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This image depicts an adult-male Eastern Lowland Gorilla living in Uganda. Males, of this Gorilla subspecies, are the largest living primates in the world. Fiver Löcker—from Wellington, New Zealand—took this photo, in Uganda, on September 26, 2009. License: [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

To prepare for his [role as "King Kong,"](#) Andy Serkis [studied gorillas](#) - and their behavior - at the [Dian Fossey Karisoke Research Center](#) in Rwanda. For those of us who must study gorillas at a distance, however, what do we know about these endangered animals (who are sometimes called "[gentle giants](#)")?

Scientists at [ARKive.org](#) describe them [as follows](#):

The gorilla is a heavily built primate and is the largest of the living apes. Until recently it was considered a single species, but DNA evidence has led to the recognition of the eastern and western populations as distinct species; Gorilla beringei and Gorilla gorilla, respectively.

Gorillas have a characteristic body shape with a broad chest, heavy neck and strong hands and feet. They have a fine, brownish coat, which has a red or auburn tinge on the crown, and mature males are known as 'silverbacks' due to the silvery-white saddle of hair extending from the back to the rump and thighs.

Male gorillas have a larger skull crest than females and other apes, together with larger canines and a more pronounced ridge above the eyes. Western gorillas are smaller and lighter bodied than eastern gorillas, because they must be agile climbers in order to reach fruits in the trees.

Thanks to the generosity of ARKive, we can view movies of eastern and western gorillas in their own habitat. Let's take a look.

Eastern gorillas:

- Even when they are young, and at play with each other, gorillas [beat their chests](#);
- A "silverback," in Rwanda, [keeps his family - including a newborn - in order](#);
- Eating bamboo [provides an excellent snack](#);
- Baby gorillas loudly "[chomp](#)" on carrots;
- An Eastern gorilla family [interacts with a human being](#).

Western gorillas:

- Show [who's "boss"](#) of the territory;
- Yawn, allowing us to [see the inside of a gorilla's mouth](#);

- Have an amazing interaction, with a human being, after a long separation;
- Carry a baby as mother and infant travel from place to place;
- Have to "start again" when the gorilla is too heavy for a tree branch;
- Forage for food and construct a treetop bed - all as part of daily life.

So ... is it far-fetched that Kong could interact with a human? Dian Fossey, over a number of years, made great progress with gorillas in their natural habitat.

And ... Jane Goodall's amazing work with chimpanzees at Tanzania's Gombe Stream National Park (which includes touching encounters captured on film) cause us to wonder: Might the same thing be possible with a gorilla?

After all ... sometimes nature itself seems like science fiction. If the Cordyceps fungus can attack (and then actually grow out of) a jungle-insect's body (like an ant), who can say what is really possible when two different species interact?

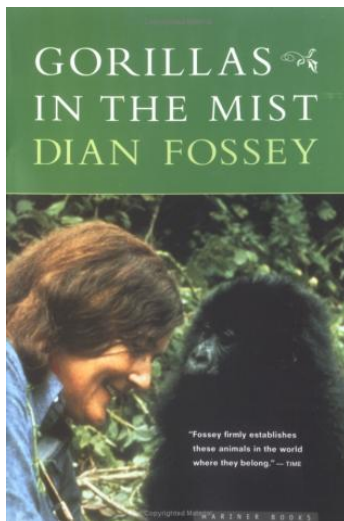
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/GORILLAS-King-Kong>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/GORILLAS-King-Kong>

Media Stream



Gorillas in the Mist - by Dian Fossey

Image online, courtesy amazon.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Gorillas-in-the-Mist-by-Dian-Fossey>



Male Eastern Gorilla

Photo by Fiver Löcker (from Wellington, New Zealand) of male Eastern Lowland Gorilla; online via Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/)

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Rainforest - Where Nature Seems Like Science Fiction

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Chimpanzees - Encounters with Jane Goodall

Clip from, *One on One Interview*, June 08, 2008.

Online, courtesy Aljazeera English Channel at YouTube.

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