

Mountain Gorilla

by

ANDY

The scientific name of the Mountain Gorilla is *Gorilla gorilla beringei*. It is classified as a mammal. The mountain gorilla lives in the dense forest ecosystems of the mountains of East Africa. It is the last remaining habitat of the mountain gorilla.



Male mountain gorillas grow to an average of 6 feet tall (when standing) and weigh 400 to 500 pounds. This makes them the largest of the great apes (chimpanzees, orangutans, and gorilla). Females are smaller, growing to an average of 4 to 5 feet tall, and weighing 150 to 200 pounds.

Mountain gorillas eat large amounts of vegetation and spend about 30 percent of each day searching for food. They devour roots, leaves, stems of herbs, vines, bark from trees, shrub-sized plants, and bamboo shoots. (Mountain gorillas are easy-going vegetarians who lead a peaceful, playful life unless threatened.)

Females bear offspring at about 10 years of age. They usually bear a young every four to five years, giving birth after a gestation period of eight to nine months. Newborn gorillas are small and

covered with black hair. They weigh about 5 lbs. They must be cared for at all times. By age two they are able to reach and chew on vines and branches. Young gorillas cling to their mother's chests until they are old enough to ride on her back. A young gorilla remains with its mother until it is 5 years of age.

The mountain gorilla is an endangered animal because its habitat destruction, war and poaching create serious threats to its future. These great apes inhabit several isolated areas on the forested mountain slopes of eastern Zaire and parts of Uganda and Rwanda. Scientists estimate that there are about 600 of these gorillas, living in populations of about 300 each, separated by about 30 miles. Their entire world consists of 285 square miles of high-elevation rain forest in east-central Africa.

10 Interesting Facts:

1. Mountain gorillas develop about twice as fast as human babies.
2. Young male and female gorillas are called juveniles between the ages of about three and six.
3. During this stage, both sexes have thick black hair and black skin.
4. Juveniles of both sexes increase in size and weight at similar rates for the first six years.
5. At age six they are about 4 feet tall and weigh about 150 lbs.
6. Females mature at about age six and stop growing taller, and they continue to gain weight slowly until they reach 250-300 lbs. at ages 10-11 years old.
7. Males continue to grow both in size and weight past the age of six. They do not reach maturity until they are about ten years old.
8. Between the ages of about six and ten years, males retain uniformly black hair color of their youth and are called black backs.
9. When male mountain gorillas reach maturity, they develop a patch of grayish or silver-colored hair on their backs, and they are called silver backs.
10. Until recently, mountain gorillas were one of conservation's brightest success stories. Today, they face a new threat – after a terrible civil war, refugee camps with 750,000 people live in poverty on the borders of the gorillas' reserves.