



# digit saving the world's last gorillas

# news

issue 33 spring 2008

the gorilla organization

## Gorilla deaths spark fears at Mt Tshiaberimu



The remaining 19 gorillas at Mt Tshiaberimu are extremely vulnerable

Tshiaberimu, a stunning area in the northern annex of the Virunga National Park, DR Congo, has long been an area of scientific interest. It is a remote island of forest, isolated from the rest of the Virungas by vast savannah and is home to a very rare population of gorillas. Despite conservation success in this area – which has seen the tiny group of gorillas grow from just 16 individuals to a more positive 21 – the population's future has been flung into uncertainty as a deadly illness threatens one of the main gorilla groups.

### Devastating

On Saturday 10 May, Molo, an adult female from the Kipura group was found dead, just 13 weeks after the death of Mughole, another adult female from the same group. These two devastating losses leave just 19 gorillas at Mt Tshiaberimu and worryingly few breeding females.

Following their discovery, the bodies were carried to the

outskirts of the park, where on both occasions, vets were able to carry out autopsies.

The autopsies revealed that both gorillas had suffered from high parasite loads, which, although not unusual in wild gorillas, may have weakened their immune systems. However, it is widely thought that the parasites could not have caused their death.

Uncovering the cause of death remains a priority for the Gorilla Organization, which manages the Mt Tshiaberimu conservation project in collaboration with the Congolese wildlife authority.

Veterinary experts are being consulted and tissue samples from the two gorillas are being analysed. In the meantime emergency precautions have been put in place and further health monitoring procedures are being developed in the area.

While everything humanly possible is being done to ensure the safety of the remaining gorilla

population, the reality of the situation is that two breeding females have been lost. Both Molo and Mughole had produced offspring in the last five years, and whilst Mughole's baby was killed during an interaction between two silverbacks, these two females were nonetheless partly responsible for the population growth that has been seen over the past 11 years.

### Conservation

The population's tiny size and loss of females leaves it extremely vulnerable, but hope exists in the remaining females and a generation of youngsters who are yet to reach sexual maturity.

The Mt Tshiaberimu gorillas have been brought back from the brink before, and they can again. Protecting their habitat and minimising the threat of disease will be crucial, but if their conservation is managed correctly there is every hope they can survive.



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### Virungas update

For eastern DR Congo, 2008 started positively. During the afternoon of 23 January a peace agreement was signed in Goma by the government and a number of armed rebel groups, which indicated the end of ongoing fighting in the Virunga National Park. The agreement was received with much excitement by gorilla conservationists who, for the first time in months, looked forward to resuming normal gorilla monitoring activities inside the park.

Sadly, in this politically unstable area, peace is still some way off and rebels maintain control of a number of the ranger patrol posts, preventing the majority of gorilla monitoring activities from taking place.

The investigation and trial into the gorilla massacre which captured the attention of the international media last year continues, and in early 2008 the first judgements were made. Eight individuals have been charged and fined for slaughtering the gorillas and a further 15 have been charged with other offences that have caused destruction to the flora and fauna of the national park.

Elephant poaching has long been a problem in the national park, but April 2008 saw a significant hike in the death toll as 13 elephants were killed in 13 days. As slow breeders, this has grave consequences for the elephant population and also for the ecosystem of the forest as a whole.

If this was not enough, illegal charcoal burning inside the national park continues to cause great destruction to the habitat. Ranger patrol teams do all they can to prevent this activity, but with much of the national park still occupied by rebels there is only so much they can do.



# Some people will do anything for a gorilla

## The gorillas are running

You don't need to spend too long in London now before you see a gorilla running through the streets – a person in a gorilla suit that is!

Gorilla Organization supporters have been doing the gorillas proud by taking part in some of London's most famous running events.

### Well done

In April, Mariah Mandelman, Paul Cuddeford, Viv Jeffery and Nicola Gardner successfully completed all 26 miles of the London Marathon and are set to raise a fantastic £6,000 for the Gorilla Organization's projects. A special well done to Mariah who also ran for the Gorilla Organization last

year and set a new personal best, crossing the finish line in just over 3 hours – phwoar!

