

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

digit news

saving the
world's last
gorillas

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the gorilla organization

Gorillas at risk as worst-ever Ebola outbreak closes in fast

For now, the barrier is holding. As medics warn that the wave of Ebola sweeping through the Ituri Province of DR Congo is the worst they have ever seen, the dense forests of the Virunga National Park are keeping mountain gorillas safe from harm. For now.

At the time of going to print, the official data looks alarming. Hundreds of deaths have already been confirmed in DR Congo alone. But that could just be the start. The Bundibugyo virus, which has caused the current outbreak, has a mortality rate of up to 50%, and there's no approved vaccine or treatment for it.

To make matters worse, the outbreak comes at a time of heightened insecurity in the region. Rebel activity is preventing health workers from delivering care, while widespread distrust in the authorities as well as a lack of funding for a proper response, is hampering even their best efforts.

Should the current outbreak reach the Virungas' gorilla population, the consequences would almost certainly be swift and devastating. Between 2002 and 2004, as many as 5,000 wild western lowland gorillas

died as Ebola ravaged closely concentrated populations with a 95% mortality rate. For this reason, The Gorilla Organization has joined an emergency mobilization of the conservation community. Funds have been redirected towards urgent preventative measures. Screening and hand-washing stations are being set up in and around the gorilla habitat. Specialist hygiene kits are being distributed to all rangers and support staff, along with training in how to prevent transmission and keep gorillas safe.

For the Gorilla Organization team in Goma, the outbreak brings yet another challenge. The community conservation projects they oversee depend on their ability to move around the region and be there on-the-ground to deliver in-person support. They have consistently managed to be there, for both people and gorillas, even through periods of war,



Gorillas share 98% of their DNA with humans. Ebola could wipe out whole populations

mudslides and volcanic eruptions. Now, however, they are grounded.

Watching and waiting

As Project Manager Henry Cirhuza reports from Goma, "Strict quarantine measures are now in place, restricting all movement in and out of the city. The good news is that our team remain healthy. But they are incredibly frustrated at their inability to provide help to where it's needed the most."

Across the border in Uganda, conservationists are also on red alert. There's never been an outbreak of Ebola among the gorillas here. But nobody is taking any chances. Tourists are still being allowed to visit a select number of gorilla families, not least because the impacts of the pandemic are still being felt here. Back then, a six-month pause on wildlife tourism led to a marked spike in poaching and

habitat destruction as communities were deprived of an income. However, should the risk to gorillas grow, stronger measures may be needed, no matter the short-term economic impact.

For Henry and his team in Goma, meanwhile, patience and vigilance are key to getting through yet another crisis. "Our project workers, the wildlife rangers we support, and all of us know we have to make sacrifices to keep each other safe, and to keep the gorillas safe. But still, we can't wait to get back to work. And we will, as soon as it is safe enough to do so."



Education is the best way to build awareness and stop the spread

**Sir David
at 100!
Toasting
a century
of saving
gorillas.
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The new Nyagakenke School: Classrooms for Conservation

For far too long, education in Nyagakenke meant mud floors, broken desks, and high dropout rates.

Now, however, the future is bright, not just for students, but for the whole community. In February, the Gorilla Organization celebrated a milestone in its community development work. Here, right on the edges of the Mgahinga National Park, a new school has brought new hope.

It is, remarked Bishop of Muhabura Diocese, the “best school in the whole region”. And it’s hard to disagree. The Bishop was joined at the official inauguration by Director Jillian Miller, as well as by representatives of That Gorilla Brand, who helped fund the school and other vital development projects across the wider district.



Pupils and parents lead the opening day celebrations

said. “Seeing the enthusiasm for learning fills me with hope for the future. These children will be the best ambassadors Mgahinga’s mountain gorillas have ever had, and I can’t wait to see them lead the way in protecting this incredible place for generations to come.”

