

CHIMPANZEE



Pan troglodytes

STATUS

- Chimpanzees are a Threatened Species as their population in the wild has declined dramatically in the last 30 years. Chimpanzees are now classified as Endangered.
- Threats include habitat destruction, poaching for the bush meat trade and diseases which are often caught from contact with humans or human wastes.

ORIGIN

- The common Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) was once widespread in West and Central Africa.

HABITAT

- Chimpanzees are apes that live in a variety of habitats including tropical rainforests and savannah grasslands.
- These environments provide a staple diet for the chimpanzees consisting of fruit, leaves, bark, seeds and insects. Chimpanzees are also known to include vertebrate prey in their diet, which may consist of small monkeys, antelopes and bush pigs.

DESCRIPTION

- Chimpanzees are quite distinguishable from other apes. They have dark brown or black coats, large turned out ears and quite protrusive lips.
- Chimpanzees are also known for their facial expressions that can show fear, pleasure, aggression and nervousness.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- Chimpanzees live in large communities of up to one hundred, which may split into smaller groups to go foraging, and then rejoin with the community from time to time.
- Adolescent females tend to leave their family group at about 13 years of age, gradually joining another Chimpanzee group while in season and mating with the dominant male. The female Chimpanzee will eventually become accepted into the new community, and as a result in-breeding will be avoided.

- Adolescent males tend to stay with their home group and generally co-operate well with others under one dominant male. Fights usually occur only during power struggles and even then, deaths rarely result.
- The hunting of monkeys involves a co-operative effort between the males of the Chimpanzee group. While the males of the group eat the majority of the meat, they are also known to share with the females.
- Chimpanzees are very intelligent and regularly use tools. A regular food is the termite. Chimpanzees will make a hole in the termite mound and using a twig, a long blade of grass, or a thin piece of vine, they will go 'fishing' for termites.
- Chimps have an array of body language including a display characterised by raised hair, standing on two feet, swaying, flapping of the arms, picking up branches and throwing them.
- As well as body language, Chimpanzees have a complex system of verbal communication. There have been fifteen categories of calls recognised, from soft grunts to hoots and shrieks audible at least one kilometre away.
- Captive chimpanzees require a lot of behavioural and environmental stimulation to prevent boredom. At Monarto, keepers and volunteers make "toys" and challenges for them. The size and nature of the enclosure itself and the other members of the group also stimulate natural behaviours.

REPRODUCTION

- Chimpanzee females reach sexual maturity at about eight years of age. They may have periods of being sexually receptive for years before they conceive their first offspring.
- Infant Chimpanzees have a white tuft of hair above their posterior. This is a signal to adults that they are babies and are to be tolerated. During this time the infants practically 'get away with murder' without being disciplined. Chimpanzees lose this tuft at about four to five years of age and then become fair game for discipline, which they normally receive from their father.
- The mother maintains close relations with her offspring for years.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- In the wild Chimps can usually be detected by the presence of nests. They make new nests each night. Unlike Gorillas, Chimpanzees will never make their nests on the ground.
- In Australia one of the simplest things you can do to help the conservation of Chimpanzees and other rainforest animals is to stop buying rainforest timber. Check products carefully to make sure the timber is from a plantation rather than a natural rainforest.