



Pan troglodytes ◀

▶ **Chimpanzee**

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Text compiled by Swen C. Renner. Photos: UNEP

Taxonomy

Scientific name: *Pan troglodytes*

English Name: Common or Robust Chimpanzee, short form: Chimps

Nom Français: chimpanzé

Kiswahili: Sokwe mtu

Pan troglodytes was until recently grouped with *Pan paniscus* into one species, but genetic and morphological differences suggest they are two separated species. *P. troglodytes* is currently considered to have three subspecies beside the nominate form:

- *P. t. verus* the western subspecies,
- *P. t. vellerosus* the east Nigeria to west Cameroon chimpanzee (might be split into two),
- *P. t. troglodytes* the central subspecies,
- and *P. t. schweinfurthi* the eastern subspecies.

The Common Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* is often shortened to Chimpanzee, and sometimes referred to as the Robust Chimpanzee. The Bonobo is considered as a separate species but was considered to be a subspecies of *P. troglodytes* until recently. There is significant overlap in size between the chimpanzee and the bonobo, but the latter is more gracile in build, with a smaller, rounder skull, and a flatter face with less-prominent brow ridges.

Figure 1: Comparative figure of chimpanzees and bonobos.

Distribution

The western subspecies, *P. t. verus*, once occurred in 10-12 countries from southern Senegal east to the Niger River in central Nigeria, but the range has greatly diminished. Populations between the Niger River in Nigeria and the Sanaga River in Cameroon have recently been described as a separate (fourth) subspecies, the east Nigeria to west Cameroon Chimpanzee *P. t. vellerosus*. The central subspecies, *P. t. troglodytes*, occurs from north Cameroon to the Ubanghi River and south to the Congo River. The eastern subspecies, *P. t. schweinfurthi* is found from the confluence of the Ubanghi and Congo rivers in western DR Congo east to the southern end of Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania, and from there northwards to Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and southern Sudan. Substantial numbers may exist in remote or unsurveyed areas of eastern DR Congo, but elsewhere populations are small and scattered (Figure 2).

The Chimpanzee has a wide but discontinuous distribution in Equatorial Africa, in 21 countries from Senegal in the west to Tanzania in the east. It is difficult to be precise because chimpanzees have likely become extinct in 4-5 countries in recent years. Most taxonomists recognize three or four distinct subspecies, although current genetic studies will likely refine this picture significantly.

