



digit news

saving the world's last gorillas

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the gorilla organization

A sad farewell to two great silverbacks



A young and boisterous Pablo sits on Sir David Attenborough during the filming of the BBC series *Life on Earth*

Two of the best known and most successful gorilla patriarchs have disappeared from the lives of their family and friends in recent months.

Silverbacks Pablo and Shinda have both been observed since their births more than 30 years ago, and will be familiar to anyone who has read Dian Fossey's book *Gorillas in the Mist*.

Pablo was bold and outgoing as an infant, and won fame as the gorilla who sat on Sir David Attenborough's chest during the filming of the famous gorilla sequences in the BBC series *Life on Earth*. Despite being the son of a low-ranking female named Lisa, Pablo grew up to become the

leader of the largest group of gorillas ever recorded.

Leadership

The group helped to re-write our understanding of gorilla society by including several silverback males in the same family. Even when he was ousted from the dominant role by Cantsbe, a slightly younger related silverback, the group continued to be known as Pablo's Group and his steady leadership skills were evident even as second in command. This may have led to his demise, although he is still only 'missing presumed dead'.

Trackers at the Karisoke Research Centre in Rwanda reported him missing along with a

younger silverback, Giraneza, in July 2008. On the same day, Inshuti, the leader of a small neighbouring group was seen with fresh injuries – apparently sustained in a fight with Pablo and Giraneza. Some time later, Giraneza reappeared, but no sign was found of Pablo despite weeks of searching. He was 34 years old, a good age for a wild gorilla.

Shinda's story came to a close in November 2008 after a short illness, aged 31. He too had an inauspicious start in life, being born to an elderly female in Group 5 named Marchessa.

By chance, Marchessa's daughter Pansy had given birth to a big healthy baby, Muraha, only a couple of days before, providing an interesting comparison. Shinda was named from the Swahili verb *ku-shinda* meaning to win or overcome, because he was such a spindly infant Dian Fossey feared he might not survive.

Handsome silverback

At one year of age, Muraha was twice the size of her playmate Shinda, but despite this, Shinda did indeed overcome and grew into a handsome silverback.

He led his own group since the break-up of Group 5 in 1993 and was still the alpha male when he died.

We can only speculate about how gorillas experience the loss of a relationship that may have lasted for decades, but for their human followers, there is at least the comfort that thanks to all of the conservation efforts over the past three decades, Pablo and Shinda were able to live their lives to their full natural lifespan.



Virungas Update

As always with the Virungas update much has happened since the last report.

Happily the Gorilla Organization staff and partners evacuated from the Goma region in DR Congo in December have been able to return home and rangers have once again returned to the park to monitor the gorillas.

More good news follows the results of a recent survey of the Virunga park in DR Congo revealing the birth of 10 mountain gorillas over the past 16 months despite the conflict and political unrest.

The survey is the first since the rangers were expelled from the forest by rebel forces, and totals the habituated population at 81 gorillas, an increase of 12.5%. Park rangers also estimate that 120 non-habituated gorillas live in the Virunga National Park.

More than 50 Congolese park rangers conducted the eight-week survey, which consisted of over 128 patrols. Six gorilla families and three solitary silverbacks were identified in the sector.

The rangers reported no sign of gorilla mortality but more than 530 snares set by poachers were removed from the forest, a significant increase compared to previous findings.



These extraordinary creatures could be made extinct at any moment.
– Stephen Fry, page 2



www.gorillas.org

Stephen Fry meets mountain gorillas

Twenty years ago, Douglas Adams, the author and Gorilla Organization patron, visited the gorillas along with photographer Mark Cawardine for their book *Last Chance to See*, documenting the plight of endangered species around the world. They had always planned to revisit the animals they had met during the trip, but sadly Douglas died before they had the chance.

However, Stephen Fry, a close friend of Douglas Adams, has teamed up with Mark Cawardine to recreate the famous

journey for a new BBC series, to be screened in the autumn.