### Congratulations

A big congratulations to Nicky Baker, Gordon Elliott, James Timson, David Milne and Gill Harrison who took part in the first ever London 10k run wearing our signature gorilla suits. Despite the miserable May showers, spirits were running high and onlookers were thrilled to see very furry gorillas running by!

The Gorilla Organization has 15 places in next year's run so if you are keen to be part of the gorilla team get in touch with Sam at [sam@gorillas.org](mailto:sam@gorillas.org).



James Timson and Nicky Baker – two of the first ever gorilla-suited 10K runners!

## Gorillas take to the streets

The Gorilla Organization's Public Collection Team has done a fantastic job already this year, having raised over £4,000 for gorilla conservation. It is not an easy task, standing for hours (often in the cold) with a collection tin in hand, and it can be very frustrating watching people walk past with their heads down. But this dedicated team certainly seems to have the knack of getting people to dig deep into their pockets for the gorillas.

## Blackpool Zoo's gorilla weekend



A big thank you to Yvette Foulds at Blackpool Zoo who organised a very special Gorilla Weekend over the May bank holiday.

Yvette dressed and behaved as a gorilla for two days to raise money and awareness of the plight of the gorillas in the wild. Blackpool Zoo has four adult gorillas in residence, living on their very own award-winning mountain.

Yvette dressed as a gorilla demonstrating gorilla behaviour to young onlookers

### Events coming soon

- July 6 – Gorilla Abseil, Kings College Hospital, London
- July 5/6 – Gorillas at the Hop Farm festival, Kent
- July 18-20 – Gorillas at Latitude festival, Suffolk
- August 23-24 – Metro Weekender Clapham Common, London
- September 6/7 – Proms in the Park, London
- September 27 – Great Gorilla Run 2008, London
- September 27 – Great Gorilla Run after party, London
- October 13-22 October – Great Gorilla Challenge 2008, Uganda

For more information on any of the above events visit [www.greatgorillas.org](http://www.greatgorillas.org)

## West Yorkshire gorilla bash

Many thanks to the Gorilla Organization's fabulous regional fundraiser Dee Newton (pictured below) for organising a fantastic



event in Keighley, West Yorkshire. Over 100 guests enjoyed the fancy dress party with live band and raffle, raising £900

for the gorillas. Dee has shown what a huge impact one person can have and helped highlight the threats to the world's last remaining gorillas.

Dee would like to thank all the friends, family and local businesses who supported the event and contributed so kindly to the raffle. A special thank you to Sir David Attenborough who signed a copy of his book 'Life on Air', for a raffle prize, which helped make Dee's fundraising event a success!



Guests in fancy dress

# Saving the Cross River gorilla

Cross River gorillas are Africa's rarest great ape. There are fewer than 300 individuals remaining, inhabiting the mountainous landscape that straddles the border between Nigeria and Cameroon. Until the late 1960s Cross river gorillas were thought to be extinct – wiped out by hunting and the war in Nigeria. But this very precious sub-species of gorilla has persisted, protected by their relatively inaccessible habitat.

Despite their rediscovery during the 1980s very little is known about the Cross River gorilla and very few photos exist of this elusive ape. What is clear is that their habitat is being further eroded as a result of increased human activity and their long-term survival is dependent on urgent conservation action.

At the end of last year the Gorilla Organization joined forces with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to fund the Cross River gorilla project on Kagwene mountain in western Cameroon. In 2002 the presence of around 20 Cross River gorillas was

confirmed in this area and work began to help understand more about this gorilla sub-species and how it could be protected.

## Developed

A basic research camp was constructed and a team of research assistants were recruited from some of the local villages surrounding Kagwene mountain. The team's skills in tracking and interpreting gorilla behaviour were developed, and they concentrated on tracking the Kagwene gorillas and recording information related to their daily habits. From this early stage, a clear decision was made to avoid contact with the gorillas as much as possible in order to avoid risks associated with habituating them to humans – a principal that is still maintained today.

