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## What is a Bonobo?

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### Overview

Bonobos are one of humankind’s closest living relatives, sharing more than 98% of our DNA. These great apes are complex beings with profound intelligence, emotional expression, and sensitivity. In contrast to the competitive, male-dominated culture of chimpanzees, bonobo society is peaceful, matriarchal, and more egalitarian. Sex transcends reproduction, as it does in human society, and serves to promote bonding, reduce tensions, and share pleasure. Bonobos are also the most vocal of the great apes, using complicated patterns of vocalizations to communicate detailed information. Because of their caring and compassionate society, bonobos serve as a powerful symbol of peace and cooperation. Sadly, these amazing apes are highly endangered, classified by the [IUCN Red List](#) as facing possible extinction. They only live in one country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and their numbers are declining every day due to human threats such as hunting and logging. We must [act now](#) to protect our primate cousins before it’s too late. We have much to learn about them, and they have much to teach us about ourselves.

### Habitat and Range

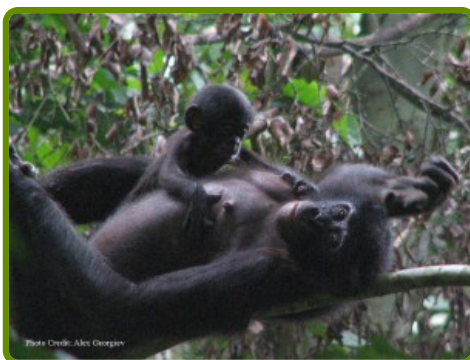
Bonobos are only found in only one country: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). They live in the heart of the [Congo Basin](#), the second largest rainforest on earth. They inhabit approximately 500,000 square kilometers (193,000 square miles) of tropical forest south of the Congo River and north of the Kasai River, where the average rainfall is between 63 and 80 inches per year.

### Diet

Bonobos are essentially frugivores (fruit makes up half of their diet), but they also eat vegetation and occasionally supplement their diet with insects, larvae, earthworms, eggs, and even small mammals. While the majority of bonobos studied in the wild do not hunt other animals as chimpanzees do, researcher Gottfried Hohmann of the Max Planck Institute observed one bonobo group hunting small monkeys at the Lui Kotal study site near the Salonga National Park.

### Behavior and Social Structure

Frequently referred to as the “Make Love, Not War” primate, bonobos have a reputation for being docile and diplomatic in their social and sexual relationships. Their generally peaceful and cooperative society is attributed to the evolution of a highly complex social system.



Bonobo communities are peace-loving and egalitarian. Bonobos are considered to have a matriarchal society, meaning that females have a higher social status than males and social interactions are female-centered and female-dominated. Females have strong social bonds amongst themselves, but they do not exclude males.

Bonobos, like their chimpanzee cousins, live in “fission-fusion” societies and therefore tend to vary in party size. Communities of up to 100 bonobos will usually split into small groups when searching for food during the day and come back together to sleep at night. Bonobos have a male philopatric society; males remain with their birth group whereas females migrate to other groups during adolescence.

Sexual activity plays a large role in bonobo society; it is used for pleasure, social bonding, and conflict resolution. Bonobos are extremely diverse in their social and sexual interactions. They do not form permanent monogamous partnerships and have sex without regard to age or gender, except for avoidance of relations between a mother and her adult sons.

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## Bonobo Peace Forest



**Bonobos are the most vocal of the great apes.** Their vocal communication is complex, frequent and often accompanied by hand gestures. Vocal communication plays an important role in bonobo society. Bonobos communicate where to find their favorite food using calls and squeals and can provide specific details about food quality and preference using a combination of vocal sequences. The voice of a bonobo is melodic and high pitched, in contrast to the deeper and more guttural vocalizations of a chimpanzee.

### Physical Characteristics

Today, we are aware of important behavioral and social differences between chimpanzees and bonobos. To the untrained eye, it can be difficult to tell the two species apart, but there are a number of characteristics that can be used to distinguish between them.

Bonobos can be distinguished from chimpanzees by their pink lips and black faces. Bonobos have black hair that parts down the center of their heads, covering part of their ears. Compared to chimps, bonobos have a noticeably smaller head and ears, a flatter face and a less prominent brow ridge. Bonobos were previously called pygmy chimps, a misleading name as there is a significant overlap in body size between the two species. Adult female bonobos stand at over 3 feet tall and weigh an average of 68 lbs., while adult males measure up to 4 feet tall and weigh an average of 85 lbs. Perhaps the most interesting difference is the bonobo's ability to stand up and walk bipedally (on just two feet) more easily and more often than chimpanzees. Bonobo anatomy is more similar to Australopithecus, one of our evolutionary ancestors.



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