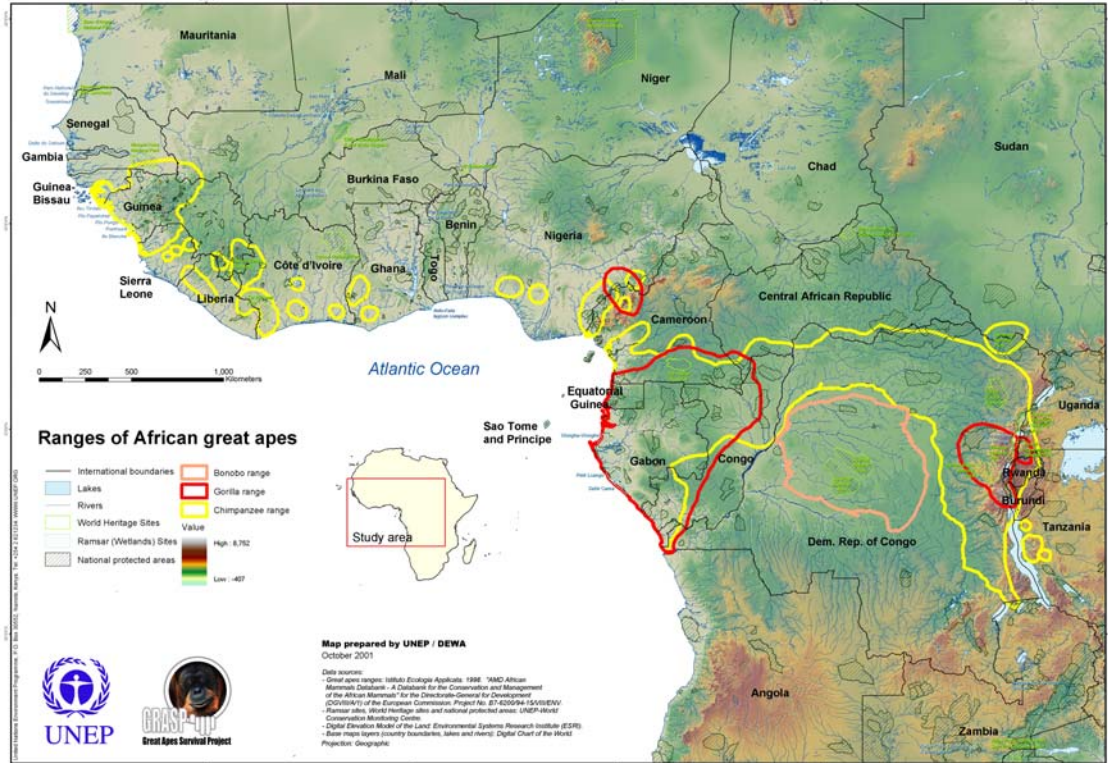


Figure 2: Distribution of Chimpanzees. Source: UNEP.

Anatomy and Appearance

Chimpanzees are great apes that are most closely related to humans (they share 98% of their DNA with humans). Chimpanzees have very long arms and a short body. The appearance is gracile and not bulky as in gorillas or orangutans. Chimpanzees are covered with black hair on most body parts. Chimpanzees have a slight brow ridge, large ears, small nostrils, and an elongated snout. They have hands that can grip firmly, allowing them to pick up objects and use them as tools.

Seize, Weight and Lifespan

Males:	35-70 kg	90-120 cm
Females:	26-50 kg	66-100 cm
Lifespan: 60 years in captivity, 35-40 years in the wild.		

Gestation

8.5-9 months. Reproduction starts in the age of 12-13 years. Young chimpanzees are weaned from their mothers at about 4 years of age. The reproduction therefore is slow and populations need a long time to recover from sever declines.

Ecology and Behavior

Chimpanzees are omnivorous and have even been known to catch and eat other primates. Chimpanzees drink water, often by using a chewed leaf as a sponge. Chimpanzees are social and diurnal animals. They live in small, stable communities or unit groups of about 40-60 individuals. Smaller subgroups of 6-7 individuals stay together for a while, with the membership changing over time. Each evening, chimpanzees construct a fresh "sleeping nest" made out of leaves and other plant material.

Chimpanzees as well as bonobos are famous for their understanding and utilization of tools. They use an inventive variety of tools to reach remote or inaccessible food. Before genetic evidence (see above), this behavior was thought to be the most connecting link between humans and great apes.



Habitat

Chimpanzees live in a wide variety of habitats, including tropical rain forests, forest edges and clearings, woodlands, swamp forests, and closed Savannah in western and central Africa. In Guinea-Bissau they have been observed to live in open Savannah forest also.

Predators and Natural Enemies

Humans.

Leopards also predate on young chimpanzees.

Population Sizes

Western Chimpanzee *P. t. verus*: 21,300-55,600 (Kormos and Boesch 2003)

Nigerian Chimpanzee *P. t. vellorossus*: 5,000-8,000 (Kormos and Boesch 2003)

Central Chimpanzee *P. t. troglodytes*: 62,000 (Butynski 2000)

Eastern Chimpanzee *P. t. schweinfurthii*: 96,000 (Butynski 2000)

It is difficult to assess population size and monitor trends of chimpanzees due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of their forests. Attempts have been made to estimate overall population size by applying population density values at known sites to the remaining area of suitable habitat in the species range. Two such estimates of population size of Common Chimpanzee *P. troglodytes* made in the late 1980s indicated a total population size of 145,000 to 230,000. More recent estimates suggest that less than 12,000 of the western subspecies remain (with the largest population in Côte d'Ivoire), possibly 80,000 of the central group, and some 13,000 of the eastern subspecies. These would make up a total species population of around 105,000, not including the east Nigeria to west Cameroon subspecies, which is restricted in range and probably low in numbers.