Alongside gorilla tracking, conservation education activities were introduced in some of the local communities and discussions began with the Cameroonian government to gain 'protected area' status for Kagwene mountain. This recognition was finally

**Fewer than 300 Cross River gorillas remain in the wild**

granted on 3 April 2008 and Kagwene mountain officially became the world's first sanctuary for Cross River gorillas.

During the last few months the Gorilla Organization has introduced a number of improvements to the project to help develop monitoring and reporting activities. Boots and waterproofs have been supplied to the trackers, and notebooks and GPS units have been made available to help them with their daily work. In addition a solar panel has been installed at the research camp and a laptop has

been provided to allow for the data collected by the monitoring team to be recorded and analysed on site.

## Future

While Cross River gorilla numbers remain critical we are learning more and more about the sub-species each day, and getting closer and closer to understanding how we can protect them long into the future.

The more we can learn about this sub-species the more hope we have of preventing their extinction ... again.



## Volcano tourism to benefit gorillas

**By Tuver Wundi, GO Communications Manager in DR Congo**

Nyiragongo volcano stands on the edge of the Virunga National Park, towering over the city of Goma in eastern DR Congo. At night a stunning red glow radiates from the crater, acting as a stark reminder of the catastrophe that happened here six years ago.

On 17 January 2002 Nyiragongo volcano erupted, leaving in its path a wake of destruction, that can still be seen in Goma to this day. With it the volcano took a number of lives and left the Gorilla

Organization's Goma resource centre buried. Six years on and Nyiragongo volcano is giving something back to Goma and to gorilla conservation, as plans are made to open the volcano as a tourist attraction.

## Expedition

While the volcanic activity inside the crater of Nyiragongo volcano is still intense, volcanologists have confirmed that the volcano does not present any danger to the town of Goma or the surrounding area, and in March this year the Gorilla Organization joined the Congolese wildlife authority (ICCN) on a preliminary expedition to the summit.

A well organised and safe trip to the volcano will provide a once in a lifetime experience for visitors, and as a tourist attraction the volcano will bring much needed income and employment to the communities living around the Virunga National Park, home to some of the world's last remaining Mountain gorillas.

With little opportunity to

# From Essex to Uganda

The first few months of 2008 saw the launch of a brand new Gorilla Organization school twinning programme.

Students from Wickford Junior school in Essex have made links with Wildlife Club members from Mutolere primary school in Uganda.

The Essex-based students have written to their new pen friends with news of school life in the UK, and were extremely excited to receive letters back from their counterparts in Uganda. Wildlife clubs have an important

role to play in gorilla conservation in Uganda – students are taught about wildlife and conservation and are given simple tips on saving their environment.

## School twinning

The new school twinning programme promotes the sharing of conservation knowledge through the next generation of leaders and brings gorillas to the forefront of young minds.

If you are interested in finding out more please contact Sam at sam@gorillas.org

generate income, local people in this area rely heavily on the gorilla national park for resources, an activity that is sadly destroying the gorilla habitat.

The evolution of Nyiragongo as a tourist attraction will help with the development of the area and reduce the destruction to the Virunga National Park.



Wundi in the edge of the crater

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**DTP:** Column Communications Ltd

**Printing:** Emmerson Press

# Sustainable conservation

The Gorilla Organization believes that if gorillas are to survive in the long-term then conservation needs to be owned and managed by local African people. As a result we have always employed local staff to work on our African projects and made it our mission to establish gorilla conservation projects that will, over time, become self sufficient and build the capacity of local people. Conservation projects that stand alone are sustainable in the long term and will give the gorillas the best possible chance of survival ... and allow the Gorilla Organization to expand its programme further throughout the gorilla ranges.

This will not happen overnight – it is a long-term approach to conservation – but the Gorilla Organization is thrilled to report that it is taking great strides to get there. Emmanuel Busingo, the Gorilla Organization's Rwanda programme manger, has formed an agreement with the Rwanda Environment Management Authority, a local organisation managing the Protected Areas and Biodiversity project that is being



Women tending their field on the edge of Volcanoes National Park

funded by UNDP/Global Environment Facility.