Educating and protecting

The Nyagakenke Village Primary School will be a classroom and a conservation project rolled into one, educating children and protecting gorillas at the same time. Students will learn about

the endangered apes they live alongside, becoming advocates for their protection among the wider community.

The children are already busy planting trees and clearing litter to preserve fragile habitat. What’s more, for a community where poaching has too often been a means of survival, literacy offers a path to a future that doesn’t depend on destroying the forests or putting gorillas at risk.

GORILLA ORG. REPORT CARD...

- 3 buildings, 7 classrooms, room for 600 students
- 27 schools in The Children for Sustainable Conservation Programme
- 15,000 people with access to solar power and clean water



“We are so, so proud to open this new school,” Jillian



Director Jillian meets young students eager to learn more about gorillas



Leo and Casey open the school

A fundraising dream team

Leo and Casey from That Gorilla Brand (pictured above) are a driving force behind our community conservation work. Their five-year, 500,000 Euro “Adventures for a Cause” project not only

helped fund the construction of this school, it’s also backing ten indigenous Batwa children through secondary school and expanding access to education across other parts of Africa and the developing world. Thank you!

Celebrating 100 years of an icon and gorilla friend

“There is more meaning and mutual understanding in exchanging a glance with a gorilla than with any other animal I know.”

With those words, Sir David Attenborough made TV history. It was 1978, and *Life on Earth* would be seen by a global audience of 500 million people. As Sir David narrated, the popular perception of gorillas shifted completely, ushering in a new era of wonder and appreciation that would give life to a global conservation movement.

Those same words were also prominently displayed on the walls of the Gorilla Organization's London office for more than 20 years, inspiring countless team members and deepening Sir David's connection with our pioneering conservation work.

Indeed, the relationship can be traced back to that first iconic encounter with the Pablo Group, deep in the forests of the Volcanoes National Park.

Sir David's guide that day was Ian Redmond, Dian Fossey's

research assistant and future Gorilla Organization Chairman. It was Ian who led him through the dense vegetation to the gorilla family and observed as the cameras rolled.

The plan was for Sir David to briefly speak about human evolution, with the gorillas sitting in the background. But the gorillas had other ideas. An adult female ventured forward and twisted his head before putting her fingers in his mouth. And two inquisitive youngsters were even bolder. One, Poppy, played with his shoelaces. The other, a male named Pablo, lay on his lap, curious and cheeky.

Looking back, Sir David recalls the “delirium of happiness” he experienced at that moment. He was also aware of the immense “privilege” of coming so close to wild gorillas. But before he left Rwanda, Dian Fossey stressed that with such privilege comes a responsibility – to



Sir David Attenborough in 1978, and a wild encounter that would make history

raise both awareness and funds to help protect a species that was then teetering on the edge of extinction.

A lifelong legacy for gorillas

Sir David never forgot his responsibility. For almost 50 years, he has been a leading advocate for gorillas and a valued ally of The Gorilla Organization. He has shared his time and his stories to help raise funds for the community conservation projects that keep mountain gorillas safe from harm. And since he first showed the world that gorillas are complex, social and, above all, gentle creatures rather than the aggressive beasts of the jungle they had once been

portrayed as, their numbers have climbed from fewer than 260 to almost 1,100 today.

Gorilla Organization Director Jillian Miller was among the conservationists celebrating Sir David's 100th birthday in May 2026. She said: “Every time I have had the honour of meeting Sir David, I have been overwhelmed by his boundless enthusiasm for the natural world. Gorillas hold a special place in his heart, and his love for them has inspired his work for more than 50 years. It has been a true pleasure to call him a friend of The Gorilla Organization and we will be forever grateful for his tireless support and advocacy.”



Sir David's deep respect for gorillas inspired millions to help protect them

Hats on to our team!

