

Example Text: Discussion

Should zoos take gorillas out of their natural environments?

There are three subspecies of gorillas living in Africa – the western lowland, eastern lowland and mountain – and all are endangered. Most zoos conducting gorilla breeding programs are using the gorillas they already hold in captivity, and have agreed not to take gorillas from the wild. Is zoo breeding the only way to ensure their survival?

Gorillas have a slow rate of reproduction. In 1995, a cooperative project between two zoos using invitro fertilisation and embryo transfer resulted in the birth of a lowland gorilla baby. If more gorillas were kept in zoos, they could use these techniques to increase the rate of reproduction.

The lifespan of gorillas in the wild is 30–40 years, whereas it is 40–50 years in captivity. As zoos continue to research these primates, their knowledge of their ideal living conditions will improve and it is expected that their lifespan will further increase.

Some people also believe that due to gorilla tourism in the wild, that gorillas are catching human born infections and diseases. One group in the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda, recently suffered an outbreak of scabies, leading to the death of over half its population. If gorillas were kept in a controlled zoological environment, disease could be prevented or treated.

On the other hand, many people claim that taking a gorilla out of its natural environment means that their diet will be altered. Gorillas are mainly herbivorous and eat 200 types of leaves, fungus, fruit and even some insects. Replicating this range of food in a zoo is almost impossible. Groups opposed to zoos keeping gorillas cite the fact that gorillas are nomadic and have a home range of up to 24 square kilometres.

It appears that whilst zoos cannot reproduce the natural environment of gorillas, it is important that at least some are kept in captivity so that they continue to breed.