING ON THIS ISSUE

Center for Great Apes

<http://www.centerforgreatapes.org/>

The Center for Great Apes' mission is to provide a permanent sanctuary for orangutans and chimpanzees who have been rescued or retired from the entertainment industry, from research, or from the exotic pet trade; to educate the public about captive great apes and the threats to conservation of great apes in the wild; and to advocate for the end of the use of great apes as entertainers, research subjects, and pets.

REPORTS

Illicit Financial Flows and the Illegal Trade in Great Apes - *Global Financial Integrity*

<http://bit.ly/2Vg2H1D>

Researchers, investigators, and other experts have generally succeeded in establishing intelligence on this trading pattern, but they have not yet made similar progress identifying the values, payments, and financial transfer mechanisms involved. Addressing this gap, as well as overcoming a larger issue of political will to tackle the illegal great ape trade compared to some other wildlife crimes, should greatly benefit the larger campaigns against transnational crime and money laundering and against the destruction of these species.