



digit news

saving the world's last gorillas

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the gorilla organization



Tribute to Titus

I was visiting all the countries where gorillas are found in the wild in my role as UN Amabaaador for the Year of the Gorilla when I heard about the death of my old friend Titus, Gorilla Organization Trustee, Ian redmond OBE told *Digit News*.

I use the words "old friend" deliberately. It seemed fitting that I was highlighting the plight of gorillas in the wild when I heard about the death of the most famous gorilla of all.

Titus was named by a student of the American primatologist Dian Fossey, who studied gorillas in Rwanda for two decades. I started working as Dian's research assistant in 1976, and Titus was special to me because he's the first gorilla I ever saw. I remember approaching a thicket and I saw this little black furry thing which turned out to be Titus being chased up a tree by his brother. It was like joining a family picnic – a feeling of calm contentment for all involved.

The story of Titus reads like a

film script, so it's appropriate that he appears in *Gorillas In The Mist*. Titus is also famous for sitting with Sir David Attenborough in a sequence often voted the favourite wildlife moment of all time. Titus recently starred in a BBC documentary *The Gorilla King*, which tells his dramatic life story.

Titus was born in 1974, and Dian Fossey thought he was an underdeveloped baby with little chance of survival. He was born into turbulent times for the mountain gorillas. His uncle, Digit, one of Dian's favourite gorillas, was killed by poachers. Poachers also slaughtered Titus's father, younger half-brother and little sister. His

mother and older sister transferred to another group.

The young Titus was like an orphaned schoolboy thrown on to the streets of a big city having to survive after his group disintegrated. But against the odds he survived, first as a bachelor in an all-male group, and then later in a mixed group led by the silverback Beetsme, who drove away all the other males. Aged 17, Titus surprised us all when he deposed Beetsme in a bloodless coup.

Titus led the group for 15 years until one of his sons, Kuryama, began to provoke confrontations, and split from the group to form his own. In the following two years most females transferred to other groups. Kuryama returned a few weeks before Titus died.

He was found in his night nest by field staff on 14 September after dying of natural causes.

Of course I was saddened, but Titus's natural death is also a triumph for conservation – how wonderful that he could become the most successful silverback on record, then grow old and die surrounded by his family. Titus fathered more offspring than any other gorilla observed over more than 40 years at the Karisoke Research Centre in the Volcanoes National Park. The question is whether the infant gorillas remaining in Titus's group can hope to live as long? With the new threat of climate change adding to the familiar pressures on their forest habitat what will the next decades bring?

"I remember Titus very well indeed. Those few minutes he had spent with me were, without question some of the most memorable of my entire life. I was happy to learn that he had grown up to become a powerful and wise silverback with his own group. I am sorry indeed to learn that he has now died."

Sir David Attenborough



'David Attenborough's Life Stories' has recently been broadcast on BBC Radio 4



Letter from the Virungas

From May until the end of October, more than 500 international tourists visited the gorillas in the Virunga National Park in DR Congo, allowing park managers to set aside 30% of revenue from the visits to benefit neighbouring communities.

In Uganda, the Gorilla Organization is helping to fund the habituation of a large new group of gorillas to enable more gorilla tourism (see page 3).

Hundreds of local people came along to the 5th annual 'Kwita Izina' (baby gorilla naming ceremony) in Rwanda when 18 gorillas were named. The colourful festival shows how locals bordering the Volcanoes National Park are committed to gorilla conservation.

Unfortunately, there has also been sadness in Rwanda. As well as losing Titus, we were also greatly saddened by the death of baby Uzarama, the infant of the Gorilla Organization's adopted gorilla Amy (see page 3).

There were also gorilla losses at Mount Tshiaberimu in DR Congo. Silverback Kanindo died after falling down a ravine. After the loss of elderly silverback Nzanu earlier in the year there are now just 16 gorillas in the isolated population in the north of the Virungas.

Local people in DR Congo showed their support for Gorilla Organization community projects by coming to our Resource Centre in Goma to use the computer to vote for our fuel-efficient stoves project in the international World Challenge online competition (see page 3).

TOVER - WUNAI

Great Gorilla Run is a great success!

The sun shone on this year's Great Gorilla Run, and despite gloomy economic forecasts, more than 600 gorilla-costumed fundraisers embraced the 7km challenge by running, walking or even crawling around the course on hands and knees.

Childrens' TV presenter Helen Skelton started the run. Ultra-marathon runner Rory Coleman ran four marathons in four days to arrive just in time, after encountering the police along on the way when a concerned caller rang to report a gorilla

running along the A5 dual carriageway.

As always, gorilla runners got creative with their costumes, donning outfits from bumblebees to superheroes, and the run attracted national and international media coverage.

Gorilla runners will be continuing to fundraise until December and the top fundraiser wins a gorilla safari holiday in Rwanda. The runners are on course to raise more than £225,000 (\$380,000) for Gorilla Organization community projects in Africa.

