



Digit, Dian Fossey's favourite gorilla, by Joel Kirk

digit news

saving the world's last gorillas

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the gorilla organization

Landmark study shows the secret to saving gorillas

Community conservation has always been at the heart of the Gorilla Organization's work. It's a recognition that including local people in long term planning is key to building a more resilient future for all species of gorilla.

Such an approach has not always been popular. Indeed, the Gorilla Organization has been a pioneer, moving away from the old top-down approach of wildlife conservation and instead embracing a grassroots model. But it has undoubtedly been effective. And slowly but surely, the global conservation community has shifted to a community-based approach, one key reason why the future may be looking brighter for endangered species everywhere.

More effective conservation

Signed by the world's governments just two years ago, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework aims at reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. Given the alarming decline in lowland gorillas in particular, this goal may seem daunting, even impossible. However, the data shows this inclusive approach is working. A brand new University of Oxford meta-analysis of almost 200 studies

from around the world concluded that "conservation is getting more effective over time".

Certainly, mountain gorillas have been brought back from the edge of extinction, from fewer than 600 at the start of the millennium to around 1,100 now. But the job is far from done. Even mountain gorillas remain highly vulnerable, at the mercy of poachers and militias, with their habitat shrinking at a rapid rate. Even more at risk are eastern lowland gorillas, classed as one step away from being lost for good. What hope there is lies in frontline, community-led efforts.

The Gorilla Organization continues to lead the way. By taking a 'whole of family approach', men are supported as they shift from poaching to more sustainable livelihoods, women are empowered to organize, educate, and run communities without relying on the forests, and children are inspired into action in their schools and homes.



Data shows that including local people has been key to saving gorillas

As Director Jillian Miller explains, "We have always worked directly with the communities to find the right balance between keeping gorillas safe and helping people thrive, not just survive.

The two go hand-in-hand, and the results speak for themselves: lives are transformed, communities uplifted and the underlying threats facing gorillas undermined and even eradicated."

People take charge in Kansere

To see what community conservation looks like in its purest form, head west from Congo's Lake Edward and then go deep into the Kansere-Masakaru-Iyuma forests.

Among the remotest parts of Congo (and, therefore, all

of Africa), these forests have never been recognized as protected reserves. Instead, communities take the lead and, with the support of the Gorilla Organization, forage and farm while respecting the species protected by Congolese

law, including the critically endangered lowland gorillas.

Local chief Papy Kabaya Mahamudi Eustache says: "Our thanks go to the Gorilla Organization for supporting this work in Kansere. Community conservation helps to protect

natural resources and local ecosystems. These initiatives should be supported, because without the resources, especially in remote areas, it is difficult to guarantee the long-term health of ecosystems and biodiversity."



Gorilla rangers go hi-tech

In wildlife conservation, it pays to have an edge. To be one step ahead of poachers – or, indeed, of gorillas.

That’s why, alongside field essentials like sturdy boots and tents, the Gorilla Organization’s intrepid ranger teams are also now equipped with the latest high-tech tools. What’s more, they have the knowledge to put them to good use in the forests of the Congo.

At the Kisimbe-Ikobo Nature Reserve, in remote North Kivu, 25 rangers have been trained in installing and using camera traps. The team has already fixed cameras in the Kira Sector of the reserve, home to a little-seen population of eastern lowland gorillas. This way, they will know where to focus their anti-poaching patrols, while also getting to know more about the unhabituated gorilla groups.

Meanwhile, in nearby Itombwe Nature Reserve, hopes are high that newly-installed cameras will manage to snap a wandering gorilla.

And it’s not just cameras that are giving rangers the edge. The Gorilla Organization’s teams have recently been trained in SMART (Spatial



Rangers everywhere are embracing technology – and the team in Itombwe are now trained and fully equipped



Monitoring and Reporting Tool). This allows them to compile the data they collect during their gorilla monitoring patrols and share it with fellow conservationists, not just in Africa but right around the world.

