

Wild mountain gorillas found to play in water like humans

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A team of researchers from Kyoto University, Primate Cognition Research Group and Conservation through Public Health, has found that wild mountain gorillas living in Uganda play very much like humans

when having fun in the water. In their paper published in the journal *Primates*, the group describes three episodes they observed of solitary gorillas splashing around in water.

There have been numerous instances of animals playing around in water, apparently for no other reason enjoyment—dogs are just one example. Also, prior researchers in Africa and in some zoos have seen lowland [gorillas](#) playing in water. But this new effort marks the first time that the behavior has been seen in wild mountain gorillas.

The researchers report that the first instance of water play was observed by one of the team members—a 15-year-old male mountain gorilla was digging his hands and arms into the water and moving them back and forth. In a second episode, the team observed a nine-year-old female having even more fun. She crouched right down to the water and shoved her hands in and carried out sweeping and rotating movements—actually splashing the water around in front of her. And while the first instance with the male lasted for less than a minute, the female in the second episode carried on with her water play for approximately 17 minutes. The researchers report that she was joined in her fun by another female for a few minutes—and she also made facial expressions of gorilla happiness just by playing in the water. So rigorous was her play that she wound up wet from head to toe. In a third instance, a male was observed rotating his arms as he moved them across the surface of the water.

The researchers note that their observations mark a rare occurrence—wild animals having fun and playing by themselves. Most often, fun in the wild is a social activity. They suggest that the [water](#) play by the gorillas is likely just for fun—but it might also be a form of exercise, allowing the animals to have a little recreation as they keep themselves toned.

More information: Raquel Costa et al. Water games by mountain gorillas: implications for behavioral development and flexibility—a case report, *Primates* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s10329-019-00749-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10329-019-00749-6)

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