Dozens of keen gorilla runners have already signed up for the Great Gorilla Run 2010, which will take place on Sunday 26 September. Please visit www.greatgorillas.org for more details and to register.



More than 650 runners took part in the Great Gorilla Run 2009

Going...going... for gorillas!

Cash in the Attic TV star James Lewis, his wife Annabel Brammer (gorilla!), and designer Mark Hughes (far right) have raised £10,000 (\$17,000) for the Gorilla Organization following a fundraising ball. GO Director Jillian Miller collected the cheque at Bamfords auctioneers.



Lasting legacy

The Gorilla Organization joined lawyer Margaret Mountford, advisor to Sir Alan Sugar in the BBC's *The Apprentice*, for a Remember A Charity awareness

campaign highlighting the importance of leaving gifts to charities in wills.

Funds from legacies make a real difference to charities, and the Gorilla Organization is no exception. When Dian Fossey was killed by poachers in 1985, the charity received £150,000 (\$250,000) – half of her estate. It included money from book sales and film rights to *Gorillas In the Mist*, and was the biggest single legacy the Gorilla Organization has ever received.

Legacy gifts make up roughly 10% of funds received by the Gorilla Organization every year, varying from a few thousand pounds to much more – all of which are very much appreciated. The Gorilla Organization has produced a free guide to making and changing a will. To order a copy please contact Liz on 020 7483 2681, or visit www.gorillas.org/legacy.



The Apprentice's Margaret Mountford with Sam Davies of the Gorilla Organization



Artist Joel Kirk (right) presents his Titus painting to Brian Taylor CBE

Titus lives on in painting donated by wildlife artist

The mighty gorilla Titus has been immortalised in a beautiful picture by the wildlife artist Joel Kirk, who generously donated his stunning oil painting of the late 'Gorilla King' to the Gorilla Organization.

GO sold the painting to retired businessman Brian Taylor CBE, who already has a collection of Joel's gorilla artwork, for £3,500 (\$5,750). The money will go towards Gorilla Organization projects in Africa.

Artist, Joel Kirk says "After watching the marvellous

documentary about Titus's life, and then hearing about the 2009 Year of the Gorilla, I was inspired to paint this remarkable gorilla to raise funds to protect the rest of his gorilla family." The picture was painted before Titus's death.

A series of limited edition canvas prints have been produced, and also signed fine art paper prints with 10% of the profits being donated to the Gorilla Organization. They are available online from www.whiteroompublishing.co.uk

Events in 2010

- March – Great Gorilla Adventure
- April 25 – London Marathon
- May 31 – London 10k
- June – Gorilla Abseil
- Summer – Music Festivals
- September 26 – Great Gorilla Run

- October – Great Gorilla Adventure
- And watch out for Gorilla Speed-Dating, Gorilla Parties, and Gorilla Silent Discos.
- Go to www.greatgorillas.org for the latest news and sign-up information, follow us on Twitter at @Buddy_Gorilla and join our Great Gorillas group on Facebook.

Tragedy for Amy

It has been a turbulent summer for the population of mountain gorillas in the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, and one of the most affected has been the Gorilla Organization's adopted gorilla, Amy Akago.

On 28 May staff at the Ruhengeri Resource Centre delightedly reported that Amy had given birth to a healthy baby. It was positive news for Group 13 after Amy's two previous babies died, one killed in a fight between two silverbacks.

In June the Gorilla Organization's Executive Director, Jillian Miller, attended the highly prestigious naming ceremony in Rwanda *Kwita Izina* and named the baby Uzarama, which means 'eternal' in the local language Kinyarwanda. But devastatingly, on 1 September, trackers discovered that four-month-old Uzarama had died.

After the death, trackers reported that Amy held the baby's body close to her for eight days. This is common for gorilla

mothers who lose their infants. According to rangers, Amy was very aggressive and lost her appetite.

With the loss of her previous infant, Amy had temporarily left her family group. However, she has remained with Group 13. When Amy first joined the gorillas from the Sabyinyo group in 2001, another female Rugendo befriended her, and the two have often been observed grooming each other and playing together. Since the death of Uzarama, Amy has been seen holding Rugendo's baby, Isano.

Vets have so far been unable to determine the exact cause of death, but it seems that Uzarama died of natural causes. As many as one in four gorilla babies do not survive infancy, but the news was still devastating to local staff and a setback for the growth of Group 13, which is now down to 25 gorillas.

Trackers are continuing to monitor Amy, along with the rest of the group.



Amy held her baby close to her for eight days after Uzarama died

More gorilla tourism for Uganda



Habituation has allowed rangers to get up close to gorillas

The Gorilla Organization is part-funding the habituation of a large new group of gorillas in Uganda to eventually bring more gorilla-tourism to the country.

