

**Conservation Status: Critically Endangered**

# The Gorilla



*St Aiden's Home School, South Africa*

Cover Picture: Female Gorilla with young, in captivity at the Bronx Zoo.;License : GNUFD

**A Gorilla is an ape**, the biggest member of the primate order. It lives in Africa. The Gorillas' habitats (living places) are being wiped out by forest cutting for wood. Gorillas will not usually attack but if provoked become very aggressive. One Case of Gorilla Attack is when an 8 foot tall gorilla killed three children.

There are several (sub-) species of gorilla:

- Western Lowland Gorilla
- Cross River Gorilla
- Mountain Gorilla
- Eastern Lowland Gorilla

Gorillas are the biggest primates. They can become very heavy, and are very strong. They have black skin and fur. Male gorillas' fur becomes silver/grey on their backs as they become older. Because of that older males are called **silverbacks**.



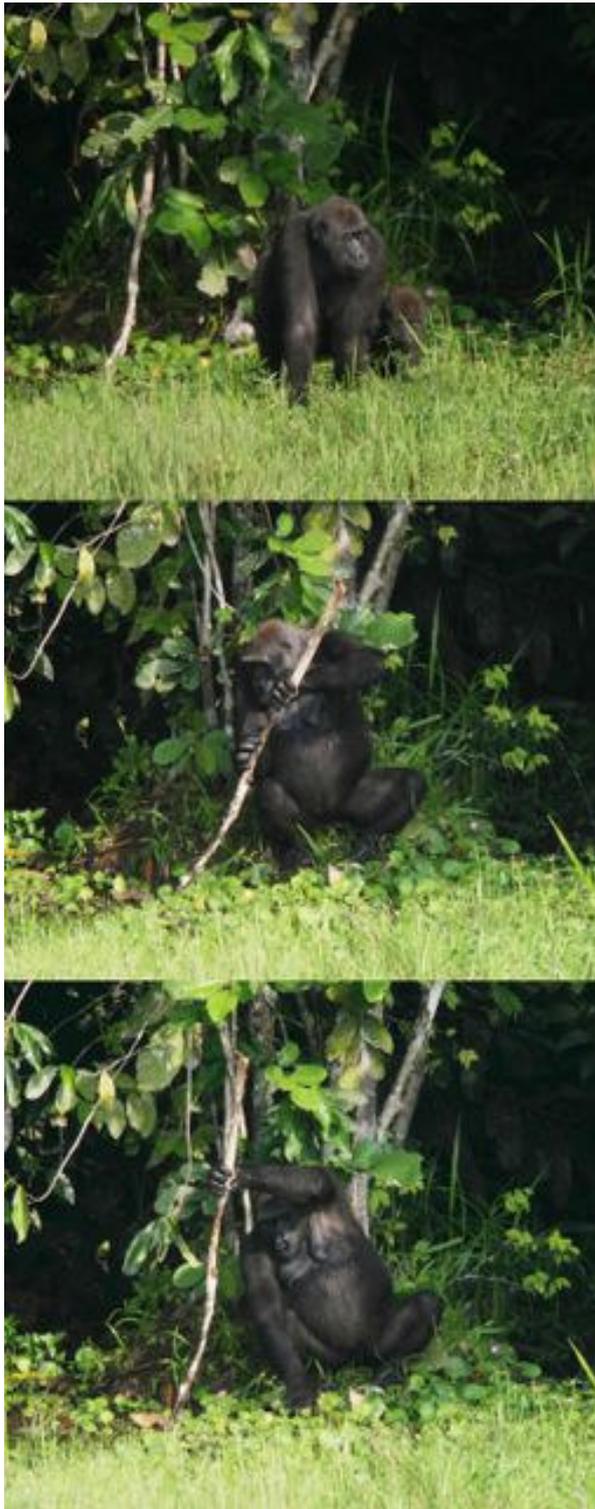
Gorillas are omnivores, eating fruits, leaves, shoots, and sometimes insects which make up only 1–2% of their diet.