## Managed

This is the first time that funding has been secured and managed directly in Rwanda and will support part of the Gorilla Organization's Rwandan field programme. Four water cisterns

will be constructed to provide communities with fresh water outside of the park, 446 firewood saving stoves will be introduced to reduce consumption of firewood by up to 60% and three tree nurseries will be established to grow trees for the national park's buffer zone.

## Farewell to our friends

For any organisation with a great number of passionate followers there are always sad goodbyes. But the last few months have been somewhat of an exception and it is with great sadness that we say goodbye to some very remarkable people from the Gorilla Organization's past.

It is with honour and sorrow that the Gorilla Organization said goodbye to Alexandre Wathaut, the director of the Virungas National Park in DR Congo when he died on 10 June 2008.

Wathaut began his career with the ICCN in 1971 and rose to the rank of director in 2005. He had been a great supporter of the Gorilla Organization and will be sadly missed. Henry Cirhuza, the Gorilla Organization's Congolese manager, said, "Wathaut was a

great listener and a great partner to the Gorilla Organization". On the sheaf of flowers laid by the Gorilla Organization at his funeral the words read, "we will never forget you". Sir Arthur C Clark, one of the Gorilla Organization's founding patrons passed away on 19 March after a long fight with post-polio syndrome. He gave so much of his time, inspiration, introductions and money to ensure that the gorillas had a future – he will be sadly missed.

Gorilla Organization Trustee, Eckart Wintzen, 64, also passed away on 21 March, following a heart attack. Eckart became a Trustee after visiting the Mountain gorillas in Uganda in 1997 and worked tirelessly for their protection ever since. As an industrialist he believed firms

should account for the *environmental* cost of their products and as an environmentalist he did everything he could to preserve the earth for future generations.

Dr Moyini, the former chairman of the Uganda Wildlife Authority died during the morning of 17 February. Dr Moyini was one of our greatest, and first, fans in Africa. He, more than anyone, grasped the point of our community approach to conservation and championed us and our work at every opportunity.

On 29 May 2008, the Gorilla Organization's Emmanuel Busingo handed over a brand new vehicle to Rosette Rugamba of the Rwandan wildlife authority (ORTPN), to support its work protecting Rwanda's endangered Mountain gorillas.



## Amy update

Earlier this year, the family of our adopted gorilla, Amy, left Rwanda and crossed into neighboring DR Congo. Amy herself was not with the group at the time having wandered alone (or possibly with the silverback Nyakarima). Thankfully Amy's family have returned to the much safer grounds of Rwanda, and the Gorilla Organization has just heard that Amy has rejoined them! A fuller update will be sent out to Amy's adoptive parents later this year.

To find out more about adopting Amy please visit [www.gorillas.org](http://www.gorillas.org) or call our hotline 0870 241 0643.

## THANK YOU

We would like to say a big thank you to...

Phoebe Kelner, Susie Murray, Mike McCarthy, Paul Valley, CGMK Foundation, Gerald Slocock & Dennis Gould Foundation, Colin Campbell Williams & Williams Serendipity Trust, Graham Norton, Longleat Safari Park, Anthony

Robbins, Blackpool Zoo, Lindeth Charitable Trust, Dominic Trust, Mitchell Trust, Mary Webb Trust, Mrs S H Adlam Will Trust, St Katharine's Fund, Roger Vere Foundation, R G Hills Charitable Trust, Conservation International Foundation, European Commission, Tusk Trust, Harold A Whitson, Henry Hoare Charitable Trust, UNDP Protected Areas Biodiversity Project, Mr & Mrs J A Pye's Charitable Settlement, Gemini Foundation,

Marjorie Coote Animal Charity Trust, Liz Williamson, Graham Cashmore, Dee Newton, Phred and Rob Newbury.

Finally, thank you to all our African staff, wildlife authorities, government departments and out trustees for their continued support and to our wonderful volunteers, without whom the fundraising team would be lost.

