



# KIBALE EXPLORER

The Kasiisi Project & Kibale Forest Schools Program

## Our Closest Cousin

in the  
Animal  
Kingdom

Photo ©Andrew Bernard

Our closest relative in the animal kingdom lives in the tropical rainforests and woodland savannas of western and Central Africa. Like gorillas and orangutans, chimpanzees are one of the great apes. But biologically, they're more closely related to humans than gorillas. We actually share about 98 percent of the same DNA! Like us, chimpanzees have an opposable thumb, as well as fingernails and thumbnails to help them grasp branches and food. They also have long arms, large eyes and long hair that covers everything but their hands, feet and face.

### Not a Picky Eater

Chimpanzees are omnivores, meaning they eat both plants and animals. Scientists have recorded Kibale chimps eating nearly 80 different types – from many kinds of fruits, leaves and flowers, to insects and even antelopes and monkeys!

### It's a Community Affair

Chimpanzees are highly social animals. In the wild, they live in communities of 20 to 100 or more individuals. Within these communities, they travel, eat and sleep in smaller groups. Male chimpanzees groom one other and form strong social bonds with other males. And they never leave the community where they were born, where most adolescent females join a new community, leaving their mothers forever. Females are typically less gregarious and more solitary, and they further isolate themselves when its time to give birth.

Baby chimps remain by their mother's side for 7 to 10 years. For the first year, the infant chimp is carried constantly on the mother's body: Initially clinging to her stomach, and at 6 months moves to riding on her back. Once weaned, the infant stays with the mother learning to find food, build nests and care for younger siblings.





## Forever Wild

Like all of the African great apes, chimpanzees are endangered by habitat destruction and hunting. Chimps are also stolen from the wild to be sold as pets. When taken, they're just tiny infants, but soon grow to become extremely strong and very intelligent. Their human caretakers quickly learn it's difficult *and* dangerous to keep them in a home. Some end up in sanctuaries, but many end up in worse situations.

Chimpanzees and other wildlife belong in their natural habitats. In Uganda, groups like the Kibale Chimpanzee Project and the Uganda Wildlife Authority are studying chimps to understand how we can better protect them. The Kasiisi Project works with Ugandan school children to teach an appreciation and respect for chimps and other wildlife.

## Explore

Learn about how you can help chimps and other wild animals keep wild:

- Don't share photos or videos of chimps and other wild animals interacting with humans or being treated like pets. Studies show these videos make people want to have chimps as pets. Don't support street performers or businesses that use chimps and other primates as entertainment props. By supporting these businesses, you're unintentionally supporting wildlife trafficking industry. Learn more about the [Forever Wild \(#4EverWild\)](#) campaign.
- Download [Chimps Should be Chimps](#), a free interactive iPad Children's book about how chimps should be free to be themselves.
- Support accredited zoos and sanctuaries dedicated to understanding and caring for chimps. Check out Lincoln Park Zoo's new [zoo-sanctuary partnership](#)!
- If you're looking to get a pet, carefully research first and then choose an animal that will be happy in your home and one that you can adequately care for. Never bring home a wild animal. First check [your local animal shelter](#) for pets needing homes. Most have not only dogs and cats, but also reptiles, small mammals, fish and even farm animals.

## Keep Calm & Play On!

Just like human babies, infant chimpanzees spend a lot of time playing. Play not only gives young chimps a chance to test their physical abilities, but also to socialize and build relationships with other chimps. And chimps continue to play as they grow. It's quite common to see infants playing with unrelated adults in their communities.

Play also helps relieve stress for both infants and adults, and is often used to manage conflicts between community members. For example, play between unrelated individuals is especially common before mealtimes, when competition for food can lead to disagreements. Play also strengthens relationships between chimps. By playing with an unrelated infant, an adult chimp can show the infant's family members that they support and care about them. Just like chimpanzees, we should all try to do fun activities with the people around us to reduce stress and build stronger relationships.



## The Mark of a Leader

Chimpanzees make great leaders in their community! Chimpanzees love to hunt and they often do it in groups. When certain chimpanzees hunt, others are more likely to join them. Individuals who start a hunt are called "impact hunters." Not only do impact hunters hunt more often, but they also hunt first. This is a risky position as they're more likely to get attacked by their prey. Despite the risk, this leadership by the impact hunter allows other chimpanzees to stay focused on the task, which often leads to a successful hunt. After the hunt, meat is shared, so many chimps benefit from the impact hunter's success.

Impact hunters demonstrate two traits of any good leader, chimp or human: A good leader shows initiative and makes sacrifices for their team.

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