

## The Gorilla: The Giant Ape

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In these days of popular science the absorbing study of the evolution of man engages the attention of most of us. Playing the most important part in that study are the anthropoid apes, amongst which is the gorilla, the largest and in many ways the most interesting, as he (I use the masculine in place of the neuter gender, as I think of these apes as almost human) is the least known of the *Simiidae*.

There are three closely allied species of gorillas. Two West African lowland species of the North Congo forest, the Cameroons and the Gaboon (*Gorilla gorilla* and *Gorilla matschiei*), the third a highland Eastern Congo form of north-west Tanganyika and the mountains and volcanoes of Kivu (*Gorilla beringeri*).

These species differ principally in the measurements and respective broad or narrow formation of the top of the cranium, also in their dentition, and externally in coloration and pelage. A noticeable feature of the Kivu or Eastern Congo species, which has only been brought to the notice of zoologists quite lately through the examination of a specimen of an extremely old male that the writer recently obtained, is the remarkable elongated crown or rather cranial callosity possessed by this gorilla (*Gorilla beringeri*), and in a similar way to the facial callosities of the orang-utan indicating the fully adult male.

The gorilla like the chimpanzee is peculiar to Africa, and as regards his range the Congo River has proved an impassable barrier to this giant ape, and none are found in the forests on the south side of this river. To the east their habitat extends as far as the Ufumbiro or Virunga volcanoes and the Nile sources near by, and then south again along the western marginal mountains of Lake Kivu and north-west Tanganyika as far as the vicinity of Baraka. The gorilla is therefore essentially a tropical animal, preferring the slopes and ravines of high mountain ranges, and, it may be said, is never found outside the evergreen equatorial forest, although in the remote past it was otherwise, for there are evidences that go to prove that the archaic gorilla, as well as man himself, came into Africa from Asia.

The West African gorilla was originally discovered by American missionaries in the late 'forties, and afterwards became more generally known by the accounts and descriptions of the French naturalist, Paul du Chaillu, which made such a furore in the 'sixties. It was not, however, until many years afterwards, 1902 to be exact, that the Eastern Congo species was brought to light by a German traveller, Oscar Beringer by name, who made a journey into the north Kivu region and there shot the first specimen, which is to be seen in the British Museum of Natural History in Cromwell Road.

The two West African races doubtless intermingle and may even be found in the same forest, but it seems almost certain, although not actually proved yet, that the east and west or highland and lowland forms do not do so. The former species prefers, and has apparently become accustomed to, such an alpine climate as is found on the high Kivu, and north Tanganyika Rift Valley Mountains, at from 7000 to 10,000 feet above the sea. As the equatorial forest extends all the way between the habitat of both species, there is, therefore, only a barrier of elevation and lack of certain foods — bamboo shoots being the staple food of the highland gorilla, and bamboo only grows at high elevations. In my own opinion, and I have spent many months there, no gorillas are to be found to-day anywhere in the Aruwimi or Ituri Valleys, although the very large lowland Congo chimpanzee may be mistaken for such, even in photographs of dead

animals and from descriptions given by natives. I have examined many dozens of ape skulls in the villages of the Aruwimi and Ituri regions, but all were of chimpanzies.

As regards his food the gorilla is very conservative, and never so happy as when in his favourite haunt of a forest of bamboos munching the succulent ground shoots or climbing over the bamboo stems, upon which he is in the habit of making a platform on which to take a sun bath. Speaking from a special knowledge of the Eastern Congo gorilla, it may be said that its food consists, apart from bamboo shoots, entirely of herbage - docks, sorrels, hemlocks, etc., although honey may be part of the menu. He does not grub for roots to any extent, neither does he eat fruit as far as my observation goes. These facts concerning his diet are borne out by my examination of the stomachs of several animals I have shot and of accumulated 'droppings'. The latter resemble those of a horse.

Non-arboreal in habits, this monster ape seldom climbs trees, his hands, but especially his feet, not being formed for this purpose. He can, however, walk over - a curious feat - a bamboo forest as if it were an aerial meadow. This effect is given when the hunter, looking out from some high vantage point across a flat sea of waving bamboo tops in search of his quarry, and, if he is lucky, sees it in bobbing black heads and huge arms stretching out amidst the greenery.

As a fully grown gorilla is an animal of enormous strength and herculean proportions, he is a match for any enemy; he could, for instance, break a lion's neck or forearm with the greatest ease, and such small fry as leopards he treats with the utmost scorn. Savage man, through superstition as much as anything else, but also on account of the inaccessibility of the gorilla's mountain home, has left this ape unmolested; we therefore find him and his family habitually and fearlessly sleeping on the ground.

In the densely forested mountains of the equatorial forests rain-storms are of almost daily occurrence, so that unless sleeping quarters are selected with some care, the gorilla finds himself lying in a puddle from the water draining off his thick and hairy coat. Thus it is we find this very human animal, if there is no hollow or overhanging tree handy, either scraping a hole for himself which he lines with fern or leaves, upon which he sits, or forming a similar 'nest' in the middle of a clump of bamboos, so that in either case he will not be sleeping in a puddle.

