



## Volcano threatens gorillas and rangers

**Living in Goma, says the Gorilla Organization's Henry Cirhuza, is like living "at the door to hell".**

And on a Saturday night in May, that doorway opened again. Mount Nyiragongo, the volcano which looms over Goma's 670,000 residents, erupted causing untold damage. Henry and his family were woken by what sounded like thunder. They feared the worst.

The following morning, the authorities ordered the evacuation of 10 city districts. As many as 300,000 people began to leave with nothing more than they could carry. Rumours of a second, bigger eruption, were spreading, and nobody knew if the one main road

out of the city would be open, or if nearby refugee camps would welcome them.

Africa's most active volcano, Nyiragongo last erupted in 2002. Then, the streets of the city center flowed red. This time, the lava stopped short of Goma airport, just outside the centre. But the damage was significant. Some 3,000 homes were destroyed and 35 people died. Tragically, the mother of one of the Gorilla Organization's team in Goma had a heart attack that night. She died days later in a hospital with no electricity or clean water.

Just a few kilometres outside of the city, the endangered mountain gorillas were panicked. They felt the tremors, heard the thunderous noises and choked on the heat and the sulphurous smoke. Rangers reported that the gorillas were safe, but they were distressed. So too were the rangers themselves. Streams of lava had destroyed the only road from Goma city to the National Park headquarters (*see map*). The ranger stations at Kibati, Kibumbe and Rumangao were cut off. Without power and water, the rangers were vulnerable and unable to carry out their vital work.



**The nearby mountain gorillas are traumatised by the eruption**

### Goma: An oasis in North Kivu

Henry has called Goma his home for most of his life. Born in Sake, like many he moved to the city for work. Due to its position on the edge of the Virunga National Park, Goma is a hub for conservation, and the Gorilla Organization runs its community development projects from here.

Henry was Project Manager back in 2002 after the last eruption and saw the Gorilla Organization's Resource Centre buried under volcanic ash. It had to be completely rebuilt. But Henry never once considered leaving. "In some ways we are lucky," he says. "The climate is perfect – Goma is a lot more hospitable than many other parts

of Congo. We have the resources of Lake Kivu. But the danger never goes away, we just have to learn to live with it."

The city also has better infrastructure than most places in the region. But again, this can fail, as it did after this latest eruption. Power lines went down, leaving people without water, light and communications, ideal ingredients for a humanitarian emergency. Even now the authorities are working to reunite children with the families they lost in the panic.

### Pressure keeps rising

Projects like the Gorilla Organization's community-based conservation initiatives do provide a degree of certainty. However, things are getting harder in Goma. Since the start of the pandemic, the number of people heading there from surrounding villages has risen. Without the chance to make a living, there's a risk that many will look to the resources of the Virunga National Park. The conservation gains of the past decades could be wiped out, pushing gorillas back towards extinction and leaving people trapped in a vicious and unsustainable cycle of poverty.



**The road to three vital ranger stations is cut off by lava**





A contested Will meant that Dian Fossey (above) almost didn't leave money to save her beloved gorillas

## Planning ahead to leave a legacy

Dian Fossey dedicated her life to saving gorillas. But even then, her legacy was in doubt.

When she died, her Will was contested, meaning her money almost didn't go towards helping the animals she loved. "Dian's case is a lesson to us all," says Director Jillian Miller. "A lifetime of caring

for gorillas is not in itself enough to leave a legacy."

Through the generous gifts left in supporters' Wills, the Gorilla Organization has managed to keep its field projects going for many years. This has meant that, even in times of insecurity and crisis, this important work has continued, transforming

lives and safeguarding gorillas and their precious habitat.

The Gorilla Organization now offers wildlife lovers a free online Will-writing service and can help supporters through every stage of the legacy leaving process.

Find out more on the legacy page of [www.gorillas.org](http://www.gorillas.org).

## A global adventure for a good cause



Leo at the top of Mount Olympus

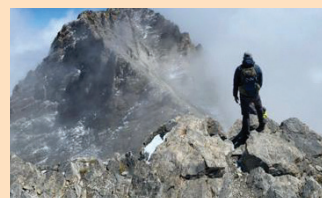
Buoyed by his pre-pandemic visit to see the gorillas of Uganda, fashion entrepreneur Leo Gripari set himself a mega challenge, to test himself and to raise vital funds for community-based conservation projects in Africa.

The Athens-based founder of That Gorilla Brand clothing company put together a challenge he calls "Two Marathons, Two Mountains, One Canyon." So, as well as running a marathon across the desert in Jordan and also one in the Himalayas, he will climb Mount Kilimanjaro and trek the entire rim of the Grand Canyon.

Leo says, "It's been great to get the first of my challenges, climbing

Mount Olympus, completed. Now I can't wait to get onto the next one and raise vital funds to support projects that help keep gorillas and their habitat safe."