Did you know? The Kisoro District of Uganda has two long, wet rainy seasons a year. So the team at the Resource Centre were thrilled to take delivery of their new raincoats and hats. Thanks to our generous supporters, they can be out in all weathers, serving communities and protecting gorillas. The team in DR Congo have also received their new kit, and are proud to be brand ambassadors in their communities.

Pictured are: Aphia, Regina, Frances, Matthew, Samson, Gidion, Phiona, Sabiti and Yvan. Brenda and Nimrod were in the field when the picture was taken.



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Two pairs of twins welcomed in Virunga

Could the high altitudes and rich vegetation of the Mikenso Sector of the Virunga National Park be the reasons behind a recent mini gorilla baby boom there?

That's certainly one theory after the mountain gorillas living here defied the odds to welcome not one but two pairs of twins in the opening months of 2026.

In January, rangers observing the Begeni family reported that Mafuko had given birth to twin males. Then in March, a female in the Bakara family was seen cradling two babies, one male and one female. The four new arrivals mean that nine infants have been born in the Virunga National Park so far this year.

The baby boom is being warmly welcomed as a clear sign that the Park's mountain gorillas feel safe



New mum Mafuko holds her two babies close as rangers check in

and have sufficient provisions to endure multiple pregnancies. Since twins are especially rare – accounting for just 1% of all births – hopes are high that the gorillas in

the higher altitudes of the Mikenso Sector will continue to thrive far away from the insecurity and poaching that is still sadly all too rife along the Park's borders.

Chimps and gorillas: The best of neighbours

Though Bwindi may be best known for its 600 mountain gorillas, they are not the only great ape found in the dense, 'impenetrable forests'.

The Ugandan National Park is also home to a substantial chimpanzee population, and learning more about them could help us further improve our understanding of the gorillas and increase the effectiveness of conservation efforts.

In 2025, researchers carried out the most recent count of Bwindi's gorillas. The results were hugely encouraging. The

population had grown from 459 in 2018 to 604 today. On the back of that, researchers decided to carry out the very first chimpanzee census. They counted around 430 individuals, all of them unhabituated to human presence and many occupying the same spaces as the gorillas.

Data key to saving close cousins

While research into gorilla-chimpanzee relations remains in its early stages, there is plenty of evidence to indicate the two great apes do interact and may even form lasting bonds. A 2022

study carried out in the Republic of Congo discovered instances of younger, more outgoing individuals from both species feeding and even playing together.

The Gorilla Organization's projects manager for Uganda, Dr. Samson Werikhe, knows the Bwindi forests better than anyone. He welcomes efforts to formally integrate chimpanzees into conservation plans, alongside the better-known gorillas.

"The more research we do, the more we see that Bwindi is a complex ecosystem where the great apes don't compete,



but instead live in harmony," he says. "These findings reinforce the need to use data to manage protected areas and avoid ape-human conflicts, especially in light of growing competition for land and other natural resources."

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Getting the eastern lowland gorillas of Kahuzi-Biega National Park to trust humans has not been easy. It's been a slow, careful process.

But, thanks to over a decade of patient work, rangers managed to gain their confidence. More than a dozen families became habituated, allowing rangers to get up close, monitor their wellbeing, and keep them safe from harm.

Now, however, that oversight and protection is no longer

possible. Armed rebels are in almost complete control of the southern section of the park. The rangers and conservation guards have been disarmed. The trails they previously followed are becoming impassable. And the gorillas are being left to fend entirely to themselves.

One ranger I spoke to anonymously shared his concerns. "We no longer know what became of our close cousins, who were accustomed to human presence, as no access is possible to carry out our work," he said. "We don't know if there have been births or deaths.

We nonetheless hold onto the hope that the gorillas are relying on their natural instinct for self-protection."

The rangers, supported by the Gorilla Organization, remain ready to get back into the forests the minute the security situation allows. There are paths to re-open, patrol posts to be rebuilt, and above all, trust of the gorillas to be won back, slowly and patiently.

Tuwer Wundi
DRC, June 2026