

Project Summary
Gorillas Love Poems
By Jennifer Tripp

I based my project around the mountain gorilla, specifically on their mating system of polygamous relationships within a harem. I found it interesting that in the media, gorillas (such as King Kong) are often portrayed as having interest in one mate who is much smaller than themselves. The general media seems to believe that gorillas are monogamous, which in fact, they are not. My goal with this project was to shine a light to this stereotype and produce a work that shows how gorillas would actually 'romance' their mates, not by choosing one small, human but actually offering things that female gorillas want – like mate protection, resources, and food.

The idea first came to me when reading *Sex at Dawn* for class. On page 66 of the book, it states “Generally, a single dominant male occupies a range for his family unit composed of several females and young, adolescent males are forced out of the group [2].” Male gorillas usually happen upon a group of females, defended by another male. They fight, and whomever wins takes over the territory. This includes right of mates and often times, infanticide. The harem-type grouping pattern of mountain gorillas is hypothesized to provide protection for females against potentially infanticidal outsider males and represents a form of long-term mate guarding of females by males [6]. This means that though a male gorilla is technically 'in charge' of the harem, the females also play a role in protecting each other and their young.

Male gorillas are on average, are much larger than the females. A male gorilla could weigh up to four hundred pounds, while a female could be around one hundred. Though very large primates, the gorilla's penis is only an inch long and his testicles are barely the size of kidney beans [2]. Though they are polygamous, the gorillas have low sperm competition because there is only one dominant male in the group (disregarding baby males before adolescent stage [3].) It's a factor I took into account, on how these male gorillas, personified, would aim to woo their mates. They need to reassure the females they are capable males, able to provide and protect. If gorillas could write poems instead of beating their chests and roaring, it would be this project.

The gorilla moves from place to place, but is almost always found in the thickest part of the virgin forest. His migrations, if they can be so called, are probably determined by the food seasons [1]. The male gorilla will move if food is running low for it's harem, though it is extremely dangerous as it leaves the group open to other predators. It's another note I made when composing the poems, that the male gorillas are focused on defense and offense at all times.

I knew that I was planning on creating some form of mating poetry, but wasn't sure yet how to incorporate gorilla's actual mating behavior. I happened upon an info sheet [4] that filled me in on the multiple mating noises, calls, and grunts that gorillas make for communication. The ones I chose specifically to work with where the copulatory panting: This is a series of "o-o-o-o" sounds that are loud and low-pitched and the hoot series: This call is low-pitched and consists of a series of "hoo-hoo-hoos" [6]. I used this to keep rhythm in the poems I produced.

Another thing I took into consideration when forming the poems was the use of visual

stimuli as well. For example, a study shows that one-third of the copulations that occurred, in fact, were preceded by some portion of the adult male's impressive chest-beat display [5].

Lastly, I took great note to make sure that homosexual behavior did not occur within the harem. It does, to some level, but it is not a device that females use to attract the male. In fact, it was shown that the males would often attack the females, and then assert dominance by forced copulation afterwards [7]. Of course, because of the harem type and polygamous relationships in gorillas, I did not find anything on male/male pairings in gorillas. Due to their aggression against one another, it would not make sense.

Taking all these factors into mind, I created five 'love/mating' poems that a male gorilla could give to one in his harem to prove he is a worthy mate. It is suppose to be humorous and give a more realistic take on how gorillas actually mate (providing King Kong is a bit over the top).

Bibliography

1. Reade, W. Winwood. "The Habits of the Gorilla." *The American Naturalist* 1.4 (1867): 177-80. Print.

This text directly explained some of the habits found in the African Gorilla. Using this text, I was able to pull some information on the male gorilla's mating habits. It also discussed the aggression these animals have compared to each other when defending territories and mates. I took this into consideration when first beginning the project, though the source is very old, the information stayed the same throughout my other sources.

2. Ryan, Christopher, and Cacilda Jethá. *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality*. New York: Harper, 2010. Print.

I used this text, though in class, to pull the body dimorphism idea about gorillas and apply it within my final project. I also paid close attention to the gorilla's mating systems in this book, as well as the size ratio and duration of male/female copulations. I also found the harem explanation extremely beneficial.

3. Nunn, Charles, John Gittlemen, and Janis Antonovics. "Promiscuity and the Primate Immune System." *Science* 290.5494 (10 Nov. 2000): 1168-170. Print.

This text was a consistent source when backing up the claims of promiscuity in gorillas that *Sex at Dawn* first brought to my attention. It also backed up claims about the immune system of multiple-couple primates and how this close-rangeness of switching partners can in fact, build up a primate's defense. Though not directly relating (the immune system, not the promiscuity), I found this to be reinforcing of the polygamy found in my work.

4. "Gorilla (Gorilla Gorilla)." *Primates.com : Great Apes : Gorillas*. National Science Research Center, University of Wisconsin - Madison, n.d. Web. 07 Nov. 2013.
<<http://www.primates.com/gorillas/gorilla-info.html>>.

This website was particularly helpful when first approaching basing the poems off the sounds/calls that gorillas make. They also clearly defined the differences in western lowlands, eastern lowlands, and mountain gorillas and why such a distinct is important. On top of this, they also included a visual communication that I found lacking in other sources.