So far, Leo has run over 1,250km in preparing for his marathons and has raised close to €160k, with research on the water projects That Gorilla Brand is supporting now underway (see page 4).



## Lockdown Leo runs wild

Stuck at home in Essex during lockdown, Leo Nicholls read one of the Gorilla Organization's leaflets.

Gorillas quickly became the 10-year-old's favourite animals. "I learned that they are

endangered and close to extinction," he says. And so when his cricket and football clubs stopped meeting, he decided to combine his love of exercise with his new-found determination to help gorillas in the wild. He set himself a target of running 50km with his mum Sarah and raised £550 for gorillas!



## Get set to put the 'fun' into fundraising

Lockdown meant no skydiving adventures or epic runs. Even fundraising drinks had to be put on ice. But now restrictions are easing, supporters everywhere are ready to go ape once again! And we're here to help you.

The Gorilla Organization's Events Team have a wealth of fundraising kits, tips and ideas to help you get started, and are ready to support any challenge.

Get in touch at [events@gorillas.org](mailto:events@gorillas.org) and let's get ready for a busy year of helping apes in distress!

Legacy Tea Parties are another great way of bringing friends and family together to pledge to ensure gorillas are around for generations to come. We do all the work and book the venue while you serve as the host and Gorilla Organization Ambassador for the day. And if you need help, our Director, Chairman and patrons are happy to come along to share their stories from the frontlines of gorilla conservation.

## Mr Gorilla hangs up his suit...for now



Tom meets the late Dame Cheryl Gillan MP at Westminster

Mr Gorilla's next challenge could be his biggest yet. The fundraising superhero (aka London police officer Tom Harrison) raised tens of thousands of pounds and made headlines around the world running marathons, hand-cycling across whole countries and doing lockdown laps of his neighbourhood – all in his trademark gorilla suit.

Now, after seven years of physical daring-do, Tom's switching his energy to lobbying on behalf of gorillas. Inspired by the late environmentalist Dame Cheryl Gillan, Mr Gorilla will return as a cheerleader for the endangered apes, throwing his irrepressible energy into getting politicians, sports stars and business leaders to play their part in saving a species from extinction.



# Rafiki legacy lives on in Bwindi's forests

**It was a crime that made headlines around the world. As the pandemic kept tourists away from Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park in Uganda, poachers seized the chance to lay down more snares, safe in the knowledge that nobody would be around to see them.**

A pair of poachers, in the forests looking for small mammals to eat, encountered Rafiki, the silverback who had been in charge of the Nkoringo group for more than a decade. They panicked. Rafiki was speared in the chest and left to die on the forest floor.

The guilty poachers claimed they were acting in self-defence. They said Rafiki had attacked them first. However, the rangers and vets who knew the silverback best maintain that he would never attack a human being.

"Habituated gorillas don't know the difference between 'good humans' and 'bad humans'," explains Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, pioneering wildlife vet and Gorilla Organization Trustee. Even the many tourists who had been lucky enough to spend an hour in his company believed the powerful silverback lived up to his name – Rafiki literally means 'a friend' in Swahili.

While the authorities were busy catching and charging the culprits, conservationists had other worries. What would become of the Nkoringo group now? Rafiki had peacefully taken over when his own father had become too old and

weak. But the sudden loss of their leader now left the group in disarray and vulnerable. Within the space of a few days, six gorillas left. Some joined the nearby Bishaho group, while adult male Christmas left to set up his own small family. Once 17-strong, the Nkuringo family was now down to 11. And fears were mounting that a lone, unhabituated silverback could come in and wrest control, possibly violently.

## A big ego brings new hope

Fast forward one year and the Nkoringo group is stable and thriving. And it's all thanks to Rwamutwe. Though his name means 'one with the big ego' in Swahili, Rwamutwe was always happy to be led by Rafiki. He was the group's eldest and largest blackback, an adolescent male more interested in play-fighting than leading. Tellingly, most rangers and guides still referred to him as a blackback even after he had turned 13, the age at which males start getting the distinctive silver hairs on their back.

However, Rafiki's sudden death meant Rwamutwe had to grow up fast. Now aged 17, he has assumed control over the group and is clearly



**Rafiki's death may have led to a power struggle, but Rwamutwe (inset) stepped up and is now in charge of the group**

showing his authority. He's even starting to look the part of an alpha male too.

As Gorilla Organization Chairman and ape authority Ian Redmond notes, "It may be that his back gets steadily more silver as he adapts to his new responsibilities. These characteristics can be influenced by social status, with hormones either sped up or suppressed according to who's in charge. So this is a clear sign

that Rwamutwe is the boss and comfortable in his position."

