

CHIMPANZEE

Pan troglodytes



Location: Chimpanzees occur across the African equatorial belt from the Atlantic Ocean eastward to Tanzania. The distribution of chimps across the range is not continuous. Chimpanzees are equally at home in the tropical rain forests and woodland savannas that border the equator.

Diet: Chimpanzees are omnivorous. Fruits are their primary source of nourishment, but chimps also eat leaves, buds, seeds, bark, insects, bird eggs and meat. Whenever possible, they eat large meals from single food sources, which allow the chimps to rest for an hour or so before walking on to the next area. Chimps may periodically eat the remains of animals killed by predators; they occasionally hunt small- to medium-sized mammals.

Chimpanzees commonly use tools to obtain food. Different populations of chimps vary in tool choice. Most social insects have potent defenses that are overcome by the use of sticks or soft stems. For instance, chimpanzees prepare smooth, strong wands about 2 feet long for feeding on driver ants; they lower the wand into an open nest, wait for ants to crawl up it, and then sweep them off and into their mouths before the ants have time to bite. Chimps also strip grass stems to make them supple and poke them into holes on termite mounds. The soldier termites bite the stem and cling on long enough for the chimpanzee to extract and eat them. Sticks are also used to enlarge holes, so that honey or tree-dwelling ants can be reached. Sticks or rocks are also used to smash open hard-shelled fruits.

Life Cycle: Chimpanzees live in communities ranging in size from 15-100 animals, which are broken up into subgroups or parties, each containing about 2-5 animals. Females with young offspring often join males. The males may also form bachelor groups.

Chimpanzees do not normally form life-long pair bonds and breeding may occur throughout the year. Gestation lasts between 200-260 days (roughly 6.5-8.5 months). Usually a single young is born; twin births are rare. A newborn infant weighs approximately 2-4 pounds and is helpless, thereby, needing support from the mother's hand during travel. Within a few days, the offspring clings to the mother's underside without assistance and begins riding on her back at around 5-7 months. Weaning takes place between 2-4 years of age, by which time the infant travels mostly by walking. The juvenile stays with its mother until it is at least 5 years old. Generally, chimpanzee mothers give birth once every 3-6 years.

From the ages of about 8-12 years, a young male spends most of his time with his mother and siblings. Then he begins the long struggle for his place in the community. This is achieved first by intimidating the females before venturing to confrontations with the lower-ranking adult males. Before a young female is about 8-10 years old, she rarely leaves her mother for more than a couple of hours. Afterward, she begins to mingle with members of a neighbor group and may transfer to a new group permanently.

An adult chimpanzee reaches up to 3 feet in length. The weight varies from 90-190 pounds for males and 65-150 pounds for females. Males are not sexually mature until they are roughly 15 years of age. Females do not normally give birth until they are at least 13 years old. The life span is approximately 40 years.

Remarks: The chimpanzees' thick, dark fur is usually black, but there is some variation in color, with brown tints occurring quite often. Older chimpanzees sometimes have a whitish beard and gray on the back, which occurs after about 20 years of age. The white tail tuft is a feature of young chimps and is present only during the first few years of life. The skin of the hands and feet are black, and the face varies from pink to brown or black, normally darkening with age.