The Bikingi group of at least 20 individuals live in the southern part of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The current estimate of 20 is based on the number of nests seen by the habituation team, but as infants don't make nests, it's thought the total is higher. It is known that there are two adult male silverbacks in the group.

The habituation process involves getting gorillas used to human presence, by tracking their

movements and being in the same vicinity as the gorillas without being any threat. Over time the gorillas will accept humans, and when tourists pay to visit the group, the funds help gorilla conservation projects.

The Gorilla Organization is providing 10 million Ugandan shillings (\$5,000) to provide GPS tracking equipment.

Over the next couple of months the trackers will complete the mapping of the exact home range of the group. Then full scale habituation, involving the identification of each individual gorilla, will begin and continue for up to two years.

BBC World Challenge

Some of the poorest women in villages in DR Congo where the Gorilla Organization works have been invited to learn how to install solar power for their communities.

The opportunity arose after the Gorilla Organization's fuel-efficient stoves project was a finalist in the prestigious *BBC World Challenge* competition for grassroots conservation.

The winner was the project that received the most online votes. British celebrity Stephen Fry encouraged his Twitter followers to vote for gorillas, and a film about the fuel-efficient stoves was broadcast on *BBC World News*. But most people in DR Congo do not have electricity so they have no internet access or television.

However, that could now change. Another *BBC World Challenge* finalist, Solar Sisters, has offered to help train women to install solar electricity in their villages. Barefoot College in India has trained more than 100 engineers in 15 other African countries. Bunker Roy from the college says "I want to join forces with the Gorilla Organization because I think we both have something tangible to contribute to empowering women with technical skills in Africa and by training illiterate rural grandmothers to be solar engineers to solar electrify their own villages we will be sending a very powerful message to women in Africa that nothing is impossible."



Women learn to be solar engineers at Barefoot College in India

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Schools link up for gorillas

The Gorilla Organization is expanding its popular school twinning programme.

A current twinned school, Wickford Junior School in Essex, gave a donation for taking part in the scheme, which has paid for twice-yearly postal exchanges with children at Mutolere School Wildlife Club.

The Essex children recently sent a scrap book and a parcel of disposable cameras to the Ugandan pupils so they could take their own pictures and then return the cameras to be developed in the UK.

The Wickford pupils also recently joined up with artist Debbie Handley to create a colourful African mural on a playground wall, complete with silverback gorillas.



Left: work in progress; above: all finished!



Teachers say the children have learned a lot about the differences and similarities of the two cultures and more about gorillas and the environment.

As a result of the twinning programme, Wickford Junior

School has chosen the Gorilla Organization as its Charity of the Year for 2010 and other UK primary and junior schools are being invited to apply.

Email info@gorillas.org for more information.

Warm welcome to two new trustees

Two well respected women have now joined the board of the Gorilla Organization. We now have ten Trustees who oversee the project proposals and budgets

Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka from Uganda, is our first African trustee. She is the founder and Chief



Executive Officer of Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH), a grassroots not-for-profit Ugandan organisation established in 2003 to control disease transmission between people and animals and improve public health.

Whilst doing her veterinary degree at the Royal Veterinary College at the University of London she also volunteered in the London office of the Gorilla Organization (then the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund Europe).

She went on to work for the

Uganda Wildlife Authority and set up a veterinary programme for mountain gorillas.

In May 2009, Gladys was awarded the prestigious Whitley Gold Award for grassroots nature conservation. She says "Becoming a trustee of the Gorilla Organization, one of the best known international organizations at the forefront of gorilla conservation, is a very great honour for me and crowns my achievements in wildlife conservation. I am hoping to bring my experiences in grassroots nature conservation to further build the programmes and great conservation impact of the Gorilla Organization."

Sandra Horley OBE a social psychologist, has worked with abused women and children for over 30 years. Since 1983 she has been Chief Executive of Refuge, the world's first refuge for women escaping domestic violence.

Sandra is a committed campaigner on behalf of abused women and lobbies for changes in

policy and legislation. She was appointed OBE for 'services to the protection of women and children' and given the award of Honorary Fellow from the London South Bank University in recognition of her dedication and commitment to the protection of women and children.

Sandra says "My interest in the Gorilla Organization lies in the work it does to empower women and their local communities. The fate of the forests and the gorillas in part depends on raising the status of women. The projects that this charity operates lift women out of poverty and reduce the threats to the gorilla habitat."



She adds: "It is a privilege to be part of an organisation which makes such a strong link between female empowerment and environmental conservation."

Great gorilla gifts

The Gorilla Organization has just launched a new range of great gorilla gifts, including a range of organically produced cotton t-shirts (see print below).



There is also a selection of 'green gifts' including ranger packs, firewood-saving stoves and the chance to plant a tree to save the gorilla forests. You can browse through all the products at www.gorillas.org/shop

THANK YOU

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

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