A solitary male or 'old man' gorilla may sometimes be found alone, having been beaten and thrown out by a younger and stronger rival, but more often than not gorillas go about in small family parties of six or eight. Father and mother gorilla only will then make 'nests' for themselves, whilst the others - young ones of different ages - will huddle around them to keep warm, the youngest of all sitting close to its mother's breast.

From the illustration I am giving with this article a good idea can be gained of the animal's pelage and proportions, making it unnecessary for me to go further into these matters. Suffice it to say that the large patch of silver-grey fur covering the back of the adult male gorilla is the most remarkable part of his coloration; the female is entirely black. This greyness extends in a less pronounced fashion along the back of the legs and the head, which show, in the West African races at any rate, a red-brown coloration, intermixed with the grey. This reddish coloration of the head may have some significance as a precursor of red-haired man.

In spite of exaggerated accounts which I have before me of Mr Howard Ross's supposed discoveries in Sierra Leone of a nine-foot gorilla, I am quite certain that these splendid apes never attain a standing height of more than seven feet - if that! The largest one shot by the writer measured six feet two inches from heel to crown, and I believe it to be a record measurement. The girth of chest sometimes reaches to a little over sixty inches. The span (and reach) of the tremendous arms is very great, eight feet being quite usual in a fine male - whilst the forearm and biceps may reach to nineteen inches.

The gorilla, shunning observation at all times, is of a silent, morose and even phlegmatic disposition. He seldom utters a sound unless thoroughly alarmed, and then his screaming roar is quite terrifying. When interested and curious he utters a loud whine like a great dog, following this by a resonant 'clopping' made by beating the closed hand on the bare chest below the nipples. Apart from using this beating of the chest to frighten away an intruder, it seems to be made both as a danger signal and to locate each other's whereabouts, and also, I think, to 'hearten' themselves, for I have heard it when there was no possibility of the animals being alarmed.

In the course of a long experience of these apes and many weeks spent in observing them in their haunts, I have never heard them utter a sound at night and not often in the day-time: by which I judge that they are not of a quarrelsome disposition, the exact opposite to chimpanzies or the baboons. I found open wounds from fighting on the crest of only one of the old males I shot; they were apparently teeth-marks, and this same animal, by the way, had several big boils in different parts of his body, especially on the glands of one armpit.

A post-mortem examination I made on several animals revealed the body as entirely free from visible internal parasites (there were none externally). The vermiform appendix I found to be of remarkable length and size, the genitalia exceedingly small for such a large animal, almost one might say atrophied, and in this respect differing largely from the chimpanzee, which has well-developed generative organs. The eyes of the younger Kivu gorillas have a yellow iris and are very noticeable in the black and wrinkled visage. These younger ones have also very little sense of danger. I have, for instance, looked at a group of them (looking for all the world like a lot of pot-bellied teddy bears), when the older ones were absent, for the space of quite half a minute at a distance of only a few yards before they would turn and run to their parents. The whole troop never went far when alarmed or even when fired at. Neither their sense of smell, their hearing nor their sight seems strongly developed.

Of the great apes the chimpanzee, the orang-utan, and the gorilla, the latter is thought to be the least intelligent of the three so far as the study of the live animal goes; the study of them, however, is far from being complete, as the gorilla, in my opinion merely through faulty treatment by their keepers at the Zoos, and through uncongenial environment, has never long survived in captivity, but with one notable exception.

This exception, as it happens, places an entirely new light on our estimate of the mind of the gorilla, for it deals with the most interesting animal I have ever known or seen inside or outside a menagerie. He was John Daniel, Gentleman Gorilla of Sloane Street, London, and Major R. Penny and Miss Cunningham, his master and mistress, as well as his play-mates and trainers. His record is quite a remarkable one and is in fact well known to many Londoners.

Purchased originally for £60, I believe, by Hamlyn from a Frenchman in West Africa, Derry and Toms bought him for £300 as an attraction at their Kensington shop. Not doing well, and becoming sick, he was offered for sale, and my friend Major Penny bought him from them when sick for the same figure. Under the Major's tuition and sympathy and that of his aunt, Miss Cunningham, this young two-year-old gorilla speedily became an extraordinarily interesting inmate of the household, and developed an intelligence of the first rank and every bit equal to that of a chimpanzee or orang-utan. When I had the pleasure of making John's acquaintance in 1920, he was sleeping on a camp bed in Major Penny's room beneath blankets that he put over or took off himself just the same as you or I. He was scrupulously clean in his habits, and acted in this respect in the same manner as the other members of Major Penny's family. He could unhasp and open the window, open the door or shut it when told to, and put on the electric light. He could drink out of teacups and put them back carefully on the tray, and many other intelligent things besides.