Almost all gorillas share the same blood type (B)! and, like humans, have individual finger prints



Fatty A male silverback Gorilla. Taken at Disney's Animal Kingdom by Raul654 on January 16, 2005.;License : GNUFD

All species of gorilla are endangered, and have been subject to intense poaching for a long time. Threats to gorilla survival include habitat destruction and the bush meat trade. In 2004 a population of several hundred gorillas in the Odzala National Park, Republic of Congo was essentially wiped out by the Ebola virus.



Gorillas are closely related to humans and are considered highly intelligent. A few individuals in captivity, such as Koko, have been taught a subset of sign language.

### **Tool use**

The following observations were made by a team led by Thomas Breuer of the Wildlife Conservation Society in September 2005. Gorillas are now known to use tools in the wild.

A second female was seen using a tree stump as a bridge and also as a support whilst fishing in the swamp. This means that all of the great apes are now known to use tools

Female Efi Using Trunk as a Stabilizer during Food Processing at Mbeli Bai

The top photo shows the intact trunk shortly before Efi manipulated it (visible to the left of female Fulani). The trunk was then detached by female Efi with both hands (middle), pushed into the ground, and used as a stabilizing stick while

dredging aquatic herbs towards her with her other hand (bottom).

From: Breuer T, Ndoundou-Hockemba M, Fishlock V (2005) First Observation of Tool Use in Wild Gorillas. PLoS Biol 3(11): e380



Gorilla Place: Zoo Aquarium de Madrid Photographer:; Manuel Gonzalez Olachea y Franco Licensed : Creative Commons

A **silverback** is an adult male gorilla, typically more than 12 years of age and named for the distinctive patch of silver hair on his back.

A silverback gorilla has large canine teeth that come with maturity. Black backs are reproductively mature males of up to 11 years of age.

Silverbacks are the strong, dominant troop leaders.

Each typically leads a troop of 5 to 30 gorillas and is the centre of the troop's attention, making all the decisions,

mediating conflicts, determining the movements of the group, leading the others to feeding sites and taking responsibility for the safety and well-being of the troop.

Males will slowly begin to leave their original troop when they are about 11 years old, travelling alone or with a group of other males for 2–5 years before being able to attract females to form a new group and start breeding.

While baby and toddler gorillas normally stay with their mother for 3–4 years, silverbacks will care for weaned young orphans, though never to the extent of carrying the little gorillas.

If threatened or challenged by a younger or even by an outsider male, a silverback will scream, beat his chest, break branches, bare his teeth, and then charge forward.

Sometimes a younger male in the group can take over leadership from an old male.

If the leader is killed by disease, accident, fighting or poachers, the group will split up, as the animals disperse to look for a new protective male.

Very occasionally, a group might be taken over completely by another male.

There is a strong risk that the new male may kill the infants of the dead silverback.

## Where & How Gorillas Live



Gorillas live in the (rain)forests in central Africa. They mostly live on the ground, but they can also climb. When on the ground, they walk on their feet and finger knuckles. They are mostly herbivores, and eat leaves and fruit.

After a pregnancy of 8½ - 9 months the female gives birth to usually one baby. It stays with its mother for 3-4 years. Gorillas can live for up to 50 years.

