THE CHIMPANZEE

OUR FOREST KIN
The alpha male chimp was sitting in the forest path ahead, staring into the distance in a melancholy way as if contemplating life’s challenges, chin resting on balled fist. My party and I were waiting it out, aware that it was us who were intruding on his territory and home. He knew we were waiting, because every few minutes he would glance disdainfully our way. The rest of the troop were spread about us, a fair distance away in the forest understorey, quietly relaxing and socialising. Life was good. For now.

“He then gave a heaving sigh and swaggered towards us, gangster-like. Being first in the path, I stepped aside and into the think forest understorey, holding my breath as 50kg of muscle and sinew brushed past me. And then all hell broke loose.
“With no warning or apparent reasoning, he went charging off into the forest, screaming hysterically and attacking other troop members. Chaos ensued as the entire troop erupted into a melee of gratuitous violence. Smaller chimps were flung about by their limbs and larger members charged about like hillbillies in a barroom brawl, pant-hooting and screaming at full volume. Thirty seconds later it was all over, as the cacophony subsided into whimpers and then silence. No harm done then. My group and I were wallpaper to the drama, wary observers, ignored.

“This naked savagery was in sharp contrast to what we had witnessed the previous day. A mother was nursing a tiny infant and this same large male approached her and tried to touch the baby. The mother
slapped his hand and gave him a look that would instantly freeze boiling water. He cringed, adjusted his strategy and tried again – same result. After several attempts, she permitted a few seconds of gentle (for him) patting before nudging him aside and ambling off with her baby. The big male seemed crestfallen, confused even, as he gazed after her.

“This encounters took place in Tanzania’s Mahale Mountains National Park, and I was lucky enough to be accompanying a small party of Africa Geographic safari clients. I have encountered chimpanzees in several areas in Africa, and continue to be fascinated by them.

“The following notes, based on information provided by IUCN Red List, will provide a greater understanding as to how this magnificent creature is doing in the face of rapid population expansion of another great ape, Homo sapiens. Also read the last section if you are keen to see chimps in the wild.”

~ Simon Espley, CEO of Africa Geographic
BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Chimpanzees live in western and central African primary and secondary woodlands and forests, farmland and fallow oil palm plantations. They are the smallest of the great apes, and our closest living relative.

They live in troops averaging 35 members (the largest known troop has 150 members). Home ranges vary – one of the smallest is 6 km² at Budongo in Uganda, and one of the largest is 72 km² at Semliki, also in Uganda.

Like humans, chimpanzees are omnivorous. They are opportunistic feeders, with fruit forming half of the diet, supplemented by leaves, stems, seeds, flowers, bark, pith, honey, mushrooms, resin, eggs, and
animal prey such as insects and medium-sized mammals. They are the most carnivorous of the great apes (other than humans), and are known to form hunting parties to track down and catch species such as colobus monkeys.
Chimpanzees are proficient tool users, using sticks to extract bees, ants and termites from their nests, and stone and wooden hammers to crack nuts. They are also known to hammer tree buttress roots with sticks and their feet to communicate with other chimps.

Chimpanzees reach puberty at 7-8 years of age, and females have a 35-day reproductive cycle, commencing at 13-14 years of age, although earlier has been recorded. Chimpanzees reproduce throughout the year, and have a gestation period of 230 days. Twins are occasionally born, but the norm is a single infant, and weaning is at 4-5 years of age.

A female can give birth to as many as nine infants over her lifetime,
and remains reproductive into her late forties. Only one third of common chimpanzee progeny survive beyond infancy, whereas in contrast the infant mortality rate for bonobos is low, with 73% of offspring surviving to age six. Maximum life span is unknown, but thought to be about 50 years. Generation time is estimated to be 25 years.
Clockwise from left: 1) Chimpanzees live in western and central African primary and secondary woodlands and forests, farmland and fallow oil palm plantations © Adam Barnard; 2) A chimp grooming itself © Fi Goodall; 3) “Daydreaming” in Kibale National Park, Uganda © Mark Paul

TAXONOMY

There are two chimpanzee species – the common chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) and the bonobo or pygmy chimpanzee (*Pan paniscus*).

