

Endangered Wildlife

Western Lowland Gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*)



- The Western Lowland Gorilla is the most widespread and numerous of the four species of gorilla. They can be distinguished from other gorilla subspecies by their slightly smaller size, their brown-grey coats and auburn chests.
- When standing on two feet, they measure from 1.2 to 1.7 metres, and can weigh up to 200 kilograms.
- Gorillas are mainly herbivorous (plant eating) and their staple foods are pith (found under the skin of citrus fruit), shoots and leaves. They also eat many species of fruit.
- This large primate is native to the rainforests of central Africa, specifically in lowland forest and swamp forest from sea level to about 1,600 metres.
- It is difficult to estimate numbers, as they are found in some of Africa's densest and most remote rainforests. However, the total population is thought to be around 100,000, with this number decreasing.
- The main threats to these gorillas are commercial hunting and disease. Both these threats are currently getting worse. They are hunted mainly for food, as pets (orphaned babies) and for body parts used in traditional medicine and as magical charms.
- Despite national and international laws that make the hunting and capture of gorillas illegal, law enforcement is weak and insufficient. In addition, the Ebola virus has killed many gorillas. Some scientists estimate up to a third of central African gorillas have died from the disease, mainly the Western Lowland Gorillas.



Western Lowland Gorilla range



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- Habitat destruction is another factor contributing to the decreasing population. Large areas of rainforest in the gorilla's habitat, located in the Congo Basin, have been destroyed or leased to foreign logging companies.
- The gorilla's numbers have declined by more than 60 per cent in the last 20 to 25 years because of poaching and disease.
- Even if all the threats to Western Lowland Gorillas were removed, scientists calculate the population would require 75 years to recover.
- The Western Lowland Gorilla is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

What is being done?

Australian zoos participating in International Breeding Programs to save the Western Lowland Gorilla are Taronga Zoo, Melbourne Zoo, Werribee Zoo and Mogo Zoo. Kimya, a 10-year-old female, gave birth at Melbourne Zoo in March 2015, marking the first arrival for the species there in 15 years.

