

Species die out at a rapid rate

Apes

THE great apes - chimpanzees, bonobos, orang-utans, gorillas and humans - share 97 per cent of their DNA.

But unlike humans, chimps, bonobos, orang-utans and gorillas face serious threats and are endangered, some critically.

Deforestation, climate change, infectious disease and illegal hunting have pushed their populations to the brink of extinction.

Found mainly in central Africa with the exception of orang-utans, which are native to the islands of Borneo and Sumatra in Asia, the animals have been the subject of intense research because of their similarities to humans.

As yet, no amount of research has been able to halt the devastation to their populations.

Land clearing and hunting are estimated to have caused the gorilla population, made famous by the highly publicised research

efforts of Dian Fossey in the 1970s and '80s, to decline by more than 60 per cent over the past 20 to 25 years, according to the IUCN.

"Under the most optimistic scenarios, population recovery would require in the order of 75 years," the IUCN says.

"Much sooner, perhaps 20 to 30 years into the future, habitat loss and degradation from agriculture, timber extraction, mining and possibly climate change will become a major threat."

Statistics like this have prompted hundreds of organisations, including the United Nations Environment Programme, to dedicate tens of millions of dollars to fight for the great apes' survival.

But for these incredible animals, time is of the essence.