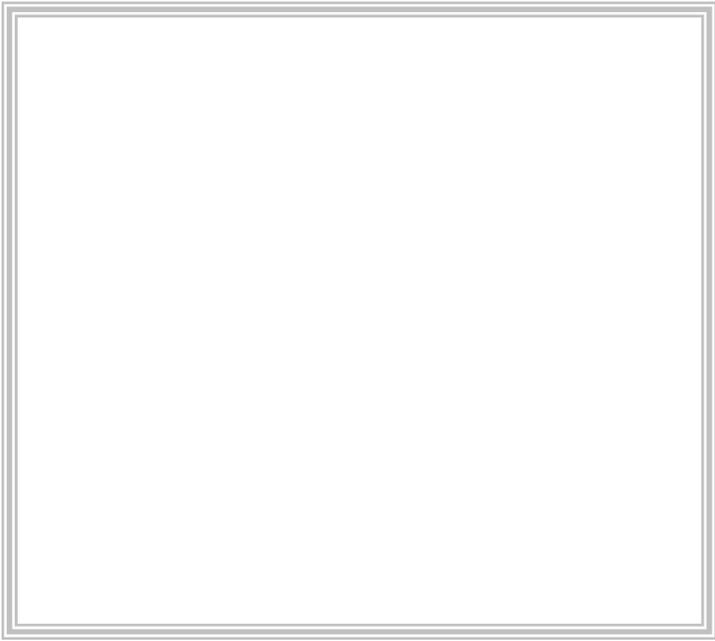
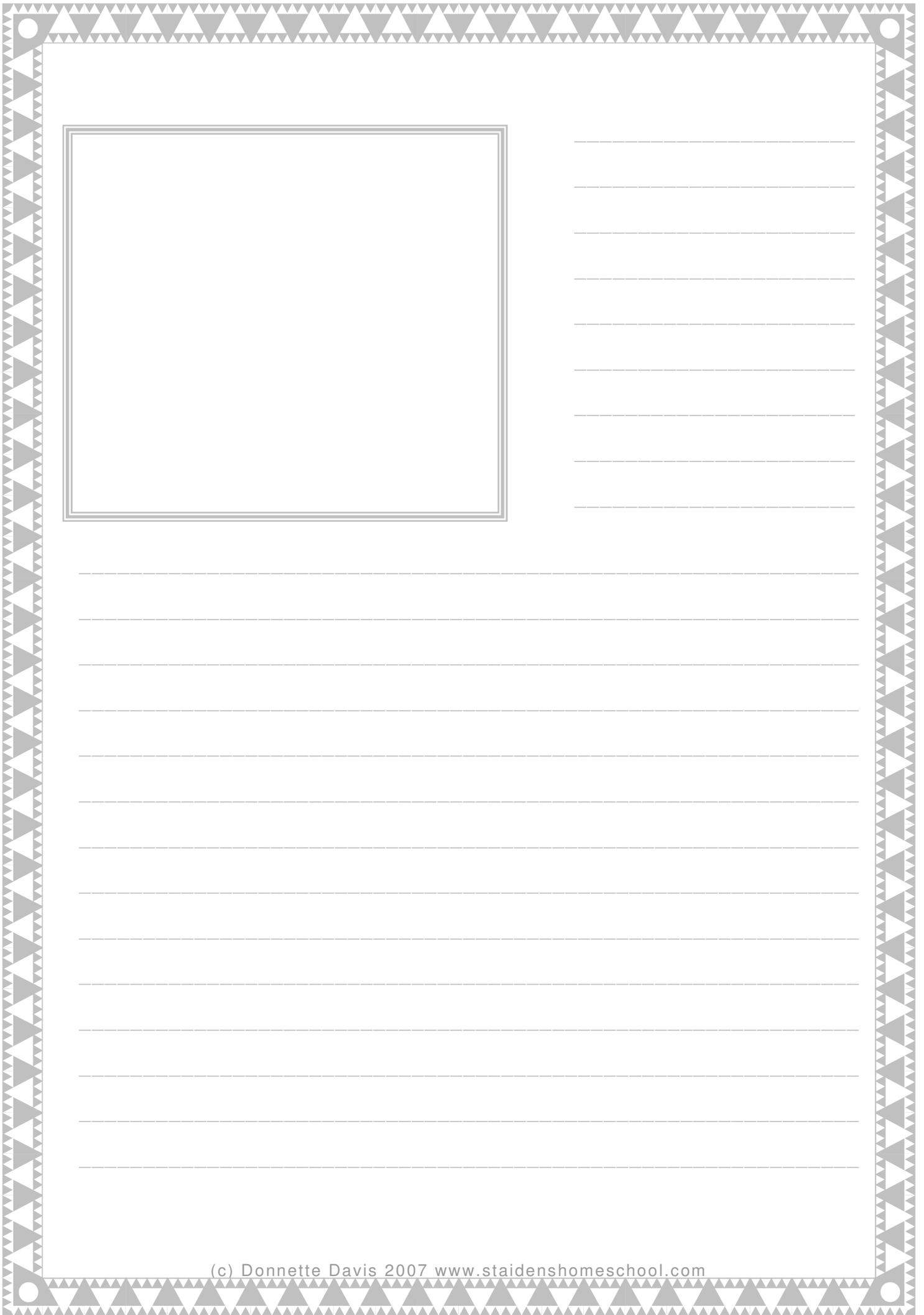


