



GORILLA AND DEBRAZZA EXHIBIT FACTS

Riverbanks' bachelor group of three male western lowland gorillas were transferred from the Philadelphia Zoo on Tuesday July 13, 2004. Gorillas are managed in North American zoos by a Species Survival Plan (SSP). This transfer was done in conjunction with the SSP

Chaka

- The largest and only silverback gorilla. He was born on July 22, 1984 and mother-reared at Philadelphia Zoo. He will be 20 years old this year.
- Chaka's parents were wild-caught and arrived at the Philadelphia Zoo in April of 1970.
- Chaka was transferred to the Cincinnati Zoo in 1994 on a breeding loan where he sired nine offspring—five sons and four daughters—in five years. Most of his offspring still live at the Cincinnati Zoo.
- Chaka was just eleven years old when his first offspring was born.
- Chaka was returned to the Philadelphia Zoo in April 1999 to be introduced to a new female and two adolescent males (Mike and Kimya). Unfortunately, the female and Chaka did not breed.
- Chaka is easy to identify because he has silver hair on his back and his bottom lip shows pink as it droops (drooped lip is a sign of relaxation for gorillas).
- Chaka stands about 5.5 feet tall (about ½ foot shorter than Kwan our previous male gorilla).
- Chaka weighs 392 lbs (5/04)-these change regularly so estimate at 400 pounds

Michael (Mike)

- Mike was born at the San Diego Zoo on December 24, 1991. He is also Chaka's nephew, and was reared by his mother (Chaka's sister).
- He was the first gorilla born in the San Diego Zoo's Gorilla Tropics exhibit.
- Mike is known for his "precocious" behaviors, including beating his chest and teasing the other gorillas.
- Mike is currently considered to be a black-backed gorilla and he is the second largest of the three males.
- Mike is easy to identify because of the lack of hair on his arms. He is also taller than Kimya, the smallest, and has a slight bit of silver on his back..
- Mike weighs 328 lbs (5/04) – these change regularly so please say "more than 300 pounds."

Kimya

- Kimya is the youngest and the smallest of the gorillas. He was born on January 11, 1994 at the Toledo Zoo.
- Kimya is shorter and stockier than Mike. He also has a lot of hair on his arms and has a longer face with a prominent brow and dark face.
- Kimya's name means "quiet".
- Kimya weighs 334 lbs (5/04) – this changes regularly so estimate at "more than 300 pounds."

Misc.

A female was added to the group of on September 15 1999 and was still with the group as late as March 2004. They lived at Philadelphia Zoo for about 5 years. Chaka was born there, but left on a breeding loan to Cincinnati Zoo for awhile. Mike came from the San Diego Zoo originally and Kimya (which we think means quiet and his sister's name Kalayla meant noisy) Originally came from Toledo.

DEBRAZZA PROFILES

Debrazza's are also managed under the AZA's Special Survival Plan

Sasha

- Sasha is female. She was born at San Diego Zoo on June 26, 1994.
- She was parent-reared.
- Sasha came to Riverbanks Zoo on June 20, 2002.
- Sasha weighs 18 ½ pounds.

Patrick

- Patrick is male. He was born at Glen Oak Zoo on January 4, 1989.
- Patrick was parent-reared.
- He moved here from Wild World on March 5, 1992.
- Patrick weighs 22.7 pounds.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q - How long do Gorillas live?

A - About 50 years

Q – How long do DeBrazza's live?

A –Up to 22 years

Q - Can the gorillas and DeBrazza's see the Zoo visitors through the glass?

A - Yes, they certainly can. Sometimes they will interact with the visitors by moving their lips, pressing their hands against the glass or with eye contact. One of our gorillas was known to crash into the glass while swinging on a rope, probably to get reaction from the crowd. At other times they ignore the crowds completely. Remember that these gorillas have been on exhibit a number of years and have seen millions of people so they are pretty familiar with crowds.

Q - Why do the gorillas look so sad? Are they unhappy?

A - You are seeing their natural expressions and actually they will change their expressions at times. If they were unhappy we'd notice this with changes in eating habits or other behaviors. They have the choice of staying inside or outside (when they are not in quarantine) and if they want privacy they can go in the back at any time into one of the rooms.