Following their visit to the mountain gorillas, Stephen Fry told *Digit News*, "No one who has encountered mountain gorillas in the wild will emerge from the experience unchanged.

"The puffing, red-faced, gasping middle-aged man who had wheezed up the slopes of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest hating every bug-ridden, ant-swarmed every step was transformed the moment he stood eyeball to eyeball with a silverback and was

allowed close to a mother and baby – such things turn on a switch inside you.

"These extraordinary creatures could be made extinct AT ANY MOMENT without the most painstaking, courageous and determined work. It is a horrifying thought.

"If they do not survive in their dwindling habitat, something ancient, dignified, noble and imponderably beautiful goes out of the universe forever. That cannot be allowed to happen."

Last Chance To See will be broadcast by BBC2 in the autumn of 2009.



Stephen Fry

Great Gorilla Raffle winners

Congratulations to the winners of our Great Gorilla Raffle 2008, which took place on 5 January 2009 and was drawn by the Gorilla Organization Executive, Director Jillian Miller and witnessed by Sarah Mee and Melanie Reed.

- 1st prize £1,000: Miss C Murphy, London
- 2nd prize £500: Mrs P Wolton, Devon
- 3rd prize £100: Mrs J Parkinson, Leeds



Tough guy gets grimy for gorillas

Tough guy Scott Henderson has proved he is willing to go to hell and back in the ultimate tough test to raise funds for the gorillas.

On 1 February New Zealand born Henderson, 32, braced the elements and took part in an unrelenting SAS-style assault course, also known as the Tough Guy Challenge.

The annual mud-fest takes place in the depths of Wolverhampton, UK and requires physical and mental strength as well as nerves of steel. Avid Gorilla Organization supporter Scott climbed, crawled, jumped and swam around the infamous course to raise a whopping £1,075 for gorillas (\$1,600).

"By the end of the

challenge most of us could not feel our legs due to the cold", explains Scott "and our elbows and knees were scratched to bits".

So why did he get involved and where did the incentive for such a gruelling challenge originate?

"In 2003 I was fortunate enough to spend a day with wild gorillas up on a mountain in Rwanda. This first hand experience made me appreciate the work the Gorilla Organization does to protect these animals from extinction."

Congratulations are in order for Scott – living proof that some people really will do anything for a gorilla!

Great gorillas hit the streets of London

Volunteers and GO staff have been hitting the streets of London clad in gorilla outfits in a bid to recruit 1,000 gorilla runners for this year's Great Gorilla Run, set to take place on 26 September.



2008's event saw 732 gorillas run the 7km City of London course, raising an astounding £295,000 (\$442,500) for gorilla conservation. Not content with wearing a full gorilla suit participants also customised their outfits, which last year included a Scottish gorilla, an old lady gorilla and even the gorilla Village People.

Early though it may seem, here at the Gorilla Organization we are aiming to make 2009's run one to remember and have already set about keeping supporters up-to-date with Great Gorilla news via our dedicated event website and Facebook page.

Sign up for the Great Gorilla news at www.greatgorillas.org

Join the Great Gorillas Facebook group www.facebook.com

Events in 2009

- 26 April – Flora London Marathon, London
- 25 May – London 10k, London
- June-September – Various music festivals, UK
- 14 June – Gorilla Abseil, Riverwalk House, London
- 26 September – Great Gorilla Run 2009, London
- October – Great Gorilla Adventure, Uganda/Rwanda

For more information on any of these events visit www.greatgorillas.org

Triple tragedy at Mount Tshiaberimu

The Gorilla Organization began working in the troubled region of Mount Tshiaberimu in 1996.

Saving the tiny group of eastern lowland gorillas that resided in this area was never going to be easy – the isolation of the area, combined with a high population density and lack of resources, meant that the gorilla habitat would always be under much demand.

Nevertheless the Gorilla Organization’s Mount Tshiaberimu team was praised for bringing about change to the region, which over the years has seen the gorilla population strengthen by 31%.

