

digit news

saving the world's last gorillas

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the gorilla organization

Ranger death shatters Congo's fragile peace

Though peace may have officially returned to eastern DR Congo, the first few weeks of 2014 have seen rangers patrolling the Virunga National Park subjected to some of the worst violence in recent memory.

Towards the end of last year, violent battles between government forces and soldiers of the M23 rebel group rocked the region. Fighting even took place within the Virunga National Park, home to around half the world's remaining mountain gorillas. And, while the rebels surrendered in time for the people of Goma to enjoy a relatively quiet Christmas, a fatal attack in January of this year served to highlight once again that peace cannot be taken for granted.

The attack took place just 10km north of Goma, in the very area that saw the worst of the 2013 fighting. A ranger patrol, working to secure an important road running alongside the National Park, was ambushed by members of the FDLR militia, an illegal movement believed to include perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide among its numbers. One ranger, a father of five called Mberabagabo, was shot and killed, another two rangers were seriously injured and two rebels also lost their lives.

This most recent fatality takes the number of park rangers killed in the line of duty since the beginning of the current conflict to 140. In most cases, the victims left behind wives and young children.

While some reports have suggested this and other recent attacks have been backlashes motivated by the gains made by ranger patrols, specifically in their ongoing fight to prevent militia and charcoal gangs from regaining control of the part of



Rangers work to keep the peace in Congo's recent humanitarian crisis

the forest closest to the gorilla sector, others remain more reluctant to see in such tragic events signs of better things to come.

Michael Kavanagh, Bloomberg's correspondent in DR Congo, has seen such hopes dashed before. Speaking to *Digit News*, he noted that, even if there have been some improvements in general security, it's too early to predict how things will develop.

"We may see a window for some uptick in tourism like we saw in 2011 and the beginning of 2012," he said. "However, I do think there will be more military operations eventually; perhaps groups like FDLR fleeing to the park. I wish I could say all was clear but history over the past decade suggests otherwise."

Such uncertainty is nothing new to the people of DR Congo, and certainly not to the long-suffering citizens of Goma, where the Gorilla

Organization's Resource Centre is located. Programme Manager for the country, Henry Cirhuza, lived through some of the worst fighting, at one point hiding with his children under the bed as mortars exploded just yards from the family home. Like most people, he's happy peace has returned, though he's more realistic than optimistic.

"We are currently enjoying the benefits of peace. The price of food has gone down and will hopefully carry on falling as those who fled the fighting return to their home villages and start growing crops again," he says.

"But will it last? You must remember that the M23 was just one of 30 armed groups in Eastern Congo. There needs to be the political will to work for real, lasting peace, so for now, I can only dream of the day the young people here are too busy in the fields or working on new roads to pick up weapons to fight."



Letter from the Virungas

Though we may have recently lost yet another brave ranger in the fight to safeguard our country's wonderful wildlife, I feel I am now able to write to you more in hope than despair.

Now the fighting that gripped Goma has come to an end, we are picking up the pieces and getting back to work. Like all human families here, the Kabirizi gorilla group suffered during the insecurity. They had no rangers to protect them, and the noise and stress would have deeply troubled them all, even the strong silverback who gives the group their name.



Thankfully, I have seen for myself that Kabirizi and the 37 gorillas he leads are thriving once again. Perhaps one day soon, tourists will be lucky enough to see these amazing animals at rest and at play. Such a development would transform the lives of many.

But for now, we are thankful that the new hydroelectric dam at Rutshuru is operational. Here in Goma, as well as in the villages around the park, we have a new and reliable source of electricity. We now go back to work more determined than ever to build a better future for our children and for gorillas such as the majestic Kabirizi.

TUVER - WUNAI

Goma, DR Congo

Volunteer Special
Learn about the local stars making a real difference and find out how you can play your part in saving gorillas. (p.2)



Phred Newbury makes friends after her first gorilla trek in Rwanda and (below) hosting inspirational art exhibitions

Local help for a global issue

Great apes need great supporters. And few come greater than Regional Volunteers such as Phred Newbury, a long-standing supporter of the Gorilla Organization who hosts regular fundraising events across the Midlands and Cotswolds area.