Population Trends

The largest remaining populations occur in central Africa, mainly in Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Cameroon. Populations are extremely depleted in five countries (Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Burundi and Rwanda), and another five countries (Senegal, Mali, the Cabinda enclave of Angola, Equatorial Guinea and Sudan) contain only small and dispersed remnant populations.

Chimpanzees are now extinct in at least four of the 25 countries they once inhabited (Gambia, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin). It is clear that numbers have declined substantially and populations are almost everywhere at risk.

Threats to the Populations

Habitat loss

bushmeat

poaching

Conservation

The low population numbers and the steadily declining population qualify the Chimpanzees as critically endangered.

Several organizations worldwide have been working to prevent the Chimpanzee populations from extinction. GRASP is working towards promoting international dialogue on great ape conservation at the highest levels among donor and range state governments, institutions and other stakeholders.

The commercial bushmeat trade is by far the greatest threat to the Chimpanzee. Commercial logging, the conversion of forest habitat to agricultural land for cash crops and subsistence farming, mineral prospecting, mining, and forest fires, compounds this. Progressive habitat loss often leaves small and unconnected patches in which chimpanzee populations are isolated and at risk from chance demographic factors.



Development of logging or mining operations invariably extend new access routes into undisturbed habitat, with a subsequent increase in hunting of animals for bushmeat and often followed by forest conversion into agriculture. Deforestation is far advanced in West Africa, where only small remnant tracts of primary rainforest persist. The fragmented populations of the eastern and western subspecies of Common Chimpanzee are primarily located in remnant forest stands and protected areas, but unauthorised hunting, logging, mining and farming are common and widespread throughout.

Hunting of adult chimpanzees for bushmeat has a disproportionate impact on populations because of both species' slow reproductive rate. Bushmeat is often a major source of dietary protein in West and Central Africa, and although ape-meat forms no more than 1-2% of the meat consumed or traded, it may be favored in some areas for its perceived magical or medicinal benefits. Although subsistence hunting may have once been conducted at sustainable levels, it increases with logging and mining because food is required to maintain large, transient labor forces, because colonizing human communities often favor bushmeat, and because modern transport systems enable unmonitored and rapid access to distant urban markets.

Civil wars exacerbate the situation because of the increased availability of guns, displacement of people and reduced agricultural output, all of which increase reliance on hunting. Chimpanzee products are widely sold in local and regional markets, and trade in live infant chimpanzees for pets is often associated with hunting of adults. The live animal trade, including capture of infants for the pet trade and entertainment industry, and the international biomedical trade, are additional pressures. It has been reported that around 1,000 wild-caught chimpanzees were exported annually from their country of origin during the past decade. Although much concern has been expressed in the past over such uses and their impact on wild populations, in itself this is far less a threat than the killing of adults for bushmeat and progressive habitat loss.

The Common Chimpanzee is listed in Appendix I of the 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and international trade in individuals or products is therefore subject to strict regulation by ratifying nations. Trade for primarily commercial purposes is banned. The species is protected by law throughout their range, although enforcement is usually poor to non-existent. The chimpanzee is listed in Class A of the African Convention (1969), which prohibits the hunting or capture of the species unless in the national interest or for scientific purposes. Nevertheless, national law and trade is not effected by CITES and the implementation and enforcement of national laws is a long and difficult process.

Given a lack of comprehensive and precise numerical population data, estimates of extinction risk are to a great extent based on observed loss or modification of chimpanzee habitats, on rates of exploitation, and also, on the risks inherent in a small range size. The Species Survival Commission of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in 2000 categorized the Chimpanzee as **Endangered**, i.e. facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future. In the former, each of the four subspecies is also categorized as **Endangered**.

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Further sources on the Internet

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- African Wildlife Foundation (<http://www.awf.org/wildlives/6>)
- UNEP – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/>)
- Primate Info Net – PIN (www.primat.wisc.edu/pin/)
- Jane Goodall Institute (www.janegoodall.org)