
Chimpanzee Fact Sheet (5/1/94)

Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*)

Description: The chimpanzee is man's closest relative and one of the most familiar of the apes. However, the young, cute chimpanzee of films and television does not give an accurate view of the adult wild animal. Its pale face darkens with age and becomes mottled or solid black. It has long black or brown-black hair, and its arms are far longer than its legs. The male stands over four feet tall and weighs 130 pounds, while the female is closer to three feet tall and weighs under 100 pounds.

Range: Chimpanzees are found in many Equatorial African nations, stretching from Sudan and Tanzania in the east to Senegal and Angola in the west. Zaire has the largest concentration of chimpanzees, but they have become extinct in some areas of their former range.

Habitat: While chimpanzees live in the tropical rainforest belt, their habitat actually varies widely. Chimpanzees most often live in primary, uncut forest but are also found in secondary regrowth forests, open woodlands, bamboo forests, swamp forests and even open savannah. Despite this adaptability, logging has been found harmful to chimpanzee populations.

Diet: Chimpanzees feed primarily on fruit, leaves, seeds, flowers and insects. One remarkable behavior seen in chimpanzees is "fishing" for termites by inserting stems or leaves into termite mounds and eating the termites collected. A small part of the chimpanzee's diet is made up of other mammals such as bushpigs, monkeys, baboons and bushbuck. While the practice is rare, chimpanzees have been observed practicing cannibalism.

Social Organization: Chimpanzees are highly intelligent, social animals with a fluid hierarchy in both males and females. These hierarchies are reinforced through communication using facial expressions, posture, touching and grooming, and sound. Communities range in size from 20 to 100 individuals, and members may switch groups frequently. Chimpanzees cooperate within their community in grooming, hunting and defense, but aggression can occur between two communities that may result in injury and death for some members. Males have also been known to kill young chimpanzees. A female will usually bear one young, which will remain with her from six to ten years.

Threats to Survival: Destruction of the rainforests of central Africa for agricultural use is the largest threat to the wild chimpanzee. The forest is also harmed by firewood collection and destruction by high concentrations of large animals like elephants, hippos, rhinos, etc. This destruction leaves isolated "islands" of forest that may result in inbreeding in a community. The chimpanzee is hunted for food or for medicinal or magical uses in many nations. Although none has been legally imported into the United States since 1976, one of the more disturbing threats is the collection of young chimpanzees for export for research in western nations. Young chimpanzees are usually caught by shooting the mother, and many die from stress and inhumane conditions during capture and transport.

Conservation Status: The chimpanzee is listed as an endangered species in the wild by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the IUCN Red Data Book and as an Appendix I species under CITES. Population estimates range from 100,000 to 230,000 in the wild. It is estimated that just 50 years ago, millions of chimpanzees could be found in central Africa.

Zoo Programs - SSP: The Chimpanzee SSP is the one of the newest SSP programs. North American zoos have based their populations on captive-bred chimpanzees; wild-caught chimpanzees have not been added since 1977. There are about 250 chimpanzees managed under the SSP. The breeding program is hampered by the low reproduction rate of captive-born females who were hand-raised rather than mother-raised. Identification of the origin of some animals is also difficult, and different sub-species may have been mixed over the years.

Conservation: The Committee for Conservation and Care of Chimpanzees, with Geza Teleki and Jane Goodall in its membership, is one of the most well-known groups dedicated to preserving the chimpanzee. The chimpanzee has also been given high priority by the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Primate Specialist Group. It is protected in almost 40 parks and reserves and has legal protection in many nations, but this does not prevent frequent poaching.