

## LIFE

# Gorilla uses tool to plumb the depths

5 October 2005

ONLY a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet. And gorillas are no fools, it seems. This lowland gorilla is using a metre-long stick to cautiously test the depth of water as she wades into a swampy pool.

"It was exactly how you or I might have tested the depth of the water," says Thomas Breuer of the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society. Breuer has been studying the gorillas in the Republic of the Congo's Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park since 1995.

While gorillas in captivity have been spotted throwing objects and using sticks to extract food, it is the first time tool use has been observed in wild gorillas in over 40 years of modern scientific study (*Public Library of Science Biology*, DOI: 10.1371/journal.pbio.0030380). And experts say that this behaviour differs from the tool use previously observed in great apes.

"Most great-ape tool use is based around the retrieval of food," says Gillian Sebestyen-Forrester, who studies gorilla communication at the University of Sussex, UK. "But the gorillas have understood that they can extend their sensory experience and find out more about their environment by physically extending their bodies with an inanimate object. This suggests that the gorilla is capable of some mental calculation and abstract thought."

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**Topics:** Life