There are four subspecies of common chimpanzee, namely the Western chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes verus*); the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee (*P. t. ellioti*); the Central chimpanzee (*P. t. troglodytes*); and the Eastern chimpanzee (*P. t. schweinfurthii*). Chimpanzee taxonomy and genetics is an ongoing field of study.
CONSERVATION STATUS AND POPULATIONS

Chimpanzees are completely protected by national and international laws in all countries of their range, and it is, therefore, illegal to kill, capture or trade in live chimpanzees or their body parts. This legal standing however does not prevent the killing of chimpanzees throughout their ranges.

The common chimpanzee is the most abundant and widespread of the great apes (population estimate 345,000 to 470,000), and yet is classified as ‘Endangered’ on IUCN’s Red List because of high levels of poaching, infectious diseases, and loss of habitat and deterioration of habitat quality. There has been a significant population reduction in the past 20-30 years and it is suspected that this reduction will continue for the next 30-40 years.
The estimated population reduction over three generations (75 years) from 1975 to 2050 is suspected to exceed 50%. Major risk factors include the ongoing rapid growth of human populations, poaching for bushmeat and the commercial bushmeat trade, diseases that are transferable from humans to animals (such as Ebola), the extraction industries and industrial agriculture, corruption and lack of law enforcement, lack of capacity and resources, and political instability in some range states.

- Western chimpanzee (Senegal and Ghana) – 18,000 to 65,000 individuals
- Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee (Nigeria and Cameroon) – 6,000 to 9,000 individuals
- Central chimpanzee (Cameroon and DR Congo) – 140,000 individuals
- Eastern chimpanzee (Central African Republic and DR Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, western Uganda and western Tanzania, with a small, relict population in South Sudan) – 181,000 to 256,000 individuals
**Left:** “One last look” in Kibale, Uganda © Mark Paul;

**Right:** Chimpanzees live in troops averaging 35 members © Adam Barnard
The bonobo is restricted to the lowland forests of DR Congo, and has a population estimated to be a minimum of 15,000 to 20,000 individuals, although only 30% of its historic range has been surveyed. Bonobos are classified as ‘Endangered’ on IUCN’s Red List because of high levels of poaching, loss of habitat and deterioration of habitat quality and diseases that are transferable from humans to animals (such as Ebola).

In some areas, local taboos against eating bonobo meat still exist, but in others, these traditions are disintegrating due to changing cultural values and population movements. There has been a significant population reduction in the past 15-20 years and it is suspected that
this reduction will continue for the next 60 years.
MAJOR THREATS

POACHING

Poaching is the greatest threat to chimpanzees, with frequent extinction occurring in entire local chimpanzee populations. Increases in human populations, easy availability of guns and ammunition, transport system efficiency, and financial incentives for supplying urban markets with bushmeat have resulted in swathes of land in the forest zone of Africa being cleared of wildlife.

Chimpanzees are generally hunted opportunistically with snares and guns, but are sometimes targeted because they provide more meat than smaller mammals, such as duikers, and poisoned because they threaten local crops. Poaching is especially intense near mining sites and logging camps – where bushmeat is usually the main source of protein available. The explosion of these extraction industries has introduced a network of roads into what were vast and roadless forest blocks. Truck drivers provide transport logistics to what has become a lucrative bushmeat industry.

Baby chimpanzees are sometimes trafficked as pets when their parents are killed for bushmeat.
Clockwise from left: 1) Caged chimp discovered in an illegal zoo in Guinea, which was subsequently rescued; 2) Chimp and gorilla skull dealers in Bertoua, Cameroon; 3) & 4) Baby chimpanzees are sometimes trafficked as pets when their parents are killed for bushmeat (these two photos comes from two separate incidents). All photos supplied by © EAGLE Network

HABITAT LOSS AND DEGRADATION
**Subsistence/slash-and-burn agriculture**
The conversion of forest to farmland across Africa has severely reduced the availability of chimpanzee habitat. Parts of West Africa had lost up to 80% of their original forest cover by the early 2000s. Extensive subsistence farming in the Albertine Rift area (eastern DR Congo, western Rwanda and western Uganda) has destroyed much of the sub-montane forest used by chimpanzees. Central Africa is experiencing lower forest cover loss.

**Logging, mining and oil**
Timber concessions undergo removal of important food trees, and resultant habitat degradation. The disturbance factor due to logging activities is also high. Mining and drilling for oil devastate wildlife habitat, and lead to large-scale human settlement and the building of roads, railways and other infrastructure.

**Industrial agriculture**
Africa has become the new frontier for oil palm plantations, which will hit chimpanzee populations hard in coming years, because of habitat loss.

