



digit saving the world's last gorillas news

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Gorilla deaths linked to tourist virus

Scientists have found evidence linking the deaths of two mountain gorillas with a virus that causes respiratory disease in people, prompting further debate as to whether the benefits of gorilla tourism outweigh the potential risks of increased contact between humans and their endangered cousins.

Research carried out by a team led by the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project (MGVP) revealed that the gorillas were infected with the human metapneumovirus (HPMV) at the time of their deaths in 2009. The study also found that both the severity and frequency of respiratory disease cases among mountain gorillas living in the Virunga Massif has been steadily rising over recent years, with even the smallest of outbreaks representing a grave threat to their continued existence.

"Because there are fewer than 800 living mountain gorillas, each individual is critically important to the survival of their species," says Mike Cranfield, Executive Director of the MGVP.

Since gorillas and humans share around 98 per cent of their DNA, conservationists have long believed that the great apes are susceptible to a range of infectious diseases that affect people, including respiratory conditions. As such, this study, published in the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, mainly serves to confirm this.

Nevertheless, the discovery may still prove to be significant, particularly when it comes to harnessing the benefits of tourism to protect gorillas living in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park. There is



Mountain gorillas at risk from human respiratory diseases

little doubt that the virus linked to the two gorillas' deaths was brought into the forest by a tourist. Not only were the gorillas part of a group habituated for tourist visitors, but analysis of a global database of pneumonia strains show that the virus originated in South Africa.

However, according to Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, CEO and founder of Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH) and Gorilla Organization trustee, banning tourists from visiting gorillas is not the answer. Indeed, such a move would be counter-productive.

"You need the tourist money; you can't protect the gorillas with research money alone," she says. "Tourist money filters down to the people. They see the economic benefits of tourism and so become primary stakeholders in gorilla protection. It's a sustainable source of income for them and gives them a motivation for helping protect the gorillas and their habitat."

Given that habitat loss represents the biggest long-term threat to gorillas, the economic boost given to communities living on the edge of the Volcanoes National Park through tourism could play a crucial role in saving them from extinction. But, as this new research has highlighted, it is imperative that rules on gorilla tourism are enforced as strictly as possible.

Unlike in neighbouring DR Congo, in Rwanda and Uganda there are no rules requiring tourists to wear facemasks, though seven-metre exclusion zones are in place.

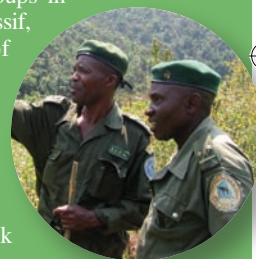
"This could be a way of being more forceful with the rules relating to gorilla tourism," Dr Kalema-Zikusoka adds. "Right now, there are doubts surrounding the importance of having such strict rules. Tourists may hide a cough or cold so they can go and see the gorillas and I've had lots of people ask me why seven metres instead of five metres. Now we have the evidence!"



Letter from the Virungas

Despite the numerous threats to their survival, including habitat loss and poaching, the latest mountain gorilla census shows that numbers have been steadily increasing over recent years.

In fact, the research indicates that there are now 480 mountain gorillas living in 36 groups in the Virunga Massif, an increase of 100 since the 2003 count and double the amount recorded in Dr Dian Fossey's first census back in the 1960s.



Alongside the 302 individuals in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and the four orphans in a sanctuary in DR Congo, this puts the global population at 786.

This is encouraging news and is due in no small part to efforts being made by people living on the edge of the Virunga National Park to protect the gorillas' forest home. With local and national help and with the assistance of international groups such as the Gorilla Organization, their reliance on the forest is slowly being eased. Let's hope mountain gorilla numbers are found to have risen again when the next census is carried out!

TUVER - WUNDA

Goma, DR Congo

Word on the grapevine is that a new corporate sponsor is raising valuable funds to support the work of the Gorilla Organization. Who is this? Turn to page 4 to find out...



www.gorillas.org

Stanley conquers Mount Kilimanjaro

On Sunday 20 February, Stanley Johnson stood on the roof of Africa for the first time.

The Gorilla Organization's indomitable chairman had scaled the 18,651 feet (5,684 metres) of Mount Kilimanjaro to raise much-needed funds to help save the world's remaining gorillas in the wild from extinction, while also generating widespread publicity for their plight.

Following what is known as the Rogani route – the least-travelled of the six routes leading to the top of Africa's highest mountain – the sprightly 70-year-old took four days to reach Gilman's Point, where he unfurled the Gorilla Organization's flag in celebration of his feat.

During his arduous ascent, Stanley passed through a zone of dense rainforest, home to both blue and colobus monkeys, chameleons and a wide variety of sunbirds, before reaching the lunar-like landscape of the summit zone.

However, the plight of Africa's gorillas and their forest home was never far from his mind, with this pushing him to accomplish what he has called one

of the most-memorable experiences of his life.

Speaking of his achievement, Stanley says: "Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro to raise funds for the Gorilla Organization has been one of the most satisfying experiences of my life.

