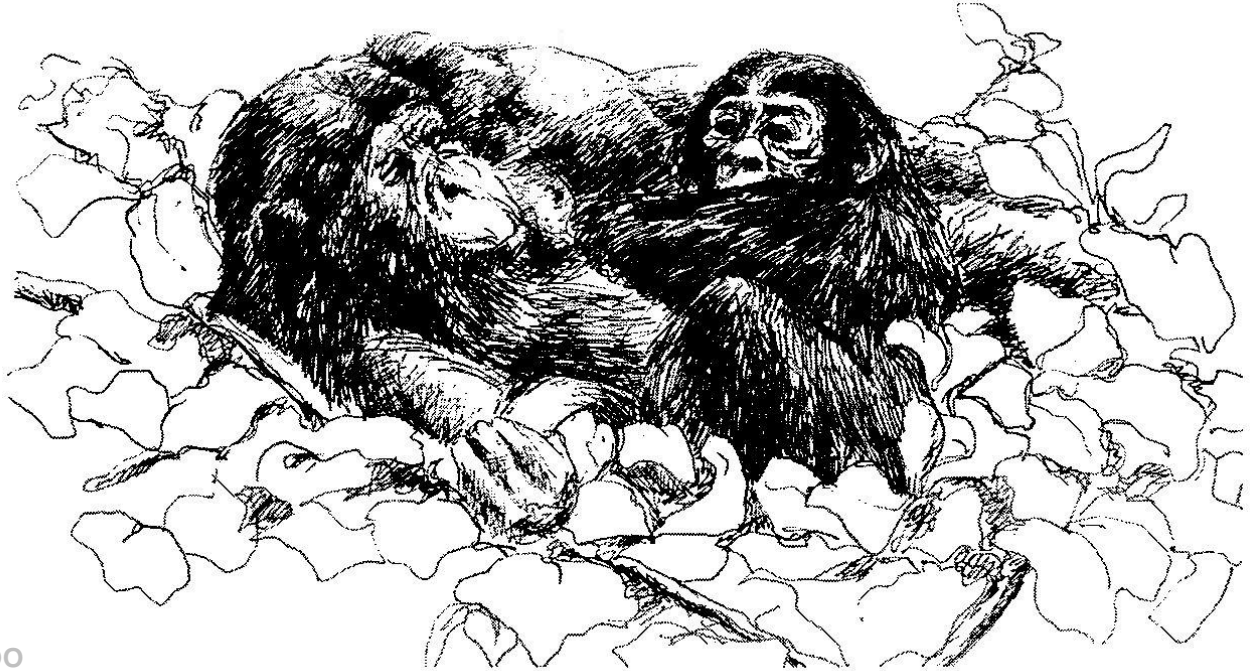


CHIMPANZEES

notes

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The common Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) was once widespread in West and Central Africa. Chimpanzees are apes that live in a variety of habitats including tropical rainforests and savannah grasslands. These environments provide a staple diet of fruit, leaves, bark, seeds and insects. Chimps are also known to eat vertebrate prey such as small monkeys, antelopes and bush pigs.

Chimpanzees live in large communities of up to one hundred individuals, which may split into smaller groups to go foraging, rejoining as a whole group on occasion. Adolescent females tend to leave their family group at about 13 years of age, gradually joining another Chimpanzee group while in season, then mating with its 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 generally only occur during power struggles and even then, it is not normal for fatalities to occur.

The hunting of monkeys involves a co-operative effort between the males of the Chimpanzee group. One adult male is set up as an ambush; the others drive the monkeys through the canopy of trees, towards the hidden male. Males eat the majority of the meat, but will share with the females.

Chimpanzees are said to be the most proficient non-human tool-users. Different communities of Chimps have different repertoires of tool use, depending on the requirements of their particular surroundings. They have been known to use stone hammers to crack nuts, and handfuls of leaves for soaking up inaccessible drinking water.

In the wild, Chimpanzees will make a hole in a termite mound then, using a tool such as a twig, a long blade of grass, or a thin piece of vine, they will 'fish' for termites to eat. Zoos SA is continually devising behavioural enrichment devices that allow the Chimps to use these kinds of natural behaviours, including the "fishing" technique. Popular enrichment items in the past have been the food puzzle. This involves the Chimpanzees finding a tool to push nuts through a vertical maze until they fall out a hole at the bottom and can be eaten.

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. Chimps have an array of body language including, a display characterised by raised hair, bipedal stance (standing on two feet), swaying, flapping of the arms, picking up branches and throwing them. In addition to this 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.

In the wild Chimps can usually be detected by the presence of nests. Nests are actually beds made by breaking and bending over leafy branches. A community of Chimps will build their nests for the night in the same tree or in neighbouring trees. Chimpanzees also make nests during the day if they want to doze for an hour or two. Unlike the Gorilla, Chimpanzees will never make their nests on the ground.

Chimpanzees are the human's closest relative, sharing up to 99% of the same genes. They are amongst the longest living non-human primates, several Chimps being known to live into their mid-fifties.

Chimpanzees have been studied extensively and have been observed treating themselves for a range of ailments by seeking out certain leaves and seeds specifically for their medicinal properties.

The breeding cycle for Chimpanzees is well recognised. They reach sexual maturity at about eight years of age. The female may have periods of being sexually receptive for years before she conceives her 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 does however maintain close relations with her offspring for years.

Zoos SA now houses its Chimpanzees at Monarto Zoo in a 3500sqm enclosure which is the largest in Australia.

Chimpanzee populations in the wild have declined dramatically in the last 30 years, making them a Threatened Species. Habitat destruction, poaching for the bush meat trade and diseases caught from contact with humans or human waste are the main causes of their decline. Chimpanzees are classified as 'Endangered'.

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.