Internationally standardized data means clearer insights and more opportunities to share knowledge and best practice. So far, rangers from Itombwe and Kisimbe-Ikobo, Maiko and Walikale reserves

have taken the training, giving them cutting-edge expertise to go alongside their savvy knowhow of the forests and that vital advantage over the poachers who mean gorillas harm.

Thank you to our donors!



Gorilla Boxes contain everything a ranger needs on patrol. Here, rangers set out for ten day’s gorilla tracking deep in the forest

When the gorilla ranger teams asked for help, our supporters

stepped up in a big way...the Gorilla Boxes Appeal was our most successful yet.

Their gifts have already been put to good use as rangers stock up on essentials like boots, waterproof clothing and camping equipment so they can be out protecting gorillas for longer periods. Thank you to all our wonderful supporters!



Students inspired by Dian Fossey

The Gorilla Organization is always ready to support the next generation of conservationists in spreading the word.

So when Maddie Southgate reached out for help with a presentation to her fellow students at Arthur Terry School in Sutton, Surrey, Chairman Ian Redmond and his team were happy to lend their insights.

Dian Fossey’s incredible work

“I’ve loved nature since childhood and have a fascination with the way animals live their lives,” Maddie



says. “My interest in gorillas grew recently when I discovered the incredible work of Dian Fossey.”

Maddie has decided to take her passion for animals even further and study conservation, evolution and animal behaviour at university.

If you want the Gorilla Organization to support a school or university project, please get in touch at info@gorillas.org



Maddie Southgate (left) giving her presentation which was inspired by Dian Fossey (above)

Healthy children, healthy gorillas



Gorillas and humans share around 98% of the same DNA. This genetic closeness builds respect and empathy. But it also has a major downside.

Gorillas and other great apes can catch diseases from humans. And viruses that are easily treatable for people can be far more serious, even deadly, for gorillas.

The threat posed by human-gorilla transmission (known as reverse zoonoses) is only getting bigger as the two come into more frequent contact. The boundary between communities and the gorilla habitat is becoming increasingly blurred, not least as tourism brings people from all parts of the world, as well

as rangers and trackers, to within just a few metres of the vulnerable great apes.

At the same time, the people living alongside the protected National Parks and reserves continue to encroach, bringing with them diseases that could potentially decimate critically endangered gorilla groups.

While research into reverse zoonoses is still in its relative infancy, the Gorilla Organization's work to keep gorillas safe from human diseases is not. For more than 20 years, community-based conservation projects in Uganda



Making young people stakeholders in community development



Happy days as a rural community finally gets clean, reliable water

and across the border in DR Congo, have been built around a recognition that healthy people means healthy gorillas.

In particular, ensuring children have access to clean water and reliable sanitation helps keep them in good health and in school and makes it less likely that they will pass on any illnesses to their parents, many of whom work in the forest as rangers, porters or guides.

Gorilla Organization Director,

Jillian Miller explains: "With thanks to our donor That Gorilla Brand, our clean water projects deliver countless benefits for whole communities as well as for mountain gorillas.

"Everywhere we have installed clean drinking water or toilets, the results are immediate and hugely encouraging, improving the wellbeing of people and the gorillas they live closely alongside."

United for conservation in a conflict zone

Since it was established in 1970, Kahuza-Biega National Park has exemplified the best – and the worst – of wildlife conservation.

The park is a sanctuary for critically-endangered eastern lowland gorillas as well as countless other species. But the conservation successes have come at a cost. The park occupies the ancestral land of the Batwa people. The indigenous communities were

forcibly removed to create the protected space, leaving most impoverished and marginalized.

In 2018, some Batwa crossed the boundaries and settled back into the forest. Over the next three years, they were subjected to sporadic violence by government forces as well as militia groups determined to exploit the forests for their natural resources.

Now, the park authorities are

making a fresh effort to work with, rather than against, the Batwa and the Gorilla Organization is there to help.

Share knowledge

A new planning group is being created, to meet once every three months, to share knowledge and find solutions to the biggest problems facing both communities and the park's gorillas.

The Gorilla Organization has been actively involved in the early stages, making sure the voices of the local communities are heard.

