



digit news

saving the world's last gorillas

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the gorilla organization

Celebrating a decade of community conservation



Children enjoying the celebrations in Rwanda to mark ten years of successful community conservation

On 29 November the Gorilla Organization celebrated a decade of community conservation ...and it certainly had something to smile about!

The Gorilla Organization has always understood that if gorillas are to have a realistic chance of survival in the context of Africa's other significant challenges, conservation needs to be in the hands of local communities.

A wealth of knowledge can be gathered from local people, who not only have an innate understanding of their surroundings but

Winning picture from the community conservation art competition



also share the gorillas' environment and have a significant impact on their long-term future.

Which is why, ten years ago, the Gorilla Organization carried out surveys in the communities around the gorilla habitat in Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo, with the aim of establishing the main threats to the gorillas' survival. In doing so it identified ways to work with local communities rather than against them.

The surveys revealed that if the local people were to help the protection of the gorillas and their habitat there were some vital things they needed access to outside the national park – including water, wood and a source of income.

So the Gorilla Organization worked with the communities to provide alternatives to the forest's resources. During the last ten years it has provided over 33,000 people with fresh water outside the national park; planted over four

million trees in the forest's buffer zone; provided conservation education to more than 200,000 children; and trained 5,000 farmers in sustainable organic farming.

Ten years on, these achievements are worth celebrating. On 29 November, events took place throughout the region in Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo. Songs were produced and performed by local communities; radio broadcasts took place; and an anniversary calendar was produced with the winning entries from a conservation themed art competition.

Perhaps most importantly, there was an overwhelming sense of gratitude and hope surrounding the celebrations. With experience under its belt and many lessons learned, the Gorilla Organization looks forward to the decade ahead, and thanks its African staff, partners, local communities and valuable supporters for helping make this possible.



Virungas update

In July 2007 a gruesome massacre in the Virungas National Park, which saw at least five Mountain gorillas lose their lives, captured the attention of the international media.

At the time it was unclear who was responsible for these atrocious attacks and as *Digit News* goes to press this uncertainty is still not resolved. The judicial proceedings are under way and two people are being questioned in Goma, DRC. However, the investigation's progress is being hampered by the current occupation of the gorilla sector of the national park by soldiers.

Rebels took control of this area of the park at the beginning of September. The soldiers invaded two ranger patrol posts, forcing them to evacuate. Since then, the 73 gorillas remain largely unprotected. However, on two occasions since the attack, ranger patrols have been allowed to take place: it appears as if the gorillas have not been affected by the rebel invasion.

The attacks on rangers and the loss of Mountain gorillas this year are devastating set backs to gorilla conservation. A United Nations fact-finding mission, commissioned in response to the recent disruption, stressed the importance of including local communities in efforts to protect the gorillas and as such the Gorilla Organization is well placed to implement the plans and move gorilla conservation forward.



Some people will do anything for a gorilla

Great Gorilla Run takes San Francisco by storm

The first San Francisco Great Gorilla Run, which took place in June, was met with an ecstatic reception from the people of San Francisco.

Hundreds formed a river of fur, which twisted through the beautiful Golden Gate Park amidst the flashing of cameras and whooping of supporters.

Sponsored by the Onion news site and with coverage from the press and broadcast throughout San Francisco and California, the Gorilla Organization made the most of a fantastic opportunity to spread the word of gorilla conservation in America.

Look out for next year's San Francisco run on June 8.



Recycle your old mobile phone

FoneAid will donate £3 for every mobile phone recycled for the Gorilla Organization. If you have an old handset please send it to the Gorilla Organization, 110 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1 8HX.

Could you be a Charity Champion?

Could your company sponsor an event or a project – or perhaps it has a Charity of the Year scheme? If you are interested in making a case to your company on why it should support the Gorilla Organization and the mutual benefits of getting involved, please call us on 020 7483 2681 or email info@gorillas.org

Fundraising news in brief



We are grateful to everyone who has supported us during 2007 with their wonderful gifts or by taking part in our events. In particular we'd like to mention...

- our public collections team who have braved all weathers to raise over £3,000
- our festivals team who pulled pints in the mud at Glastonbury and collected money as gorillas at Bestival – you raised over £2,000
- Caroline McHardy, age 8, who held a very successful cake sale and to Lauren Hollas who traded in gifts at her fancy dress birthday for donations to the gorillas
- Finally, our wonderful office volunteers who provide us with round the year administrative support – in particular Linda and Graham – we don't know what we would do without you!

The gorillas keep on coming!

On a warm sunny September morning, a stampede of gorilla-suited runners took to the streets of London in aid of the Gorilla Organization. This was the fifth London Great Gorilla Run and it was a huge success.