"It was immensely enjoyable in itself, a chance to reach – on one's own two feet – the highest spot on the African continent. And, as an

exciting fundraising exercise, it was highly successful.

"At the time of writing, we have raised for the Gorilla Organization as many pounds as I climbed in feet (over £18,530!)."

- For more information on Stanley's fundraising efforts, or to make a donation, go to <http://events.gorillas.org/stanleyjohnson>



On the roof of Africa: Stanley Johnson at the summit of Kilimanjaro

The Skye's the limit

When six-year-old Skye Davison (pictured below) learnt about the plight of the world's remaining gorillas, she knew she had to do something to help them.

So, with the help of her friends, family and classmates at the Al Raha International School in Abu Dhabi, she organised a special fundraising evening at the Al Ghazal Golf Club.

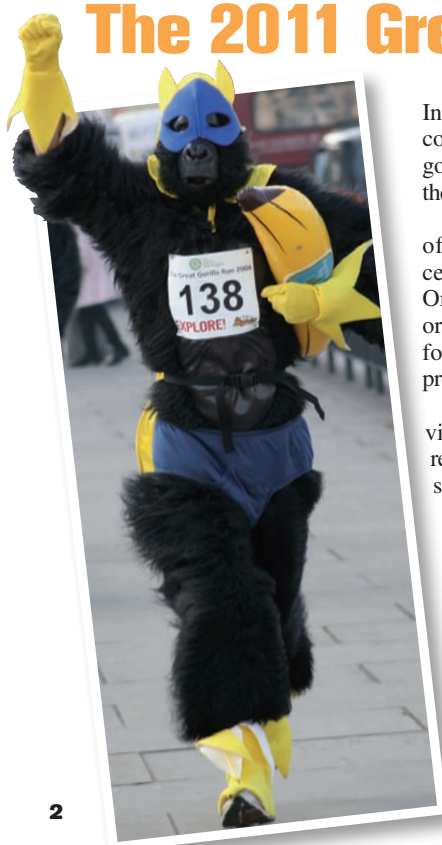
As well as a quiz, the night included a children's gorilla drawing competition, and a 'play your cards right' contest, while lots including gorilla-themed art, fitness classes and dinners in local restaurants were also auctioned off.

In total, the night raised £1,800 (\$2,955) for the Gorilla Organization. As Skye explains: "The money goes to training the guides, working with local villages and planting trees in the gorillas' natural habitat."

This looks set to be just the start of Skye's career as a charity fundraiser, as she has pledged to raise a million pounds in order to help save the endangered mountain gorillas from extinction!



The 2011 Great Gorilla Run...



In parks and gyms up and down the country, runners are donning their gorilla suits and getting in shape for the Great Gorilla Run 2011.

On 24 September, hundreds of gorillas will run through central London for the Gorilla Organization's flagship event in order to raise much-needed funds for conservation and development projects in Africa.

Places are still available, so visit www.greatgorillarun.org to register for this iconic event and help save the gorillas from extinction!



...and gorilla Royal Wedding fun!

On a sunny morning in late April, a spectacular wedding took place in central London. But rather than a future king and queen tying the knot, it was a gorilla bride and groom and their furry guests

who were celebrating in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral.

The bride looked stunning in white, complete with a banana bouquet and, as with Wills and Kate's big day, a primate was on

hand to preside over the ceremony. However, whether the royal couple enjoyed a post-service silent disco like the gorillas did – much to the delight of crowds on the South Bank – is another matter...

Two sets of twins born to gorilla families

Rangers working on the frontline of gorilla conservation have been seeing double over recent weeks after not one, but two sets of twins were born to gorilla groups.

One of fewer than 800 mountain gorillas left in the wild, Kabatwa made headlines around the world when she gave birth to two boys in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park in February. These latest additions to the Hirwa group are only the fifth set of twins ever recorded among mountain gorillas and, since mothers tend to give birth to just a single baby once every four or five years, the news has been welcomed as a 'rare double gain' by conservationists.

Positive about their future

While Kabatwa has been keeping the twins well away from prying eyes, the Gorilla Organization's Emmanuel Busingo has reported that both mother and her babies are in good health.

"It's very rare to hear of mountain gorilla twins, so we were all excited to hear the news from

rangers. The twins are both doing well and we feel very positive about their future."

Meanwhile, in the Kahuzi Biega National Park, eastern DR Congo, the group headed by silverback Chimanku has similarly expanded after the recent birth of twins. Though the birth of twins is nowhere near as rare among eastern lowland gorillas as it is among mountain gorillas, these new babies have still caused great excitement, not least as they are the fourth pair to be born into the group.

"Their mother is still keeping them safe and it's clear that all of the family are in very good health, despite the troubles we are still experiencing here," says Tuvru Wundi of the Gorilla Organization.

As with the twins born in Rwanda, these babies have been welcomed as further proof that the vigorous operations being conducted to monitor gorillas and protect their habitat are paying dividends. Indeed, the latest census of Kahuzi Biega's gorillas shows that numbers have been steadily rising since



Proud mother Kabatwa nursing her twin baby boys

2004. However, large parts of the national park are still out of bounds to researchers and rangers, with

ongoing instability placing both the gorillas and those working to protect them in grave danger.