Carrying out "conservation in a conflict zone" is never easy.

But a truly inclusive and collaborative approach is key to learning the lessons of the past and building a future that works for both people and for gorillas.

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One year on, green shoots appear again

The people of Africa are resilient. And the communities of eastern DR Congo perhaps even more so. They know tragedy, and they know how to bounce back.

In May 2023, communities across the Kafele district were hit by huge floods and mudslides, triggered by days of torrential rain. The Gorilla Organization's tree planting projects in Bushushu and Nyamukubi were literally washed away, with one worker losing his life in the tragedy.



A vital green buffer grows back

One year on, and it's back to business. Reforestation activities on these two sites have resumed and the on-site nurseries have been rehabilitated.

In the nurseries impacted by the mudslides, as well as at 18 other sites nearby, Henry Cirhuza and his team have already celebrated two planting seasons, with 250,000 saplings put in the ground per season. And the determination to get back growing is infectious.

Interest in the tree-planting project keeps rising as local communities come for the sustainable firewood and construction materials, keeping the gorilla habitat intact one tree at a time.



The Nyamukubi nursery where 250,000 saplings are planted

Taking care of injured silverbacks

As mountain gorilla numbers rise across the Virungas, specialists vets are on the lookout for signs of struggles between competing silverbacks.

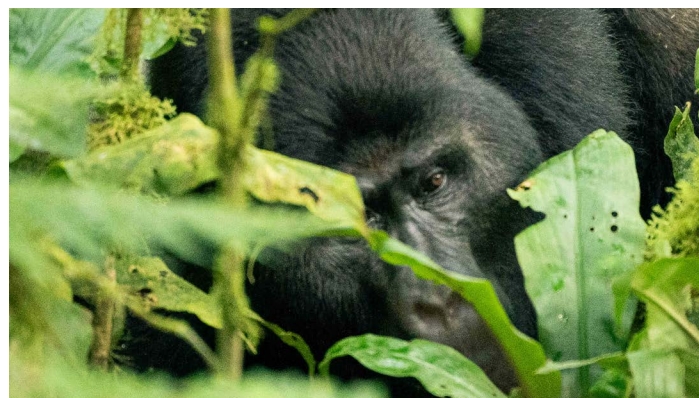
Even siblings fight, like the case of Mutobo who ousted big brother Uruwigo. Mutobo now leads a thriving group in the Virunga National Park and still wears the scars from his coup.

Scraps between adult males tussling for females or dominance of a group are natural. But nevertheless, the Gorilla Organization continues to support frontline experts who are ready to treat any serious wounds, as well as researchers who keep track of mountain gorilla family sagas.



Mighty Mutobo fought his way to the top

A plastic menace in the forests



Powerful gorillas are at risk from discarded tiny microplastics

Rangers patrolling the Itombwe Nature Reserve already have their work cut out for them searching for deadly snares set down on the forest floor.

But now, there's another growing threat. Plastics are becoming a part of the landscape, both visibly and invisibly. Speaking with the Reserve's chief ranger, the Gorilla Organization's Henry Cirhuza has learned that plastics are posing a real risk to the health of gorillas, as well as to the health of their habitat.

"There are countless mining operations in these forests and the miners consume a lot of juice and alcohol, almost all of it in single-use plastics," Henry says. "They then throw the packaging down on the forest floor and rangers have noticed a significant increase in littering over the past couple of years."

Deadly microplastics

Discarded plastic gets into the roots of trees and other plants. It prevents the growth of young

bamboo shoots – a favourite food of all types of gorilla. Perhaps more worrying is the hidden danger. Researchers have already found traces of microplastics in chimpanzee fur. There are growing concerns that gorillas, too, are being harmed, either through consuming microplastics when drinking from streams or breathing in toxic fumes as miners burn plastic waste. There are fears that lung-related illnesses are on the rise among gorillas living far from human settlements.

The Gorilla Organization's team will continue to monitor the situation, advocate for cleaner forests and play their part in keeping gorillas safe from threats both visible and invisible.



Invisible threats lurk in the dense forests