Conservation

The success of this project is largely attributed to the role of the local community who, whilst benefiting from the Gorilla Organization’s community conservation programme, have become the guardians of the gorillas and their habitat.

But, the political volatility of the region always loomed in the background of Mount Tshiaberimu’s success, and as the new year dawned in 2009 a group of unidentified assailants stormed the Burusi Patrol post on the northern perimeter of the Mount Tshiaberimu gorilla habitat.

Rangers were on guard and retaliated quickly causing the

attackers to flee, but this brief incident proved to be a stark warning of what was to come.

Guardians of the forest

Just over a week later, on 8 January, the Mulango wa Nyama patrol post to the east of Burusi was targeted, this time with more weapons and force. The eight rangers on patrol fought bravely to protect their position as guardians of the forest, but it was later discovered that Safari Kakule, the head of gorilla monitoring at Mount Tshiaberimu, had been killed during the violence.

Safari was an exceptional ranger, who had worked on the Gorilla Organization project at Mount Tshiaberimu for over three years. Recently Safari had participated in gorilla health monitoring training organised by the Gorilla Organization through Conservation through Public Health (CTPH). He was expected to play a very important role in protecting the gorillas of Mount Tshiaberimu.

Reinforcements

Following the attack the Congolese wildlife authority (ICCN) sent 15 rangers to the area to help reinforce the current team, and the attackers have been captured.

Safari’s death shocked both the staff and local communities at Mount Tshiaberimu, but their grief



The political volatility of the region threatens the tiny population of eastern lowland gorillas at Mount Tshiaberimu

was lifted briefly with the birth of a new baby gorilla on 31 January. The gorilla was born to Mwengeyali and the silverback Kanindo and after the loss of three Mount Tshiaberimu gorillas in 2008 brought great hope to the tiny population.

Tragically, just five days after its birth, the young baby was found dead in its mother’s arms. While devastating news for the population, infant mortality for gorillas is extremely high and at least 30% of newborns do not survive.

As if to add salt to the wound, tragedy struck for the third time at Mount Tshiaberimu on 16 February, when rangers found the dead body of the elderly silverback Nzanzu. Nzanzu was part of the original Kipura family, the first family at Mount Tshiaberimu to be habituated.

In recent months the rangers had been reporting that Nzanzu was looking increasingly frail and while the news of his death was tragic, he died a dignified death in his natural environment.

Cancelled timber contracts spell good news for gorilla conservation

The Democratic Republic of Congo government has cancelled nearly 60% of its timber contracts in the world’s second largest

tropical rainforest in a bid to protect indigenous populations, trees and wildlife, including the endangered gorillas.



The changes follow a review of the logging industry revealing corrupt and greedy practices are decimating the rainforest.

Logging companies that had contracts cancelled were allowed to appeal against the decisions but 68 out of 87 appeals were rejected. The amount of rejections provides positive evidence the DR Congo government is taking a harder line with the lucrative logging industry.

Not only will this breakthrough prevent more devastating habitat destruction throughout the Congo but the changes also empower local communities who will now be able to stand up to large corporations.

Henry Cirhuza, Gorilla Organization’s Program Manager

in Congo, is positive about the effects such enforcements will have on GO projects, particularly within the Walikale forest, “The changes are welcomed by all the ecologists in the region as there are many companies coming to exploit and to build roads through these forests...It will help to protect mainly the Walikale forest; this reserve was not protected by any law, it was only a community reserve. Now, communities have the right to refuse the timber companies in their area.”

The biggest threat gorillas face is habitat loss, so any effort to combat forest destruction is good news for the great apes – lets hope the changes are a catalyst for yet more to come.

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Gorilla adoptions are BBC number one

The Gorilla Organization's adopt-a-gorilla scheme has been voted "Wildlife on Test Winner" by *BBC Wildlife Magazine*, in a recent survey of international animal adoptions.

