

Direct observations of western gorillas have only become possible more frequently over the last few years. Researchers became aware of swampy areas in the forests, which are visited regularly by gorillas and other forest animals. Ecological studies point to interesting differences from the mountain gorillas. But time is running out for the researchers: though most living gorillas belong to this species they are also the most hunted ones!

The distribution area of the Western Gorilla stretches over 6 countries. The sub-species of **Cross-River Gorilla** live in small forest patches close to the Nigeria/Cameroon border, possibly only 4 isolated populations with a **total of 200 animals** are left. In 1999, a well-known poacher was arrested here, hunting mainly on gorillas and drills.

The western lowland gorillas are very sought after and there are hunters who - with their dogs - have specialised in the gorilla hunt.

Gorilla hunters enjoy a **good reputation** as they are considered as fearless. Many local people consider the peaceful gorillas as dangerous, they are scared of their dominance behaviour like chest beats and play attacks.



If gorillas are attacked, e.g. by the hunters' dogs, the **silverback** defends his family. Females and infants flee up the trees. The hunters shoot the silverback first to protect themselves. After this, the hunters either hide and wait for the gorillas to come back to the ground where they are shot dead, or they shoot them out of the trees right away.

Many hunts happen during the night - the animals can then be killed in their sleeping quarters and be sold on the market the very next morning - and therefore the **bullets do not always hit the target**. Many animals get injured, flee and **die painfully**. Infants cannot be seen in the dark and get shot on the belly of their mothers. **Whole family groups can be wiped out in one night**.



In a single town in the PR Congo and in the South-East of Cameroon, 800 dead gorillas are sold annually.

Gorilla steaks are presented to guests during celebrations, a **sign of wealth**. Gorilla hands (especially fingers), skull, heart, other organs and different body parts are used for **healing rituals**. They are supposed to give **strength and potency, protect from evil demons and have magical powers**. Even today, there are tribes who kill a gorilla only for special celebrations and only by certain people, at other times hunters are punished severely for breaking such a taboo. Some women in Cameroon do not eat gorilla meat since their husbands will otherwise become as "cruel" as gorillas...