Phred's love for mountain gorillas was born out of a life-changing trip she took to Rwanda back in 1993. Here, trekking alongside Ian Redmond, she came face-to-face with the critically-endangered apes. Fearing future

generations may not be so lucky, she promptly signed up to help spread the word about their plight any way she could.

"Many fundraising events take place in London, for instance, the fantastic annual Great Gorilla Run," Phred explains.

"However, for people who find it difficult to get to the capital, it's important to get the message out in other areas and I thought that people may be more inclined to help if they heard about the



Hooray, it's a Banana Bank Holiday!

This summer, things are going to get more than a little fruity. That's because The Gorilla Organization has declared Tuesday 1st July the first-ever Banana Bank Holiday! Pip pip hooray!

In support of their furry cousins in the forest, people up and down the country will be setting themselves the challenge of including banana in every meal and snack they eat on

the day itself. As well as enjoying an extra dose of potassium in their diet, participants will have the chance to raise money through sponsorship, with all funds going towards supporting a range of innovative conservation and development projects aimed at securing the survival of critically-endangered gorillas.

"Banana Bank Holiday is simple, fun and a great way of

Gearing up for the Gorilla Run



Few people take part in just one Great Gorilla Run. Once they've pulled on a full gorilla suit and felt the wind in their fur as they race across Tower Bridge, most are keen to repeat the experience and do even more to help save gorillas in the wild from extinction.

So, just as with the past 10 years, this September will see dozens of returning runners await race patron Bill Oddie's starting pistol for GGR14. Among those tackling the 7km of urban jungle will be a team from Props & Frocks in Essex. The fancy dress shop has kindly offered to support this year's event, storing and distributing hundreds of gorilla suits between now and the big day.

"We ran the Great Gorilla Run two years ago, and it's an experience I'll never forget," says company manager Ellis Wiseman. "So we're delighted to be returning and it's a real privilege to be able to offer

our support to such a worthwhile and fun event."

The Great Gorilla Run 2014 will take place on Saturday 20 September. Registration is now open, so visit www.greatgorillarun.org to sign up for the most fun event for conservation taking place anywhere in the world.



plight of gorillas first hand."

And indeed they are. Through events such as swimathons, film screenings, illustrated lectures and art exhibitions (left), Phred has raised thousands of pounds to support vital conservation projects across central Africa. Now, in her 20th year as a regional fundraising star, she's passing on her tips on how to follow in her footsteps and bring the message of gorilla conservation to your local community.

"Being a Regional Volunteer has many benefits, including meeting a lot of wonderful people who you would not otherwise have met, but best of all you will be doing something positive for

7km in a full gorilla suit too easy?

The events team also have Bupa London 10k places up for grabs, and would love to hear from anyone running the London Marathon. Get your running shoes on and help primates in peril!

'gorilla beings' and human beings who, through no fault of their own, need and deserve our help."

To read Phred's guide to being a Regional Volunteer for the Gorilla Organization, visit www.gorillas.org/_Regional_Volunteers



30,000 bananas piled high in London's Trafalgar Square

Silverback Tsongo missing on Mount T

The Gorilla Organization's team on Mount Tshiaberimu, in eastern DR Congo, have resigned themselves to the fact they may never see charismatic silverback Tsongo alive again.

The dominant male, who was head of one of just two families left on what is known locally as 'The Mountain of Spirits' vanished at the end of the year. His shock disappearance sparked a massive search, with Project Manager Jean-Claude Kyungu leading his team of rangers deep into the forests in the hope of finding Tsongo alive.

While the team were unsuccessful in their search for the missing gorilla, they did find around 200 snares in the area where he disappeared, highlighting the ongoing threat posed by poachers.