Parc National des Volcans, Rwanda. August 4, 2005. Gorilla Mother and Baby - for an infant gorilla, Mama is food, transport, and playground. Credit: by Sarel Kromer.

The Mountain Gorilla is diurnal, most active between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Many of these hours are spent eating, as large quantities of food are needed to sustain its massive bulk. It searches for food in early morning, rests during the late morning and around midday, and in the afternoon it searches again before resting at night. Each gorilla builds a nest from surrounding vegetation to sleep in, constructing a new one every evening.

Only infants sleep in the same nest as their mothers. They leave their sleeping sites when the sun rises at around 6 am, except when it is cold and overcast; then they often stay longer in their nests.

<b>DINURAL ANIMALS</b>	<b>NOCTURNAL ANIMALS</b>



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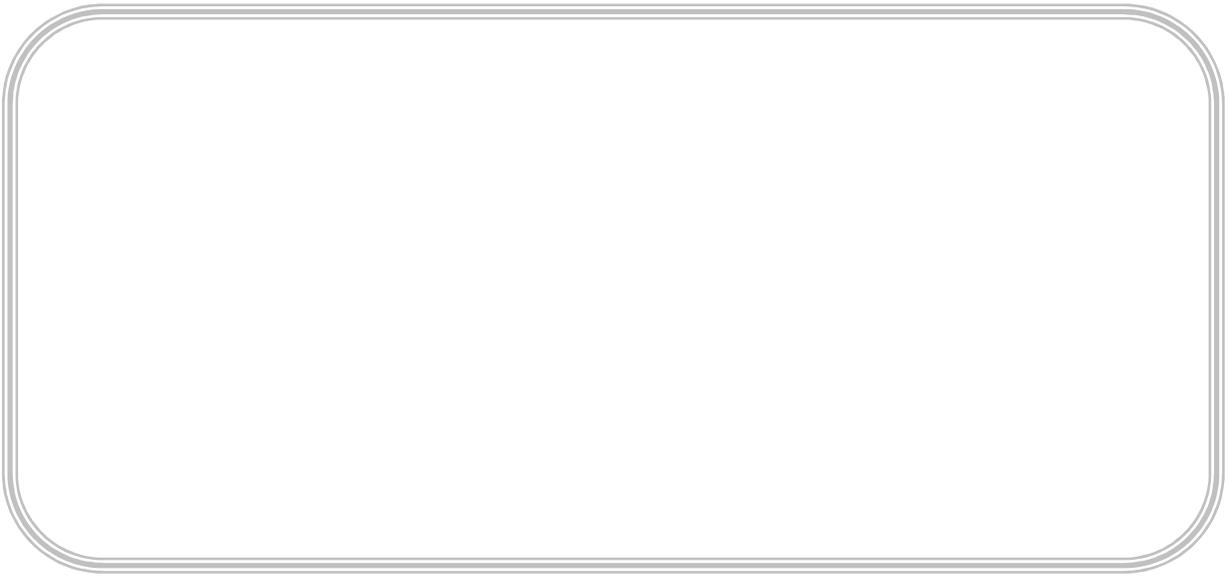
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- National Geographic
- Discovery School
- S A Tourism Board
- Wikipedia
- Simple Wikipedia
- South African Wildlife Fund
- African Wildlife Federation
- Some information African Fauna.com

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