



Fixing the water woes of gorillas and humans

In western Uganda, as in many parts of Africa, people are thirsty. And, increasingly, the mountain gorillas of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest are thirsty, too.

Climate change is pushing temperatures up. Not much, but enough to make gorillas dangerously dehydrated. Gorillas have evolved to get all the water they need from vines, leaves and the juicy stems of banana plants. But as climate change nudges temperatures ever higher, they are now being forced to find alternative sources of water, including streams on the edges of the National Park that are also used by people and their livestock.

These streams can often be dirty and dangerous. Vets have reported cases of gorillas falling ill from waterborne diseases. And they are not ideal for the local communities, either. As well as being potentially dangerous, getting water from streams can be unreliable as they run to a trickle in dry season. It's also inconvenient. People, usually women or children, have to take time away

from their education or from trying to earn a living, to collect water. And finally, it increases the chances of gorilla-human interactions.

Clean water for all

The solution? Small wells and giant lobelia. To help humans, The Gorilla Organization is giving communities in the area easy and reliable access to clean drinking water. With the support of NGOs Just a Drop and Voluntary Action for Development, wells are being installed in villages along the edge of the Bwindi forest.

Most recently, shallow wells and protected springs have been installed in the villages of Kanyamahene and Nymasinda.

That means more than 2,500 people are now enjoying easy access to clean water for the first time, empowering them to focus on making a living without relying



Thick fur coats put mountain gorillas at risk of dehydration

on the resources found in the precious gorilla habitat.

We have also become the first conservation charity to start planting giant lobelia, which can grow up to six metres tall and are incredibly juicy. In fact, they are 90% water. Just one plant has enough water to keep a whole gorilla family hydrated.

As Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, leading primatologist and Gorilla Organization trustee, explains: "It's hugely important that gorillas stay hydrated, ideally through a plentiful supply of plants with high water content." This is especially important for mountain gorillas, the endangered sub-species living in the Bwindi forests. They evolved to live at high altitude, with thick fur that now puts them at risk of dehydration as temperatures creep upwards.

Slow but steady progress

Both the drilling and planting projects are now pushing

ahead at a steady pace, illustrating the importance of joined-up community conservation. However, while plants like giant lobelia are slow-growing and will take a few more years to be sufficiently big to sate the biggest thirsty silverbacks, the water projects are proving to be an instant success.

New wells prove as hit

In March, a Gorilla Organization team was joined by representatives from Just a Drop and Voluntary Action for Development in a visit to the villages benefitting from new wells. They found that the communities themselves have embraced the wells, donating money for their upkeep and using them daily. No more time-consuming walks to unreliable streams and, more importantly, more time to focus on developing livelihoods, reducing dependence on the resources of the forests and keeping humans and gorillas safely apart.



The whole community gets involved as a new well brings fresh water

Reformed poachers welcome BBC crew

A global audience of around 800 million got to see community conservation in action when the BBC paid a visit to the Gorilla Organization's Reformed Poachers project.

Climate Editor Justin Rowlett was in Uganda reporting on the "dramatic turnaround" in mountain gorilla numbers over recent decades. To reflect the importance of community-led conservation efforts, he showed how the Gorilla Organization is addressing one of the greatest threats facing gorillas right now – poaching.



He joined Uganda project manager Dr Samson Werikhe on a visit to the Rubugiri Reformed Poachers initiative where around 80 men have been given a chance to earn a living outside of the protected Bwindi forests.

"A key challenge was to persuade these men to stop poaching animals from the park. They were made an

offer it was hard to refuse," Justin told viewers.

The offer was indeed too good to turn down. Dr Werikhe explains: "They had to hand over their hunting spears, their machetes, their traps. I told them 'This is your last chance – if you get caught in the park, the authorities will send you to jail. If you give up hunting, you can have a very good future for yourselves'."

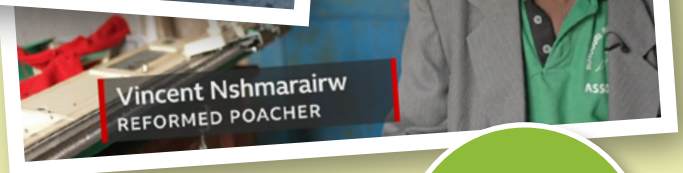
Conservation success story

Community-led initiatives that address the root causes of the threats facing gorillas are part of the reason behind the ultimate 'conservation success story'.

However, as the post-pandemic economic realities begin to bite in



Interviewees in the BBC's "Mountain gorillas: a conservation success"



You can watch the programme on BBC iPlayer via: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0018v56

many parts of Africa, even more people will need to be given an incentive to give up their poaching tools and stay out of the gorilla habitat.



Team Gorilla set for London Marathon

After two years with no charity runners taking part, the London Marathon is back.

And Team Gorilla is recruiting! The UK's biggest – and most prestigious – marathon is a highlight of the fundraising calendar.

Over the years, the sporting superstars of Team Gorilla have raised tens of thousands of pounds for gorilla conservation projects in Africa. What's more, by running, walking, and even knuckle-

crawling their way around the 26-mile course, they have also raised awareness of the plight of the world's last remaining gorillas in the wild.