5. Nadler, Ronald D. "Sexual Initiation in Wild Mountain Gorillas." *International Journal of Primatology* 10.2 (1989): 81-92. Print.

Since I wanted to focus mostly on mountain gorillas, I found this article to be particularly interesting due to the fact it is an experiment done to test the levels of sexual intimacy during menstruation in gorillas. Also, I found that the description of the male's libido to be relevant to this project, and aggression towards females when copulating. Male gorillas are definitely not gentle 'lovers'.

6. Robbins, Martha M. "Male Mating Patterns in Wild Multi-Male Mountain Gorilla Groups." *Animal Behaviour* 57.5 (1999): 1013-020. Print.

This article speaks thoroughly of the dynamic and social structure of a gorilla harem that has multiple men, and what that means as far as sexual competition for mates as well as for food and territory. Seeing as how they are strictly polygamous creatures, I found this to be helpful when constructing what might be anti-project (ideas that go against my general conclusions made in the poems.)

7. Graham, Charles E. *Reproductive Biology of the Great Apes: Comparative and Biomedical Perspectives*. New York: Academic, 1981. Print.

This book directly laid out the sexual and social dynamic between a male gorilla and a female gorilla. It also added valuable information about mate competition (harem in this case) and also mate choice. It also touched on infanticide, which other sources did not mention at all (except for *Sex at Dawn*.)

G O R I L L A
L O V E P O E M S

By Jennifer Tripp

Not My Baby, Not My Problem

Your hair is dark like raven's wings
and tiny body that my heart sings
but that baby has got to leave
He's not mine, or so I believe

Yes he's cute with a button nose
and ten little fingers and toes
but that baby has got to go
I'm not the father, don't tell me so

In fact, these kids aren't mine at all
I never taught them to talk or play ball
so I think I will start a new
Let's kill these kids then make a few.



One of Many, But You Still Count

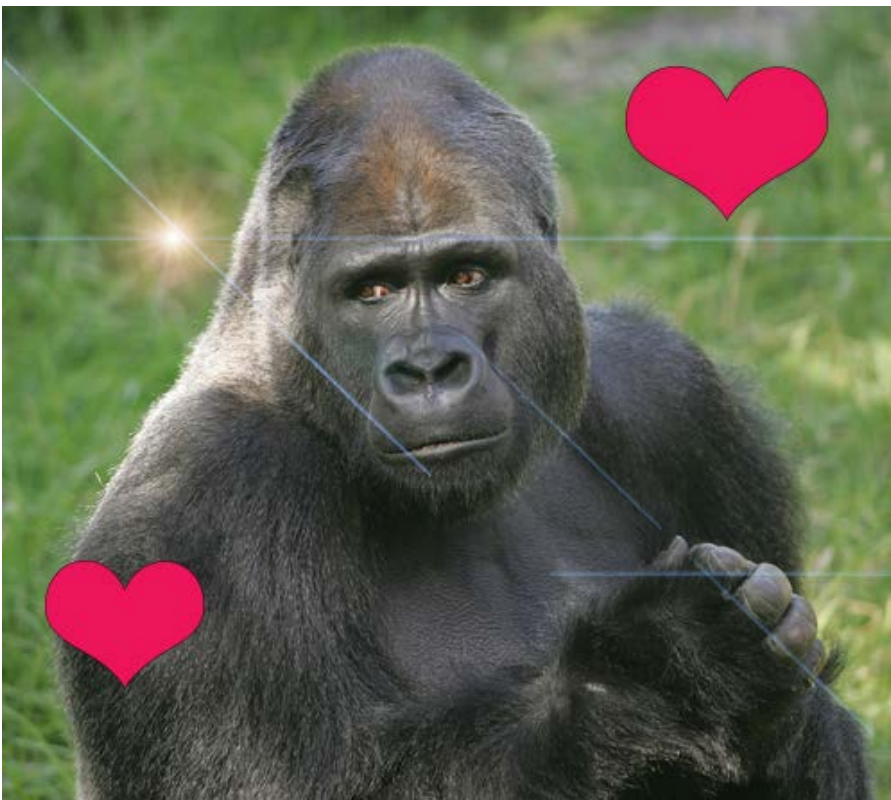
Yes I do have many females in which
I call my own, but all of them are
special in their own way, I'm informed

Harem life is great and in time you will see
that each of your sister wives help feed and
raise each other's multiple babies

It's not that one is better or I prefer
you over them, I just really want to
spread my genes as much as I really can

Remember this when I come back to town,
I only really want them over you, because
you're getting quite round

When you have my baby, then we can talk
though it may take some time, as you've
got to feed the tot



Why My Territory Is So Great

Look at this land that I defend
with plentiful leaves and stems

I've got fruit and shade and water
and lots of females and some daughters

Patrolling and guarding is what I do best
don't believe me, ask the rest

In fact, when all of our resources are through
I'll move to a better place, somewhere new

But don't despair, just join the team
Make me babies and I won't be mean

After all, this family is polygamy
made up of many yous and just one me