Hundreds of runners took part and tackled the 7km course to raise valuable funds for the Gorilla Organization's conservation projects in central Africa.

TV presenter Bill Oddie was a

fantastic host, starting the race and presenting the gorilla runners with their medals at the finish line.

Cricketer Phil Tufnell was challenged by runner Colin Jackson to run in his gorilla suit as part of BBC1's the One Show; and Cadbury's Dairy Milk supported the event as part of their drumming gorilla advertising campaign.

We achieved a whole host of press, radio and TV coverage

including the BBC, CNN, and the Telegraph to name just a few.

So far we have raised over £200,000, so a huge thank you to all the runners, sponsors, volunteers and supporters for making this great event better than ever.

For information about the Great Gorilla Run London 2008 go to www.gorillas.org/greatgorillarun or contact Sam on 020 7483 2681.



Great gorilla runners get ready to go at the start of the 2007 Great Gorilla Run in London on 22 September

Murder during rebel attack

Trials and tribulations at Mt Tshiaberimu

In the last edition of *Digit News* the Gorilla Organization reported on the tenth anniversary of its Mt Tshiaberimu Conservation Project.

The anniversary celebrated the steady growth of the isolated population of gorillas, which now rests at 21, up from 16 – and the involvement of local communities in protecting this fragile ecosystem.

Sadly, just days later on 20 May, rebels attacked two ranger patrol posts on Mt Tshiaberimu, killing WWF conservation agent, Nicolas Mbusa Viranzire, and injuring several others. They took hostages and looted everything.

The Gorilla Organization's community relations officer, Jean de Dieu Vhosi and ranger Kambale Mulonda were shot in the leg; Alain Mali, a student from a local university, was shot twice in the shoulder and one of the project's

top rangers, Kataps, lost his baby and wife, Katungu, during childbirth after she went into shock the following day.

The Gorilla Organization's project manager, Jean Claude Kyungu, worked under terrible duress to manage the situation: sheltering effected families in his home and working day and night with the authorities to get to the bottom of the attack and restore the project.

Top-level support

Immediately after the attacks, the Gorilla Organization secured top-level support from MONUC, the United Nations peacekeeping force in Congo, who gave it their assurance that they could evacuate staff at short notice if necessary.

The organisation worked closely with the Congolese army and wildlife authority (ICCN) to



The precious Mt Tshiaberimu gorillas were thankfully unaffected by the attacks

apprehend those involved, and restore security on the mountain. Six rebels were apprehended – they said they had come to claim the forest for the poor farmers, a promise illegally made to them by a newly elected politician during campaigning.

The Gorilla Organization also launched an emergency appeal which enabled it to pay medical costs for post-traumatic stress, and replace equipment and supplies.

In the long-term, the emergency funds have allowed the organisation to facilitate conflict

resolution activities to help it re-establish the integrity of this protected area and restore conservation activities.

This work continues, and while it was slightly hampered by the conflict in the southern sector of the Virungas, rebels left the Mt Tshiaberimu area in early November and the Gorilla Organization remains positive that it can further strengthen the involvement of the local communities and protect this precious gorilla population from extinction.

Football for the environment

World Environment Day, established by the United Nations in 1972, is celebrated in June all over the world.

The day gives a human face to environmental issues and promotes an understanding that communities are pivotal to changing attitudes towards the environment. It is a day that gives the Gorilla Organization the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to local communities.

This year, the Gorilla Organization launched a football tournament around the southern sector of the Virunga National

Park, Democratic Republic of Congo in celebration of World Environment Day. The tournament traveled through the communities living around the gorilla habitat for four weeks and engaged over 60,000 people with gorilla conservation.

Nine teams took part and the atmosphere was electric. FC Okapi de Kiwanja won the girls tournament, followed closely by FC Tylapia de Rubare. In the boys tournament, FC Mawingu de Rubare took second place while FC Vijana de Bunagana were crowned champions.

Football captures the attention of the majority of the population in this area – often the first question you are asked is “what team do you support?” and there are very few people who do not enjoy either playing or watching.



Winning boys team from tournament

The local communities are hugely important to the gorillas – they are the ones who can prevent the degradation of the forest and keep the gorillas from extinction. But the local communities also benefit greatly from the gorillas.

Careful development of the region is the best way to conserve the gorillas' forest, and while the gorillas remain in their country, international NGOs and carefully managed tourism will continue to bring prospects to the region. The football tournament reinforced this message.



Emmanuel Buggingo, the Gorilla Organization's Rwanda programme manager, reports on some pleasing results.