Marks were awarded for the quality of the pack, and how the money is spent. The BBC said, "The organization runs superb, people-based conservation work that is one of the best ways to ensure survival of gorillas. All of your money goes directly to saving these great apes."

'Gorillas on Thin Ice' launches the UN Year of the Gorilla

This year has been designated 'The Year of the Gorilla' by the United Nations and all over the world gorilla-themed events are taking place to raise funds for gorilla conservation.

The UN Convention on Migratory Species is behind the initiative, along with GRASP – the UN Great Apes Survival Partnership – and WAZA, the World Association of Zoos and Aquaria.

Gorilla Kidnap

The Gorilla Organization is also part of the campaign, which got off to a good start in January when volunteers in gorilla costumes skated under the UN banner at the ice rink outside London's Natural History Museum. They were joined by investigative reporter Donal Macintyre, star of ITV's *Dancing on Ice*, who also made the acclaimed BBC documentary 'Gorilla Kidnap'.

The bizarre sight of skating gorillas and celebrities attracted a posse of press photographers and film crews, and videos of the event can still be viewed on the internet.

Already, several governments have pledged additional funds for gorillas and the German government is hosting a major scientific symposium in June. Although the focus is entirely on gorillas in their natural habitat, more than 100 zoos around the world are participating, organising events and encouraging visitors to donate to projects helping all four sub-species of gorilla.

The list of projects, including the Gorilla Organization's fuel-



Ice-skating gorillas at London's Natural History Museum help launch the United Nations Year of the Gorilla 2009

efficient stoves initiative, will support the action plan of the Gorilla Agreement, a legally binding treaty which was drawn up in 2007 and is already in force in most of the 10 countries with gorillas.

Gorilla Organization Trustee Ian Redmond OBE, who has been appointed Ambassador for the Year of the Gorilla, said, "Gorillas may be on thin ice metaphorically, but this is not just about saving amazing apes.

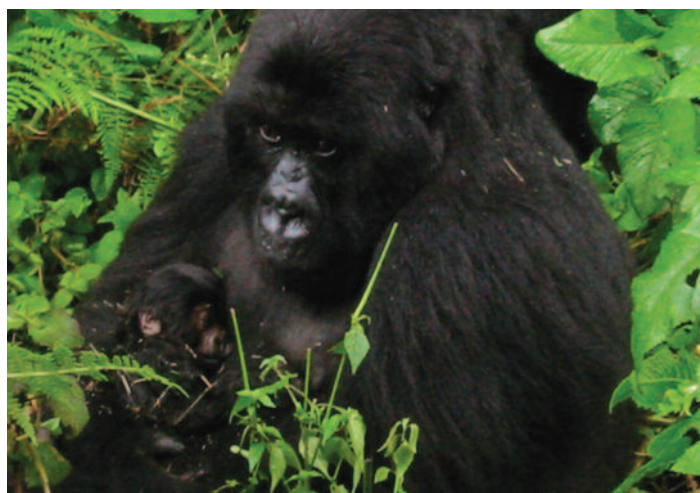
"The conservation of gorillas can help slow the global warming that is thinning polar ice and glaciers worldwide. Why?

Because gorillas are keystone species in the Congo Basin forests.

"The health of the planet depends on the three great tropical forests of Amazonia, Congo and SE Asia. The health of those forests depends on the survival of gorillas and other primates who disperse seeds for the next generation of trees.

"This is why the Year of the Gorilla is so timely, because forests must be included in the new Climate Agreement that follows the Kyoto Protocol."

See the Year of the Gorilla website: www.yog2009.org



New baby for Amy

We are delighted to announce breaking news that Amy Akago has given birth to a beautiful and healthy bouncing baby. Amy has been part of our adopt-a-gorilla scheme for over 10 years and we're sure her adoptive parents and all our supporters will be as thrilled as we are about this latest addition to the family. Every gorilla born provides hope for the future of this critically endangered population, so this really is a very special baby!

THANK YOU

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

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