**Major transportation infrastructure**
Huge road projects, sometimes several kilometres wide, fragment chimpanzee habitat and enable human settlement in previously wilderness areas.

All of the above extraction industries result in habitat fragmentation due to the building of roads, and introduce infrastructure and channels for the trade in wildlife products. They also cause human migration and the introduction of diseases to chimpanzees.
DISEASE

Infectious diseases that are zoonotic (transferable between humans and animals), especially Ebola, are a major cause of great ape die-offs. Transmission between humans of Ebola is rapid, and humans are more mobile than apes, crossing large rivers and other barriers that apes do not cross – carrying the disease with them.

Because chimpanzees and humans are so similar, chimpanzees succumb to many diseases that afflict humans. Infectious diseases, including outbreaks of respiratory disease and anthrax, are the main cause of death in several chimpanzee populations that have been habituated to human presence.
FINAL WORD

Yes, chimpanzees are under serious pressure and facing an uncertain future, largely because of the antics of that other great ape, Homo sapiens. But there is hope, because chimpanzees are a resilient species living in vast swathes of equatorial forest in the heart of Africa.

We close with a quote that reflects chimpanzees in a different light to the above scientific notes:

“In what terms should we think of these beings, nonhuman yet
possessing so very many human-like characteristics? How should we treat them? Surely we should treat them with the same consideration and kindness as we show to other humans; and as we recognise human rights, so too should we recognise the rights of the great apes? Yes.” ~ Jane Goodall

The feet of a chimpanzee in Kibale Forest National Park, Uganda © Andrea Galli (Photographer of the Year 2018 entrant)

TREK FOR CHIMPANZEEs WITH AFRICA GEOGRAPHIC
There are a number of places in Africa to trek for chimpanzees, from the accessible highland forests of Kibale in Uganda to Rwanda’s Nyungwe, where the sheer biodiversity on offer will leave you speechless, to the remote forests of Mahale in Tanzania, where the chimps often venture onto the shores of Lake Tanganyika.

Each option has its own unique appeal and other available activities. Trekking for chimps is best woven into a larger itinerary, due to the distances and logistics involved.

*Travel in Africa is about knowing when and where to go, and with whom. A few weeks too early / late and a few kilometres off course and you could miss the greatest show on Earth. And wouldn’t that
be a pity? Search for your ideal safari here, or contact an Africa Geographic safari consultant to plan your dream vacation.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS, AFRICA GEOGRAPHIC EDITORIAL

We’re the Africa Geographic editorial team – a diverse set of editors, designers and social media natives, all united by our passion for this addictive continent.
Celebrating Africa’s Wild Babies

It was not too long ago that we featured our first incredibly adorable gallery celebrating *Africa’s Wild Babies*. After recovering from the exposure of such cuteness, we discovered that there are more “oohs” and “awws” to be had with wild babies, but now with
their mums and dads!

What better way to appreciate Africa’s wild but through the close bonds that are shared between babies and their parents – and all captured on camera by some incredibly talented photographers for you to enjoy.

So sit back and relax while you click your way through our gallery of photos taken by some of our Photographer of the Year 2016, 2017 and 2018 entrants.
A leopard's hunting technique is to either ambush its prey or to stalk it. In either instance, it tries to get as close as possible to its target. It then makes a brief and explosive charge (up to 60km/h), pouncing on its prey and dispatching it with a bite to the neck.

Read more interesting facts about leopard here.
Celebrating Africa’s Wild Babies

"An unusual instance in which a lioness brought out her only cub to a wildebeest kill at a very young age. The cub was only just able to walk very short distances and mistook this young male lion’s paw for its mother's paw, finding a bit of solace in a dangerous situation." ~ Matthew Murray
"We were on an evening game drive with our guide when we got caught by a storm. Once it had cleared, we slowly drove back to camp and as we passed by a ridge we heard a lion roar close by from behind a bush. Suddenly, a pride of around 14 lions appeared from behind a bush and moved into the sunset along the ridge, giving us this surreal Disney scene." ~ Anja Gröbel
"Don't worry mom" in Kruger National Park, South Africa © Annemarie du Plessis (Photographer of the Year 2018 Top 101)

