



digit saving the world's last gorillas news

issue 42 autumn 2012

the gorilla organization



Thousands flee as violence engulfs DR Congo's Virunga National Park

Mountain gorillas remain in peril amid Virungas unrest

Rangers working on the frontline of mountain gorilla conservation in the Virunga National Park are struggling to return to their vital work after heavy fighting rocked large parts of eastern DR Congo.

At the start of spring, dozens of rangers were forced to abandon their posts as fighting between government forces and heavily-armed rebels spread into the heart of the Mikeno sector of the park, home to around half of the world's remaining mountain gorillas. Along with their families, many ended up in makeshift camps dotted along the edge of the National Park, keeping them far from the gorillas they are determined to protect and preventing their children from enjoying a proper education. At the same time, as shells were fired into the park by the government forces in an effort to flush the rebels

out, Congo's critically-endangered mountain gorillas retreated deeper into the dense forest, leaving both conservation researchers and rangers unable to reach them and assess their wellbeing.

Now, though the intensity of the fighting has eased significantly over recent weeks, the threat looming over the park has yet to go away. Reports from out of eastern DR Congo indicate that new groups of rebels could be forming. Meanwhile, thousands of government troops are still stationed in and around the city of Goma, ready for any fresh eruption of fighting, enhancing the feeling of instability in the area and preventing both the Gorilla Organization and other NGOs from getting their vital work back on track.

For Henry Cirhuza, this latest outburst of violence in what is one of the most bio-diverse and

ecologically precious places on the planet is nothing new. Indeed, as the Gorilla Organization's manager in DR Congo, he has lived through countless outbursts of fighting over the years. Thankfully, he explains, rangers have been able to reach agreements with all the belligerents and carry out the occasional patrol. In fact, they have found that, not only are the park's gorillas safe, they have also grown in number, with sporadic patrols having revealed that two babies have been born in the midst of the fighting.

But still, Cirhuza warns, the ongoing unrest is still placing both the gorillas and their human neighbours in jeopardy and serving to undermine much of the progress that has been made here over recent years. "Instead of tourists coming to the Virunga National Park and providing vital income for the local communities, we now have rebel soldiers in the park. To make matters even worse, tens if not hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced by the fighting and many are now camped along the park boundary and are cutting down trees for fuel. It is vital we are able to get back to work protecting the gorillas and their habitat."

As well as the mounting threat of habitat loss, rangers working to protect Africa's oldest National Park are also struggling to cope with a rise in opportunistic crime, including illegal animal trafficking, making their jobs even more perilous, yet even more important, than ever.

Jillian Miller, executive director of the Gorilla Organization, adds: "This is by some way the worst fighting we have seen in this part of DR Congo for years. We just don't know what position we will be in once peace returns. But we do know that we've coped with unrest, war, natural disasters and even genocide before and managed to emerge stronger than ever, and this is what we will do this time, as well."



the gorilla organization

Letter from the Virungas

Here in DR Congo, we have been living under the threat of bombs for six months now. Monitoring and ranger patrols have been disrupted and gorilla trekking suspended, hurting the communities that are reliant on the revenues generated through tourism. I fear many people will have no choice but to enter the forest for the essentials they need.



It's not just in the Mikeno Gorilla Sector of the park where conservation efforts are at risk. The unrest has led to an increase in poaching in the forests around Mount Tshiaberimu. Though the small gorilla population here have not been harmed, how long will it be before one of them gets caught in a snare left for an antelope?

But, against this backdrop of violence, we have reason to be cheerful. As my colleague Henry reports, two baby mountain gorillas were born in the Virunga National Park this summer. If these remarkable creatures can thrive at times of such stress, I can only wonder what the situation would be like if the park was able to be what it was designed to be; a zone of peace and a refuge for Congo's animals.

TUVER - WUNAI

Goma, DR Congo

Find out why Adam Garcia is going ape for gorilla conservation. See page 2.



www.gorillas.org

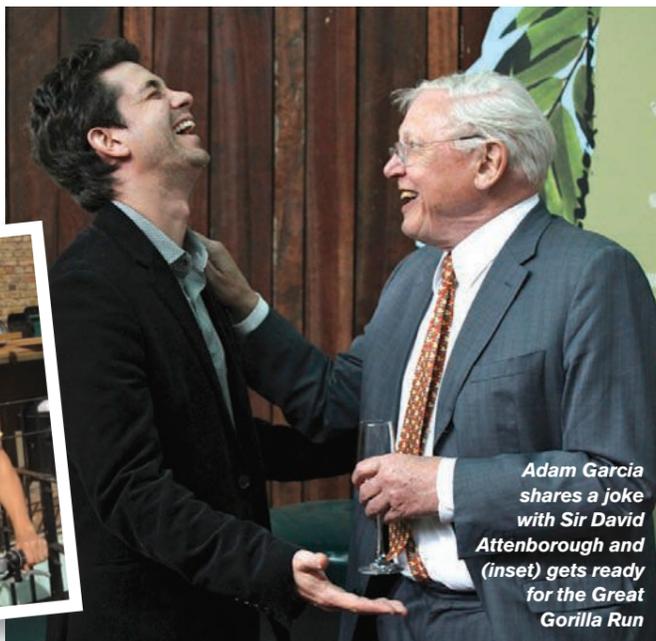
Dancing to the beat of gorilla conservation

Despite having established himself as a major star of the stage and screen, Adam Garcia has never forgotten his first love: conservation, and in particular protecting the world's great apes. It is this long-held fascination with the natural world that has inspired him to lend his support to Gorilla Organization and its work both in the UK and overseas.