But sympathy and friendship were as life to John Daniel, and in the end his eventual purchasers, Messrs. Bamum and Bailey, lost him through a broken heart, for his friends had to leave him after he was sold, and considering himself deserted and friendless, he pined and died, a few weeks after his delivery at the menagerie in America.

To take the hunting of these great apes, no one with a spark of feeling can free himself from the thought that killing them is akin to murder. They are so very human and interesting, the young ones so unsuspecting of danger, the older ones so full of curiosity, that hunting them can hardly be termed sport. Owing, however, to the native tales one hears of their ferocity and even carnivorous habits, one approaches them with caution, his imagination alight at the thought that they will attack him on the slightest provocation. Adding to this the undoubted menacing look of the older animals, their gigantic size and strength, the hunter is perhaps to be pardoned if he exaggerates the danger their chase entails.

The gorilla is, however, a great bluffer, and if he can't frighten you away by his uncanny screaming roars or by the beating of his great chest, he usually leaves it at that - he is certainly not looking for trouble.

Native superstition, so easily aroused, is accountable for the bad name the *Ngaghi*, to give it its native name, possesses. Natives attribute all kinds of horrible practices to this inoffensive giant. To mention two of them, they will, for instance, tell you that the gorilla lies in wait along forest tracks and will pounce on the unsuspecting wayfarer, first breaking his arms and legs, and having killed him will then bury the body for some days before eating it. Then, again, they have been credited with carrying off women and children from the fields and mutilating them in a horrible manner.

Authenticated cases of gorillas attacking man are rare. I mention one instance, however, for, like an elephant going must, gorillas will become dangerous at times, probably through wounds or old age, or, as occurred in this instance, through being themselves attacked.

This exciting affair, of which the following is an account, occurred during my recent visit to Lake Kivu, and curiously enough at a place called Katana near the western shore of the Lake, where gorillas had never before been encountered as far as is known, either by white men or by the Bahavu natives inhabiting the region.

It appears that a heavily forested spur of the Rift Valley Mountains runs down towards Lake Kivu behind the Mission station of the White Fathers at Katana, cutting into a grove of bananas planted there, which

place early one morning became the scene of a terrific fight between an enormous 'old man' gorilla and half-a-dozen natives. The account given me by the Father Superior of the Mission, to whose hospital the three wounded men were afterwards brought, relates that the owner of the banana grove, greatly to his astonishment, surprised a small band of gorillas, headed by the huge beast in question, raiding the plantation. Not realising the danger, but intent on saving his crops, he quickly collected a few friends, and arming themselves only with heavy sticks they attempted to drive out the marauders.

When attacked the troop scattered with the exception of the big male, who stood his ground, and as the natives by this time had their blood up a great fight ensued. The big gorilla caught one of the natives, and it seems fairly pulled him to bits, and the others, hoping to save him, were in turn badly bitten. When it was too late reinforcements arrived in the shape of a man who owned a spear, and with this they managed between them to dispatch the infuriated beast.

To give an experience that happened to myself on my last expedition to Kivu: on this occasion I had followed a troop of gorillas into the alpine meadows to be found between the summits of the two volcanoes of Mikeno and Karisimbi to the north-east of Lake Kivu. On either side are steep ravines and ridges, amongst which I eventually came up to the animals, but as these were all females and young they were of no interest to me. Walking on to look for the big male that I felt sure was somewhere about, I presently found myself standing on the top of a steep ridge with a ravine on either side of me.

Continuing my search along this I was approaching a mass of lobelia, within which I suddenly became aware of a violent commotion, and the foliage parting, out stepped the most magnificent 'old man' gorilla it has ever been my luck to see, and stood listening not fifteen paces away from where I stood. A second afterwards it seemed this astonishing apparition caught sight of me, and the transformation was surprising, for with great suddenness and just balancing himself with his huge arms thrust forward, his body half raised, his hair fairly bristling and his ugly fangs bared, he whipped out a roar of malediction and hatred and with this leapt towards me.

I must say I scarcely expected such an onslaught; raising my rifle, however, I took aim and pressed the trigger. . . . The only sound that came to my waiting ears at that moment was the metallic click of a misfire, unhappily not the reassuring crack of a good charge of cordite. Throwing out the offending cartridge, the next thing I realised that the beast was turning a complete somersault in front of me, for in his rage at being disturbed, and in his haste to rid both himself and the ridge of my company, he had tripped on a stout liana or root, and the last I saw of him was a grey and black mass rolling down the side of the ravine.

In conclusion, let me add that the great apes now living are of little use to-day except for the sole purpose of science, and for this reason it is well they should be rigorously protected. The last word has by no means been written concerning them, their lives may still hide clues to our past. The science of genetics or somatogenics with regard to them has scarcely been touched on, and perhaps one day some future President of the British Association, or some great medical specialist, may yet evolve for us a cross-bred ape-man from a pygmy- chimpanzi strain - a real Tarzan of the Apes! Who knows?