Ugandan farmers key to easing pressure on gorilla habitat



Key Farmer Trainers teaching modern agricultural techniques

In 2006 the Gorilla Organization joined with the Kisoro District Farmers Association (KDFFA) to help communities in this part of southwest Uganda adopt modern farming techniques and improve crop yields.

By making agriculture – which forms the backbone of the Kisoro District economy – more efficient, families are better-equipped to feed themselves and generate much-needed income. Additionally, they

have less need to trespass into the Mgahinga National Park to collect resources such as food, water and firewood, threatening the survival of the mountain gorillas living there.

In the first phase of the project, 95 Key Farmer Trainers (KFTs) took part in workshops and practical training sessions. These covered basic farming techniques such as preparing land, planting seeds and producing organic manure, to more

complex issues such as record-keeping and marketing produce. After graduating, the KFTs started working alongside other farmers within their communities, passing on what they had learnt. So far, over 700 secondary farmers have joined the project, with the eventual aim that each KFT trains ten others, meaning more than 1,000 farmers will ultimately benefit.

The benefits of the farmers' hard work and new skills are only too evident. Cabbages, peppers and maize are all popular crops and yields are up. The biggest success story, however, has been with potatoes. A total of 122 tonnes have been harvested since the start of the project, thanks in no small part to the use of organic fertiliser made from goat manure. From 40 goats provided for the KFTs at the start of the project, a total of 161 have now been reared, with their manure helping boost crop yields and saving farmers a significant amount of money on chemical fertilisers.

At the same time, farmers have also been learning how to construct fuel-efficient stoves. These use 75% less firewood than traditional open fires and, to date, 98 stoves have been built, reducing farmers' need to enter the forests to collect fuel.

The project has already made a vast difference to the lives of the farmers and their families. Extra produce can be sold at market, generating much-needed income to cover essential costs including food, water and school fees. The crops also contribute to a more balanced and nutritious diet, improving health and reducing illness.

But it is not only humans who are benefiting from the project; as the farmers develop their skills and the number of beneficiaries carries on rising, reliance on the resources of the national park steadily diminishes, allowing the gorillas to live safely and peacefully in their forest home.



Farmers go back to school

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Solar Sisters return from India to electrify DRC communities

Five communities in eastern DR Congo are set to benefit from renewable energy now that the Solar Sisters have returned home after five months in India.

Back in November 2010, the five Congolese women – all of them grandmothers, all but one of them illiterate – left their home villages to take part in a unique joint initiative between the Gorilla Organization and the Barefoot College in Tilona, India.

In the time they spent in India they learned how to identify electronic components, fabricate circuits and install and maintain small-scale solar power units, with college manager Bunker Roy praising them for overcoming language barriers and homesickness to excel in their schooling. Meanwhile, back in Africa, the Gorilla Organization's DRC programme manager Henry Cirhuza made sure that the women's families were kept up to speed with news from India, including their visit to the Taj Mahal and their meeting with the Dalai Lama.

Upon their return to DR Congo, the Solar Sisters were received by the governor of North Kivu province, Julien Paluku Kahongya,



The Solar Sisters greet the Dalai Lama at the Barefoot College

and by the provincial minister of the environment, Chantal Rugenera.

According to Henry, the ladies have been attracting a lot of media attention and have now become icons in their villages, all of which are located on the edge of the Virunga National Park, home to some of the world's last remaining mountain gorillas in the wild.

"Everybody wants to learn from them. It is amazing to think that illiterate grandmothers have travelled from Africa to India and

are now solar power experts!" he says.

By introducing solar power into their communities, the ladies will help boost the economic wellbeing of the people living around the protected park, with light enabling people to work or study after dark. This in turn will help ease the pressure on the gorilla habitat, not least by reducing the reliance on an illegal trade in charcoal that continues to drive deforestation in this part of eastern DRC.

Hot stuff

Around 200 homes in the village of Rusayo, in the North Kivu area of DR Congo, are now benefiting from new fuel-efficient stoves.

Supported by funding from the Gorilla Organization, the stoves were handed out by partner NGO Aide-Kivu and it's expected they'll make a huge difference in the fight against deforestation in the Virunga National Park.

Since they use significantly less fuel than conventional stoves, families will no longer be reliant on the natural resources of the park, home of the endangered mountain gorillas.



Gorilla Boogers to sponsor Great Gorilla Run 2011

The Gorilla Organization is proud to announce a new sponsorship agreement with Gorilla Boogers.

The brainchild of multi-award-winning entrepreneur Jo Beech, Gorilla Boogers hit the nation's supermarket shelves, vending machines and work and university canteens at the beginning of May.

The range includes Giant Booger Cookies, Booger Boxes and Chocolate-Covered Boogers, all of which contain only the juiciest raisins!

Gorilla Boogers will be the principal sponsor of the Great Gorilla Run 2011, which will take place in London on Saturday 24 September.



THANK YOU

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