Q – Will Riverbanks Zoo ever get a female gorilla?

A – At this time Riverbanks Zoo has been selected by the western lowland gorilla SSP group to house bachelors and there is not a plan in place to add a female gorilla. However, breeding recommendations may change in the future.

Q - Do the zoo keepers ever go into the same areas as the gorillas or DeBrazza's monkeys?

A - No, the keepers and animals are always separated by a protective barrier. When training or feeding is being conducted it is done through these barriers. While the gorillas are not normally aggressive toward the keepers, they are extremely strong and could cause serious injury accidentally. When the keepers are cleaning the group room or the outside exhibit area the gorillas remain in the back..

Q - Will Riverbanks ever get any gorillas from the wild?

A – No. Importing of gorillas from their native habitats in Africa has been prohibited since 1974 to preserve populations in the wild. In the past poachers would kill older gorillas in order to capture young gorillas for sale to zoos but that practice is outlawed now.

Q - What do gorillas eat?

A - In the wild gorillas eat many varieties of plants including leaves, bulbs, flowers and other things. The only animals they eat are ants and termites. In the Zoo we feed them a balanced diet of various fruits and vegetables including sweet and white potatoes, corn, broccoli, oranges, grapefruit and even bananas as well as commercially prepared primate biscuits. Many people picture gorillas eating bananas all the time; however, bananas are not found in Africa, so gorillas in the wild may never see a banana in their entire lives.

Their daily Zoo diet is:

Produce: 40.5 lbs. Total : Chaka: 16 lbs. Kimya: 11 lbs. Mike: 13.5 lbs.

Primate Biscuits: 7.5 lbs. total: Chaka: 2 lbs. Kimya: 2.5 lbs. Mike: 3 lbs.

Training

- Our animal staff engage in training sessions with the gorillas and DeBrazza's each day
- Reasons for the training are the same as for sea lions and elephants: animal husbandry and animal enrichment.
- Training is rewarded with favorite foods—the gorillas like grapes.

Apes, Monkeys and other primates

- Primates are a classification of animals that includes monkeys, apes, prosimians and also humans.

- Prosimians (the word means “pre-monkey”) are animals such as the lemurs we have here at Riverbanks on Lemur Island. They are the most primitive of primates and don’t look too much like monkeys or apes.
- There are many different species of monkeys in the world and we have quite a few here at Riverbanks including baboons, spider monkeys, Diana monkeys, howler monkeys and some very small monkeys such as golden lion tamarins and pygmy marmosets. Although monkeys and apes look a lot alike it is easy to tell them apart—most all monkeys have tails where apes do not.
- We have two species of apes at Riverbanks. On Ape island you will see our siamangs. These animals belong to a group of apes known as gibbons and are often referred to as “lesser apes” because of their small size. “Great apes” are larger in size and included in this category are gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans.

Questions

Does more than one male gorilla ever live in the same group? Do male gorillas get along with each other?

Normally, there is only one adult male in a troupe and this male will threaten any other males who approach. Young males will stay with the troupe as long as they are under maternal care, then they will leave. Some male gorillas do form loosely connected bachelor groups in the wild which sleep and nest together. There is a about a 50:50 ratio in male:female gorilla births, so there is a need to house male gorillas together in zoos. Bachelor groups in zoos have been managed successfully for many years, and Riverbanks will monitor interactions between the males as they grow and mature. You should expect to see occassional cuts from normal male interactions with each other. Right after Mike arrived it was noticed he had a wound on his leg, possibly from Chaka biting him. Our veterinarians are aware of it and can treat it with the help of our keeper staff and their gorilla training if needed.

Which are smarter—gorillas or chimpanzees?

Traditionally, chimps have been considered the most intelligent apes but not nearly as much research has been done with gorillas so this conclusion may not be correct. Gorillas are also quite intelligent.

Is it true that the DNA of apes is very close to that of humans?

Chimps have a 97% DNA match with humans and the other apes somewhat less. But even baboons have about a 94% match which just goes to show that a small percentage of DNA can make a big difference between species.