The 2022 TCS London Marathon will take place on Sunday 2 October. At the time of going to print, there are still some vacant places on Team Gorilla, and the events team are ready to help with all your training and fundraising needs. Find out more by contacting info@gorillas.org

Postcard from the field: Kisoro comes to life

After being closed to guests for so long, our centre is coming back to life – in more ways than one.

We always wanted this place to be more than an office. And we are succeeding! The Resource Centre is now a true community hub, welcoming visitors from across Kisoro and beyond. After being welcomed by Fiona our receptionist, young visitors can join Frances in learning about gorillas and wildlife conservation while their parents join Brenda in the gardens learning how to grow sustainable crops or Jackson in the office who is always happy to share news from our projects.

The community hall is busier than ever, and the gardens are really in full bloom. We have planted bee-friendly plants like torch lilies and these are succeeding in attracting wildlife, like our regular three-horned chameleon. The extra colour and vibrancy grab the attention of passers-by, a useful outreach tactic that allows us to talk about gorilla conservation to even more people!

Samson
Dr Samson Werikhe



How gorillas survived – and then thrived – in the pandemic

When the pandemic hit, the entire conservation community held its breath. The sudden fall in tourists also meant a sudden fall in income for large numbers of people living around Africa's National Parks.

Even those that didn't work in tourism, whether directly or indirectly, were still impacted, not least in Uganda where 20% of all money generated from gorilla-watching permits goes directly to local communities.

Almost overnight, the number of people ready to break the law and venture into National Parks to poach, chop down trees or burn the habitat, soared dramatically. To make matters even worse, reports from elsewhere confirmed that gorillas could catch Covid from humans. There was, therefore, a genuine fear that the pandemic could lead to a spike in poaching and a reversal of the significant progress made in keeping gorillas safe over recent decades.

At first, such fears appeared to be well-founded. In the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest alone, rangers reported a massive rise in the number of snares being illegally set. And then tragically, in June 2020, silverback Rafiki was killed by a poacher returning to his traps. Since then, however, no other gorilla has lost their life to poachers. And no wild gorilla has caught Covid. What's more, even in the face of an

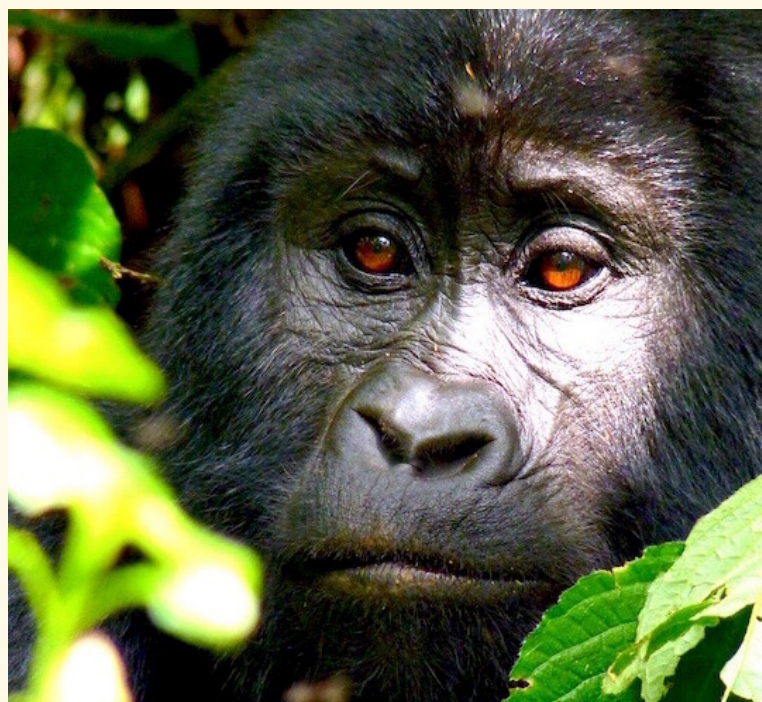
unprecedented crisis, gorilla numbers have continued to rise, thanks in no small part to the tireless dedication of park rangers.

More and longer ranger patrols

"We knew from the start that, if we wanted to keep gorillas safe, we needed to keep rangers in place," explains Jillian Miller, Director of the Gorilla Organization. While ready to put their lives on the line for gorillas and other wildlife, the rangers themselves were also under immense pressure. Conducting daily patrols and then returning to their homes was not an option since this increased the risk of passing on the virus to gorillas. Instead, they needed to spend longer in the forests, cut off from their families for weeks at a time. To do so, they needed urgent and ongoing support.

The Gorilla Organization's teams in both Uganda and DR Congo stepped up to the challenge. Food aid and practical equipment was sent to the 400 rangers self-isolating in the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park. This allowed them to stay at their posts or to conduct longer patrols deeper into the forest, keeping the floors free from deadly snares.

