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FACTSHEET

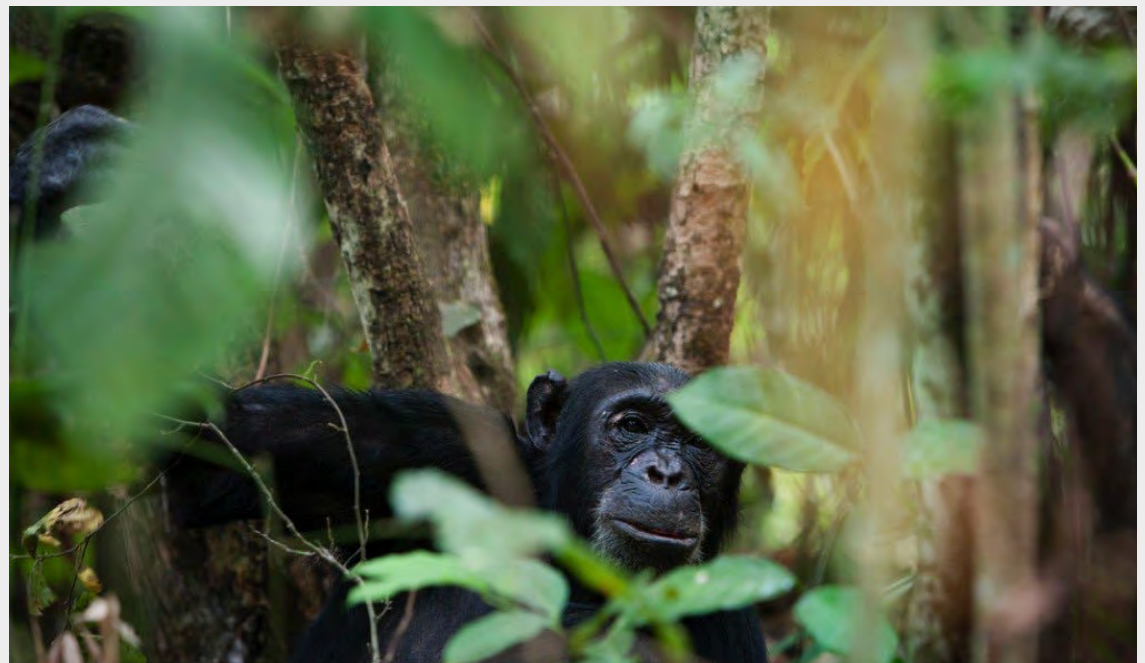
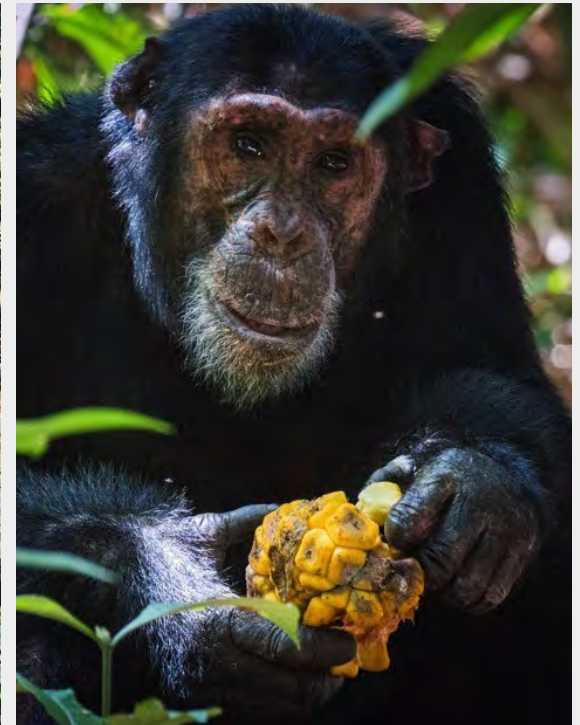
Chimping through the seasons

Greystoke, Mahale

The Mimikere (M) Group chimpanzee community in the Mahale Mountains covers a home range of around 15 square miles and are our closest neighbours at Greystoke, Mahale.

Throughout the year the movement and location of the chimps vary according to where they can find food. Chimpanzees are naturally gregarious, so when food sources are abundant, they'll gather in large groups frequently calling to each other and making a lot of noise. When food resources are lower, they tend to split up into small groups and can be harder to find as they spread further afield, and are generally less vocal. So, their proximity to camp and the ease of getting to them is to some degree dictated by the seasons, and the knock-on effect on the forest larder.

Fluctuations of available food are not entirely dependable year by year, so of course the following general guide is by no means definite but it should help to understand what to expect while you are at Greystoke.





JUNE/EARLY JULY

The start of the dry season and the most challenging time for trekking to see the chimps. A main source of fruit are the bunches of tiny *Canthium Vulgare* (wild coffee) fruit, and the more succulent Mohororo fig. Both of these species are found in the higher reaches of the mountains in the east of their home range, which can be a tough, long trek from camp.

JULY/AUGUST

Various fruits become more abundant in the lower ranges of the mountains and the chimps tend to start sporadic forays down onto the lower slopes, often with small groups of males leading the way. It is this time of the year that they also tend to supplement their diet with a bit of hard protein in the form of Red Colobus monkeys and seeing a hunt is very exciting. Figs and lemons are a favourite, and can result in large numbers of the group congregating in areas an easy hour and a half walk from camp.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

This is one of the best times to see the chimps and trekking can be relatively easy. The chimps rarely head high to the eastern hills but often spend days in the northern reaches of their home range seeking out the wild nutmeg and Kasolyo Granite *Garcinia* and Buhono fruits. They can from time to time head for odd days into the almost impenetrable steep southern hills but rarely spend more than a day or two there before returning to the lowlands.

NOVEMBER

The onset of the rains coincides with less abundant fruit and the chimps diet is comprised mainly of leaves and pith of plants such as the wild ginger. The group generally spreads more thinly in search of food, but are still often found in larger groups generally in the lower reaches of the mountains and trekking is not too difficult.

DECEMBER TO MARCH

The green season offers varied viewing, although the forest is at its resplendent best, full of butterflies and wild flowers. It's a photographer's dream, as the haze which is often prevalent during other times of the year, is gone, leaving the air clear and bright. The chimps continue to feed mainly on grasses, leaves and whatever fruit they can find, though the lowland Ilombo vine fruit comes into its own in December attracting big chimp parties. Their daytime siestas tend to take place in tree nests rather than on the ground and the meetings between group members are theatrical and impressive. The lake is clearest in these months often with breathtaking views of the mountains of the Congo in the distance. February can be especially hard to locate the chimps as they follow their primary food source into the higher reaches and thicker parts of the forest so be prepared for more challenging trekking.

APRIL/MAY

Tends to be wet and the camp closes during this time as it does rain quite a bit each day, making trekking difficult. However, the staff who remain in camp during this time, are often treated to groups of chimps attending loud and cheerful 'banquets' in nearby trees, as the fruit of the Mkibu tree comes into its own attracting large groups who hang about in them.