"We were spending time with the Shingwedzi baboon troop in Kruger National Park for the first three hours after sunrise. It was beautiful to see the little ones waking up and exploring with the troop. This little guy was still very new to the rest of the troop, and always stayed close to its mother. After drinking time, he was lying on her lap, displaying an intimate and lovable bond between mom
and baby. When he stretched out to touch mom’s cheek, it was really as if he meant to say: 'Don’t worry mom.' ~ Annemarie du Plessis
Celebrating Africa’s Wild Babies

"No matter how many leopards I see in the wild, I cannot get enough of these fascinating cats. Just like I am in awe of their stealthy hunting skills and sudden bursts of power and ruthlessness, I was humbled by the tenderness with which this mother looked after her single cub. Never had I seen a leopard with such a young cub, and to be able to spend many hours with
them over three days was a true privilege. I often think about this
cub and hope that it is growing strong and beautiful – just like its
mother." ~ Pedro Ferreira do Amaral
Female hippos have a gestation period of eight months and usually have only one baby at a time. A baby hippo, or calf, weighs about 23-50 kg (50-110 lbs) when born. Hippos can be extremely aggressive and territorial, and a mother hippo won't hesitate to protect its baby. Read more about hippos and dramatic river disputes here.
A Cape fox pup pleads for food from his father in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Botswana/South Africa © Johan J. Botha (Photographer of the Year 2017 Top 101)

"I was photographing Cape fox pups playing at their den. Their father brought them rats and lizards as food from time to time, whilst the mother guarded them during the daytime. This pup did not get anything this time around and was pleading to his father for something to eat in typical Cape fox manner: licking the parents' face." ~ Johan J. Botha
"A mother's love" in Manyeleti Game Reserve, South Africa © Armand Grobler (Photographer of the Year 2018 Semi-finalist)

"The bonding between lion pride members is an essential key to their survival and a reason why lions will often outlive other big cats. Lions can often be seen allogrooming, which strengthens family bonds through licking and rubbing up against one another, with both females and males taking part in this activity." ~ Armand Grobler
"The crossing" – a matriarch and her family make their way over a dry lake bed in Amboseli National Park, Kenya © Dana Kennedy (Photographer of the Year 2018 entrant)

"One of my favourite places in all of Africa is Lake Amboseli – where large families of elephants journey along the dry and well-travelled region. On this evening game drive, a matriarch and her family were making the long journey on the dry lake bed, and I had the immense privilege of capturing this image. It was a magical moment while watching the quiet trek in the fading light." ~ Dana Kennedy
A baby mountain gorilla gets all the attention in Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda © Stuart Sinclair (Photographer of the Year 2018 First runner-up)

"This photo was taken in Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. Walking into this family of gorillas was spectacular. They were so comfortable in our presence, very relaxed and observant. It was amazing to see their strong family bond, and this photo really highlights that. After a short time they played and fed in front of us. Some of the youngsters ran through the group, seemingly
knowing that it would cause a stir, and enjoying the reaction!" ~
Stuart Sinclair
In a colony of meerkats, the whole family, including the father and siblings, all take turns to help raise the babies (or pups). Female meerkats give birth to one to eight babies at a time, but it is more common for them to have three to four offspring at a time. Read more interesting facts about meerkats here.
Celebrating Africa’s Wild Babies

A gorilla and her young in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda © Andrea Galli (Photographer of the Year 2018 entrant)

Uganda is home to about half the world’s population of mountain gorillas, with the majority of them living in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park. Bwindi has as many as 11 habituated gorilla families available for tourists to track. Read more about the different gorilla families found in Bwindi here.
"Can I tell you a secret?" in Kruger National Park, South Africa © Ricci Goldstein (Photographer of the Year 2017 entrant)

"On a misty morning drive towards Mopani, I was excited to be able to spot and photograph a hyena clan. Two important factors stood out for me in making this sighting a photographer’s dream. Firstly, the mist had slowly evaporated and a soft light fell upon the savannah. This was coupled with an adorable interaction between a mother and her young." ~ Ricci Goldstein
"Unsteady but secure" in Skukuza, Kruger National Park, South Africa © Thinus Schoeman

(Photographer of the Year 2017 Top 101 Finalist)

"A family of elephants were resting in the shade of large riverine trees on the riverbank, approximately 8 to 10 metres from the road. I spotted this very young baby elephant, still unsure on its feet, secure between the elephant cow's legs. I liked the natural framing the body and legs of the elephant cow provided, and had an image in mind. I had time to take four photos before the baby
turned away and disappeared deeper into the herd. It was a privilege to witness how protective the family was of this baby elephant." ~ Thinus Schoeman