Rafiki may have been replaced as leader of the Nkoringo group but his legacy lives on. In January, adult female Furaha gave birth. The baby is Rafiki's youngest offspring and is happy and healthy. What's more, TV documentary crews are making plans for a special film on the family, celebrating the conservation triumph that has emerged out of unspeakable tragedy.

## Gorilla conservation is a family affair in Kisoro



**Dads and their kids play their part in saving gorillas**

The Nkuringo mountain gorilla group isn't the only family thriving in Uganda. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Gorilla Organization has continued to make great progress in its pioneering 'family first' approach to community conservation in Kisoro District.

In targeted 'front line villages' bordering both the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, whole families are benefitting

from grassroots development and conservation projects. This way, for example, mothers can benefit from sustainable agriculture training, while fathers join the Reformed Poachers Project, ensuring families are able to earn a living without relying on the protected resources of the forests.

At the same time, with the Children for Sustainable Development initiative now active in 24 primary and secondary schools, the next generation are getting a head start in environmental

education and conservation knowhow.

The approach has got a lot of attention from both the Ugandan Government, the Uganda Wildlife Authority, and other NGOs working in the region who have started to adopt this multi-generational approach to their work. Now, with the training hall of the Gorilla Organization's Kisoro Resource Centre ready to re-open as soon as the Covid-19 lockdown ends, even more local families are set to benefit.



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# Community reserves a safe haven for Grauer's gorillas

Since they don't live high up in the dense forests like their mountainous cousins, Grauer's gorillas (also known as the eastern lowland gorilla) are far more likely to come into unwelcome contact with humans.

And since their home range stretches across large parts of eastern DR Congo, one of the least secure places in Africa, gorilla numbers have been falling steadily over the past few decades.

Now, however, conservationists have been given a glimmer of hope. Research published in the *American Journal of Primatology* indicates that the population decline may not be as big as initially thought.

Long weeks of counting nests led the researchers to revise the previous estimate of gorillas living in the Kahuzi Biega National Park and the nearby Oku Community Reserve up from 3,800 to 6,800.

Of course, the threats facing the gorillas remain the same. In some cases, they have even intensified, with hunting for bushmeat rife. However, the study also shows the effectiveness of community reserves as well as National Parks.

Director Jillian Miller notes: "It's



**New research shows that there are more eastern lowland gorillas than previously believed thanks to a broader scope of study**

hugely encouraging to see there may be more lowland gorillas than we once feared. And it's interesting to see that gorillas were mostly found furthest away from roads and human populations, highlighting the importance of keeping forests intact."

Just like at Oku, the Gorilla Organization's project at Walikale Community Reserve is doing just that, ensuring local people have a say in forest management and providing a safe home for gorillas to live in peace and to thrive.

## Mapping Bwindi's water needs



**Interviewing a family in drought-ridden Nyabaremba village**

For the communities living alongside the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park in Uganda, getting clean water is a constant and time-consuming struggle.

Water sources are unreliable and unpredictable. In many cases, people will walk for more than an hour to get it. And even then, they will have to use a mosquito net to filter out dirt and even animal waste. The problem affects everyone – from families living on

the edge of the park boundaries to the National Park staff tasked with patrolling the forests and protecting the endangered mountain gorillas living there.

To get a better overview of the situation, a team from the Gorilla Organization's Kisoro Resource Centre spent weeks surveying hundreds of residents, assessing their needs and challenges. Samson, Frances and Jackson also mapped out the communities in most need of clean water and identified both seasonal and permanent water sources in the area.

### **Ambitious project**

Together, they presented their findings to a team of consultants from the charity Just a Drop who visited the Resource Centre and surveyed the sites in June. The consultants' research will be used for an ambitious project to get clean water to target villages and communities located on the very edge of the protected forests.

As well as improving the lives of thousands of people, it would also give gorillas rangers one less thing to worry about and reduce

incidences of people trespassing into the gorilla habitat in order to find water.

Dr Samson Werikhe, the Gorilla Organization's Regional Programme Manager for Uganda, explains: "Having reliable access to clean water will make such a huge difference for people living on the border of the National Park. Delivering this will be a big challenge – but our close connections with the communities will be a big advantage as we find a solution that works for everyone."



**With a reliable water supply, rangers will be able to patrol the gorilla habitat for longer**

## Queen Bee aims big

**As 'Queen Bee' of Kisoro District, Jovia Basenga (pictured) has helped hundreds of local people give up poaching.**

**But Queen Bee Jovia is just getting started. She is working on creating a "Bee-lectric fence" – a chain of a thousand beehives**

**stretched along the southern boundary of the Bwindi forests. Not only will this give thousands of households a way to supplement their nutrition, but the bees will also deter greedy gorillas from venturing onto farmland. Find out how you can help Jovia meet her goal at [www.gorillas.org](http://www.gorillas.org).**

