

Inbreeding caused albinism of Barcelona's famous gorilla: study

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Copo de Nieve (Snowflake), an albino gorilla at the Barcelona zoo, on September 14, 2003. Inbreeding was the cause of the albinism of Snowflake, the only albino gorilla known to man which was a star attraction of the Barcelona zoo for decades, Spanish researchers said.

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The gorilla was captured in Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony, after hunters killed the rest of its clan and taken to the Barcelona zoo in 1966 where he lived until his death from [skin cancer](#) in 2003.

The gorilla was featured on postcards, mentioned in tourist guides and even featured on the cover of National Geographic magazine, becoming an unofficial mascot for the city and famous around the world.

Now researchers at Barcelona's Institute of [Evolutionary Biology](#) have concluded after carrying out genome sequencing on the remains of the gorilla that his [albinism](#) was caused by a mutation of the SLC45A2 gene which was transmitted to him by both parents.

"Genes causing albinism are recessive. That is, to be albino, you have to have the two chromosomes with the mutation for albinism," Tomas Marques, the director of the team that carried out the study presented Wednesday at the Barcelona zoo, told AFP by telephone.

Snowflake's grandfather probably carried the recessive albino genes, he said. Then two of his descendents probably paired off—a rare case where an animal receives two recessive albino genes, one from each parent—and the result was Snowflake, an albino gorilla.

The researches have also published their study of the [genome sequence](#) of the famous albino gorilla in the journal *BMC Genomics*.

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