"In the past 10 years I have seen the number of gorillas shrink from 20 to just a handful," Jean-Claude says. "Their habitat is being decimated by rebel groups fighting in the area and by desperately poor poachers, who come to the forest in search of food to survive."

Since Tsongo's disappearance, rangers have noted that his

mate Mwasanyinya is withdrawn and eating very little, while the silverback's two young sons, Mukokya and Kambula, are also showing clear signs of agitation. Though there is another silverback on the mountain, a gorilla named Katsavara, he has his own mate, in addition to a six-month-old infant of his own to care for, leaving the Tsongo group alone and vulnerable.

Ian Redmond, Gorilla Organization Chairman and world-renowned expert in great ape behaviour, explains that it's very rare for a gorilla family to be left without a dominant male to lead them, and rarer still for them to remain this way for more than a few weeks.

"The situation at Mount T is both tragic and, in terms of gorilla behaviour, highly unusual," he explains.

"However large or small, a gorilla family needs a leader. Without one, they tend to suffer from general feelings of stress and insecurity and are vulnerable to the threats posed by humans or indeed from other silverbacks hoping to muscle in. I've known a few,



Mukokya (right) with brother Kambula are without their father

isolated examples of female gorillas assuming leadership roles, albeit on a temporary basis, so this could happen here, or else the blackback, Mukokya, could be required to grow up fast and step into Tsongo's formidable shoes."

With Mount T's gorillas teetering on the brink of extinction,

all eyes, then, are on Mukokya. The young gorilla is already a symbol of hope for the local communities. Each year, a local group known as Sagot or Solidarity of Friends of Mountain Gorillas Tshiaberimu, mark International Women's Day with the Mukokya Parade. Now, even more rests on his young shoulders.

Poaching part of rhythm of life in Virungas

"In the heart of central Africa, so high up that you shiver more than you sweat, are great, old volcanoes towering up almost 15,000 feet and nearly covered with rich, green rainforest – the Virungas!"

Little has changed since Dian Fossey wrote this description of the place where she was to make her name as a primatology pioneer. The slopes of the three volcanoes are still as lush and the forests still as biodiverse. Frustratingly, just as Dian raged against the threat posed by widespread poaching, so too do today's conservationists

have to spend the bulk of their time removing potentially lethal snares from the forest floor.

The latest statistics from the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda illustrate the sheer scale of the rangers' job. According to these figures, rangers found and destroyed an average of 150 snares a month over the course of 2013, an increase on the previous year.

Looked at more closely, the numbers also show how poaching is part of the rhythm of life in this part of Africa, with the number of snares being put down by poachers



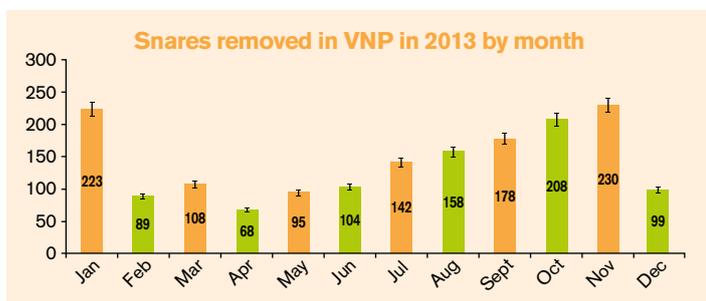
A park ranger dismantles a snare

fluctuating according to season.

Emmanuel Bugingo, the Gorilla Organization's Programme Manager in Rwanda, explains: "In November, for example, there is an increase in snares because in that period, people are waiting for their crops to mature. Since many have no food in their homes, they look to the forest to provide for them and their families. Similarly, we see increased poaching in January as people want to get bushmeat which they can sell to others celebrating the start of a new year"

Just as snare numbers soar when times are toughest, so too do numbers drop when things improve. "In April, May and June, there is a decrease in snares because in these three months, many people are busy harvesting their crops," says Emmanuel. "This means that there is enough food for everyone, and also that many families have extra crops they can sell."

