

# Great Ape Section (SGA) of the IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group

*Primate Specialist Group (PSG) Chair, Russ Mittermeier, PhD, Conservation International*  
*PSG Deputy Chair, Anthony Rylands, PhD, Conservation International*  
*SGA Coordinator, Liz Williamson, PhD, University of Stirling, UK*



Adult male western lowland gorilla  
(*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*)

The Great Ape Section of the IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group is a team of experts leading research on and conservation of the great apes. The role of the SGA is to promote conservation action on behalf of great apes, based on the best scientific information available. The SGA serves as a forum for discussion and information exchange; its members establish guidelines for best practice in research and conservation, formulate action plans and advise on the effective protection of great ape populations in the wild.

**International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, bringing together States, government agencies and a diverse range of NGOs in a unique world partnership which seeks to assist societies throughout the world to conserve the diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. IUCN has six Commissions, of which the **Species Survival Commission (SSC)** is the biggest. This network of volunteer scientists advises IUCN on the technical aspects of species conservation. Most SSC members are deployed in Specialist Groups focused on over 120 distinct species or species groups. The **Primate Specialist Group (PSG)** is concerned with more than 670 species and subspecies of monkeys, apes and lemurs – in particular, for carrying out conservation status assessments and making recommendations on taxonomic decisions which inform IUCN policy as a whole. The PSG produces a number of journals and newsletters, including *Primate Conservation*, *African Primates*, *Asian Primates Journal*, *Lemur News* and *Neotropical Primates*. The **Section on Great Apes** of the PSG focuses exclusively on issues affecting the 13 taxa of orangutans, gorillas, bonobos and chimpanzees.



Central chimpanzee  
(*Pan troglodytes troglodytes*)

The goal of the SGA is to prevent the extinction of the great apes by informing and supporting sound policy decisions by habitat countries. The SGA advises governments on effective conservation strategies based on current knowledge of the populations and distributions of the great apes and the many pressures that threaten their survival. As an integral aspect of this role, the SGA facilitates the exchange of critical information among primatologists and the professional conservation community.

With more than 100 members – including some of the world's most distinguished and experienced great ape researchers – the combined expertise of the SGA spans the scientific, social and ethical aspects of great ape conservation, providing a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and solutions available.

In common with other Specialist Groups, the principle activities of the SGA are the following:

### ***IUCN Red List of Threatened Species***

The SGA is responsible for reviewing the Red List assessments for each species and subspecies of great ape, making any recommendations for a change in status and providing the necessary documentation in support of those changes. Between 2006 and 2008, members of the SGA compiled the most up-to-date information available on all great ape taxa, evaluated population trends, and produced assessments of each species and subspecies. Red List website: [www.iucnredlist.org/](http://www.iucnredlist.org/)



Sumatran Orangutan  
(*Pongo abelii*)

### ***Status Surveys and Conservation Action Plans***

The SGA has supported and helped to coordinate regional workshops for Western chimpanzees, Eastern Chimpanzees, chimpanzees and gorillas in Western Equatorial Africa, and Cross River gorillas. These workshops brought together researchers and conservationists, protected area managers and officials from range states, and the resulting Action Plans outline their consensus opinion on the priority sites and priority actions vital to the protection of great apes in those regions. Specific plans are being prepared for the Nigerian chimpanzee, the Sumatran orangutan and bonobos. All action plans are free to download from the PSG website: [www.primate-sg.org/action.plans.htm](http://www.primate-sg.org/action.plans.htm)

### ***Establishing guidelines for specific research and conservation practices***

Drawing on expertise from within the IUCN network, the SGA produces “best practice guidelines” which provide guidance to field scientists, governments, donors and development organizations involved in great ape conservation. Topics covered to date include:

- Great ape tourism
- Monitoring and surveying great ape populations
- Reintroducing great apes to the wild from sanctuaries
- Health monitoring and disease control in great ape populations.
- Reducing the impact of commercial logging on great apes in Western Equatorial Africa
- Conflict between humans and great apes.



Bonobo  
(*Pan paniscus*)

PDFs in English, French and Bahasa Indonesia are available for download at: [www.primate-sg.org/best.practices.htm](http://www.primate-sg.org/best.practices.htm)

### ***A.P.E.S. database***

The Ape Populations, Environments and Surveys (A.P.E.S.) database is a joint initiative of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology and the SGA. A.P.E.S. is a repository for survey data on great apes; a place to store information for monitoring populations and distributions that allows for the analysis of population trends and for well-informed priority-setting, hypothesis testing, and policy advice. A major output of A.P.E.S. is a set of GIS layers of data availability and survey data gaps, geographic range, occurrence probability, and trends in occurrence, which are being developed and that will be regularly updated. See <http://apes.eva.mpg.de>

#### **Contact**

For further information, please e-mail: [SGA\\_coordinator@conservation.org](mailto:SGA_coordinator@conservation.org)

#### **Websites:**

[www.primate-sg.org](http://www.primate-sg.org)  
[www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)  
[www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/index.htm](http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/index.htm)