A recent visit to the Gorilla Organization funded water cistern at Gitaraga primary school (as reported in Issue 30) on the edge of the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, revealed some rather unexpected and surprising results.

Traditionally, the primary school children spent the first hour of their school day collecting water from the national park – a dangerous and time-consuming experience. But since the cistern

was built in March 2006, the time spent by pupils collecting water has reduced so considerably that the school has adopted a new timetable, allowing pupils to spend an extra hour and a half a day in lessons.

This has had a huge impact on the pupils and the school, which has now been rated first in the district and 18th in the country, following an outstanding set of results during the last exam period.

According to one of the senior teachers at the school, 51 out of 71 pupils passed this year, compared to 41 who passed the previous year before the water cistern was installed.

The system provides water for more than 1,500 people from the local communities, Gitaraga primary school hopes to be able to extend its guttering in the future so they can collect more water during drier spells.

The Gorilla Organization
110 Gloucester Avenue
London NW1 8HX
Tel: 020 7483 2681
Fax: 020 7722 0928
info@gorillas.org
www.gorillas.org
Reg. Charity No. 1117131

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Directors: Greg Cummings,
Jillian Miller

Digit News:

Editor: Jillian Miller

Contributors: Sam Davies,
Abi Girling, Melanie Reed

Photographs: James Aven,
Dan Bucknell, Polly Phillipson,
Tuver Wundi

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Gorilla naming ceremony

On 30 June 2007, some of the Gorilla Organization team joined the Rwandan President and thousands from the local community for the third annual gorilla naming ceremony in Rwanda, to name 23 mountain gorillas from the Volcanoes National Park.

The theme of the 'Kwita Izina' ceremony was 'caring for wildlife concerns us all', and celebrated the work of all those who contribute to wildlife welfare and conservation in Rwanda. Hosted by the Rwanda Office of Tourism and National Parks (ORTPN) in Kinigi, Musanze district, this high profile event is steeped in Rwandan tradition and was attended by over 100 key international personalities.

Among those naming the gorillas in this year's ceremony was Hollywood star Natalie Portman. She named one of the infant gorillas from the 'Group 13' family with the name Gukina, which means 'play' in the local Rwandan language, Kinyarwanda. A gorilla was also named in honour of Steve Irwin, the late Australian naturalist, by a friend of his family.



Traditional Rwandan dancers at Kwita Izina ceremony

The gorilla was named Ingufu Steve Irwin, which means 'strength and energy of Steve Irwin'.

Rangers have been naming baby gorillas in ceremonies for the last two decades, but it is only since 2005 that the ORTPN launched the official gorilla naming ceremony as an international event.

Aimed at ensuring the future of the Mountain gorillas, the

ceremony was re-branded earlier this year as 'Kwita Izina', which means 'to give a name' in the Kinyarwanda language. It is a cherished Rwandan tradition used to name every new-born baby, and the entire Rwandan community found it pertinent to extend the 'Kwita Izina' ceremony to the precious Mountain gorilla population.

Digit News is changing

Following the launch of our new logo last year, this edition of *Digit News* has been updated to reflect the new look.

The masthead has been refreshed with a new illustration of Dian Fossey's favourite gorilla, Digit, drawn beautifully by Joel Kirk from a photograph taken by Richard Wrangham.

We hope you like the new look which we will be changing gradually in 2008. Do let us know what you think of it?



Gorilla Agreement signed by nine African countries

On Friday 26 October, the Gorilla Organization signed the 'Paris Agreement on the Conservation of Gorillas and their Habitat', also known as the 'Gorilla Agreement'.

The Gorilla Organization is truly excited about this treaty, which for the first time in history provides governments from the African range states, as well as other governments and organisations involved, with a legal framework that will reinforce and integrate conservation efforts.

While the Kinshasa Declaration signed in 2005 took great steps to protect primates, it did not have any legal standing, but this time countries will be legally obligated to act in a coordinated manner against threats to the largest of the great ape species. The agreement specifies efforts that

governments need to undertake and to collaborate on, including supporting law enforcement and building capacity in the legal and judicial areas.

Triggered by the slaughter of Mountain gorillas earlier in the year, the agreement was prepared by the UNEP Convention on



Signing of the Gorilla Agreement

Migratory Species, with its partners in the Great Ape Survival Project Partnership (GRASP) and the French government.

Representatives from international NGOs, governments and international agencies gathered in Paris. The agreement was endorsed by ministers from nine African countries, Central African Republic, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Cameroon, and Gabon. Rwanda was unfortunately unable to attend.

This is a major conservation achievement, which will boost protection for wild gorillas and the Gorilla Organization looks forward to working with local governments and communities to help make the Gorilla Agreement a reality.

THANK YOU

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