The continued reliance on the forests of the Virungas for food, whether it's to eat or to sell, emphasises the importance of development projects aimed at giving people the chance to make a viable living in other ways. The Gorilla Organization's Sustainable Farming Project does just this, with hundreds of families having seized the opportunity to break out of this destructive cycle. However, as these statistics show, there's still much work to be done before the Volcanoes National Park is a genuine safe haven for the critically-endangered mountain gorilla.



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Students speak out for gorillas

Students at the University of Roehampton have taken their first steps to becoming educational ambassadors for the Gorilla Organization.

Around a dozen primatology and anthropology students attended a special workshop at the west London institution at the start of the year. Here, they met with Gorilla Organization Chairman Ian Redmond, along with Executive Director Jillian Miller, to learn more about conservation work being done in Africa and hone their public speaking skills. With these new skills under their belt, the students will give presentations at schools and community groups, raising both awareness and funds to help gorillas in peril.

Anthropology undergraduates Sarah Crudington and Roisin McAuley were among those in attendance.

“It was a privilege to meet Ian Redmond at the speakers workshop and I found it inspiring and educational,” says Sarah. “I volunteer for the Organization and my utmost ambition is to have a career in charity and conservation, where I can help secure a future for gorillas.

Roisin, who also regularly helps out at the London offices, adds: “The workshop was really positive and gave us a great foundation for our primary school talks, the first of which went really well and I can’t wait to give another!”



Sarah (left) and Roisin meet Ian Redmond at Roehampton

Rwanda’s intrepid Solar Sisters have worked their magic and started to install solar panels in the village of Nyarugina, in the Musanze District. Villagers now have the power to transform their own lives and be less reliant on the fragile forests they live alongside.



Ten years of Kwita Izina

This year will mark the tenth anniversary of Kwita Izina, the Rwandan ceremony of giving names to newborn baby gorillas.

Created as a way of bringing both local and international attention to efforts to protect both the critically-endangered mountain gorillas and the natural habitat of the Virunga Mountains in the north of the country, the event has proven a massive success.

Over the years, dozens of infant gorillas have been given names, with The Gorilla Organization enjoying the privilege of taking part in the ceremony on several occasions. Now, with Rwanda set to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 1994 genocide this year, this summer’s Kwita Izina is being heralded as a beacon of hope for a country, as well as for an iconic species on the edge of extinction.



Uganda mourns gentle giant Mishaya

Conservationists across Uganda are in mourning for one of the country’s true natural superstars, the charismatic but camera-shy silverback Mishaya. The male mountain gorilla was found dead in the southern sector of Bwindi Impenetrable Forest by rangers. An autopsy revealed that he died of an intestinal condition and he was then buried with full honours by members of the Uganda Wildlife Authority in the town of Rushaga.

Samual Nsingwire, the Gorilla Organization’s Programme Manager in Uganda, remembers the dominant male with great affection. “He was well-known as a very handsome silverback. In fact, he got his name from his long face, which is a much-admired feature here,” he says. “Though he was quite shy with humans, he was a formidable silverback. He led the challenge that led to the break-up of the Shongi



Silverback Mishaya sorely missed by both rangers and tourists

group and went on to form his own family, which has since earned lots of money for local communities through gorilla tourism.”

Ian Redmond has trekked through Bwindi and come face-to-face with this family on several

occasions. But each time, the leader eluded him. “I never got to meet Mishaya myself; he was always so elusive and ready to hide in the forests, but that only added to his charisma. He will be sadly missed.”

THANK YOU

Jack de Loss Foundation,
 Margaret Davis Charitable
 Trust, Allan & Nesta Ferguson
 Charitable Settlement, Save

Me Trust, Pennycress Trust,
 Enid Slater Charitable Trust,
 Dennis Alan Yardy Charitable
 Trust, Marjorie Coote Charitable
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