Across the border in the Itombwe reserve, one of the most inaccessible and inhospitable parts of DR Congo, the Gorilla Organization's funds were put to good use establishing a stronger and more consistent ranger



New baby for Raha's family

The Nshongi family is just one of the many mountain gorilla groups that has thrived over the past year. Left in relative peace and kept safe from poachers' snares by the constant vigilance of rangers, the group has settled down into a happy routine, and has even expanded.

In May, rangers saw that adult female Kebirungi had given birth to a baby, taking the group's size from 12 to 13, including youngster Raha (pictured above), the Gorilla Organization's adopted gorilla. For now, the baby remains close to its mother, with silverback Bweza watching closely over both. In time, it will become more independent, and join Raha (whose name means 'playful') testing the silverback's patience and keeping rangers on their toes.

presence. A first permanent patrol post was set up Kabolokelo. Here too, practical and financial support made a real difference, as it did in the Maiko National Park where Chief Warden Jean-Claude Kyungu reported that regular salaries and increased rations helped to motivate his team and keep them focused on their vital work.

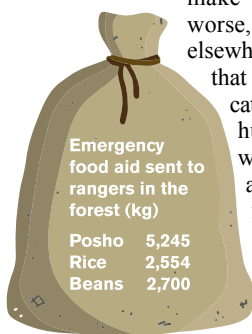
A debt of gratitude

The rangers aren't just working longer and harder than ever before – they're also working smarter. Patrols are increasingly based on intelligence, both on where poachers are operating and where gorillas are feeding and sleeping. And again,

this is only made possible through funding for GPS trackers, radios and other equipment.

In recognition of their essential role in keeping gorillas safe and allowing them to not only survive but actually thrive, Bwindi's head warden, Nelson Guma, wrote a letter of appreciation to the team at the Gorilla Organization's Resource Centre in Uganda.

Director Jillian Miller adds: "And special thanks must also go to all our supporters. Without them, poaching would now be out of control and we might have also lost the valuable support of communities, putting our long-term mission in jeopardy."



The team get ready to deliver food aid to keep rangers supplied

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A growing passion for planting trees

At around 6,000 square kilometres, the Kahuzi-Biega National Park is one of DR Congo's largest protected forests. But even here, every tree is incredibly precious.

The park is one of the last refuges of the eastern lowland gorilla, and deforestation remains one of the greatest threats facing the critically-endangered population found within its borders. Trees are chopped down not only for firewood, but also to build and even furnish homes. In almost all cases, the logging is carried out illegally, slowly but surely depriving gorillas of their natural habitat.

Fighting back

But the Gorilla Organization's DR Congo Project Manager Henry Cirhuza has been fighting back. Under his leadership, the Kalehe Reforestation Project has been going from strength to strength. A

network of 10 tree nurseries has been established, stretching more than 70km along the edge of the park. Just in the past year, Henry and his team have planted more than 230,000 saplings. Perhaps more importantly, they have also planted the seeds of greater appreciation for the protected habitat and for sustainable forestry.

Henry says: "People now have a passion for growing trees and understand that they can produce their own trees for firewood, construction and furniture. Indeed, the sale of bean poles, honey and fruit means they have money for schooling and medical care. The tree has become a source of income for the local people, and their nurseries a source of pride."

The Kalehe Reforestation Project is now visible on Google Earth, and by reducing reliance on the National Park, its eastern lowland gorillas are being left in peace.



Busy planting 230,000 saplings



At the start of July, the UN declared the latest Ebola outbreak in DR Congo over. The green wall held – and not a single gorilla caught the deadly virus!

Supermum Tumaini welcomes fifth baby to Bageni group

Rangers based in Congo's Virunga National Park have been working flat out to return to normal duties following a recent spate in serious unrest and violence.

Priority number one is to locate and monitor all 10 of the Park's habituated mountain gorilla groups. The Bageni group proved to be one of the easiest to find. And what's more, when they did locate the gorillas during a routine patrol in April, rangers found that Tumaini was carrying a new-born baby.

This is the 23-year-old's fifth baby and, like the infant female's big brothers and sisters, the new arrival is doing well under the watchful eye of silverback Bageni. And Bageni himself has also been busy.

The group leader has fathered an infant with another of the group's females, 12-year-old Ziada. The male infant is Ziada's second baby and brings the group's total up to an incredible 46 individuals, making it one of the largest mountain gorilla families ever recorded.

Farmers sow seeds of change

In villages across the Kisoro District, the Gorilla Organization's Key Farmer Trainers are almost local celebrities.

After benefitting from training in

sustainable agriculture and organic farming themselves, this small group of men and women have gone out into their communities to pass on their skills and expertise.



With new tools, farmers can earn a living outside of the gorilla forests

In the latest round of workshops, one trained farmer reported he had been overwhelmed with requests for help after he showed villagers how they can use organic techniques to produce six times as many potatoes as before. As a result, 36 new farmers have learned how to boost their crop yields, while also being trained in looking after goats, and a further 10 women were shown how to grow bamboo, to be used for construction.

Thanks to the work of the Kisoro District Farmers' Association, more than 1,000 people in 170 households have now been reached! That's 1,000 fewer people with reason to venture into the forests, to chop down the trees that the gorillas rely on, and to put down deadly snares.



Supermum Tumaini