"The most fascinating thing for me about gorillas is that they seem to have a soul, they are very gentle animals and they are so intelligent," says Adam, who followed up a visit to a fundraising dinner with Sir David Attenborough with participation in the 2012 Great Gorilla Run.

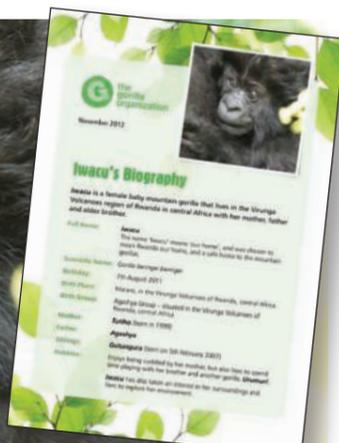
"I also love the way they look, they way the act and behave and the similarity that they have with us. Gorillas add so much to our world and I would encourage people to support a cause like this, to promote gorilla conservation and to help protect their precious habitat."

However, despite having observed gorillas in zoos and sanctuaries around the world, the Coyote Ugly star has yet to see them wild, in their natural habitat, something he is keen to put right sooner rather than later. "I would absolutely love to visit gorillas in Africa one day," he says.



Adam Garcia shares a joke with Sir David Attenborough and (inset) gets ready for the Great Gorilla Run

Meet baby mountain gorilla Iwacu...



Amy Akago, the Gorilla Organization's adopted gorilla, has never been the type to settle down. Far from it, in fact. Over the years, she's criss-crossed the border between Rwanda and DR Congo countless times, making it difficult for researchers to keep track of her movements.

It is now believed that Amy, who recently celebrated her 18th birthday, has left the Agashya gorilla family for good and joined another unhabituated group deep within Congo's Virunga National Park.

The Gorilla Organization is therefore introducing a new

adopted gorilla, a one-year-old female named Iwacu (meaning 'our home') "She is an adorable baby mountain gorilla," says fundraising officer Kym Dhudwar. "Her mother is Turiho, who is the younger sister of Amy, so this makes Iwacu Amy's niece. We hope that supporting her and seeing her grow into a strong, healthy adult will bring lots of joy to our supporters, just as Amy did over the years."

Details of how you can make an adoption can be found in the latest merchandise catalogue or at www.gorillas.org.

Hundreds hit the streets for Great Gorilla Run 2012

On a glorious September morning, hundreds of gorillas took to the streets of London for the 2012 Great Gorilla Run. In all, more than 350 runners tackled the 7km course, which took them through the heart of the City, across Tower Bridge and past some of the capital's best-known landmarks, including City Hall and the Tate Modern.

Once again, race patron Bill Oddie was on hand to count all the gorillas out and count them all back in again, with the TV conservationist also awarding the prizes for Best Dressed Gorilla, Furthest Travelled Gorilla and, Biggest Team.

So far, more than £100,000 has been raised for gorilla conservation efforts, though this total is set to rise further still as

runners collect their sponsorship money.

"What a mad, fun and inspiring day," said Bill afterwards. "It's so heartening to see so many people do their bit for the gorillas, who really do still need all the help they can get."

Registration for the Great Gorilla Run 2013 is now open. Learn more and sign up at www.greatgorillarun.org

Left: Bill Oddie starts the race
Top: Gorilla runners cross Tower Bridge
Bottom: The wonderful marshals get to work



Batwa enjoy the harvests of five years' work

After five years, the Gorilla Organization's pioneering Batwa Training Programme (BTP) is drawing to an end, having touched the lives of thousands of Rwanda's indigenous people.

Launched in 2007 with the backing of the European Commission, the five-year project has focused on giving the indigenous pygmy communities living alongside the Volcanoes National Park the skills, knowledge and equipment they need to pull themselves out of poverty and boost their standing within wider society. The project started with the selection of a small group of men and women, who would be given intense training in a wide range of agricultural skills, as well as in literacy and numeracy. Just as importantly, as Key farmer Trainers (KFTs), they would be given the capacity to pass on these new skills to other members of their communities, ensuring the sustainability of the project.

"The overall objective of the project is to help the Batwa, who have suffered widespread discrimination for decades and who often have to go into the national park for things like food and fuel, putting themselves and the gorillas that live here at risk," explains the Gorilla Organization's Rwanda Programme Manager Emmanuel Bugingo.

"We wanted to reduce levels of poverty across the northern and western provinces of Rwanda

and give the Batwa the capacity to improve their own lives and status in society, and over the past five years we've succeeded in doing just this!"

Making a real difference

The initial group of 21 KFTs were not only taught the latest in sustainable farming techniques, including crop storage methods, efficient harvesting and effective seed selection. At the same time, they were also given literacy training and taught basic maths, thereby giving them the ability to sell excess crops at market for a fair price.

Since the first wave of KFTs graduated from the training centre specifically constructed for the project in the Kinigi Sector – a short walk to the border of the Volcanoes National Park – all of them have returned to their home communities and started to pass on their knowledge. In all, a further 275 farmers in the Musanze, Kinigi, Shingiro, Mukamira and Bigogwe districts have received training, both in modern agriculture, as well as in maths and literacy and general health and hygiene.

Key achievements of the project include helping with the education of Batwa children in several districts (more than 500 school uniforms have been bought and distributed and thousands of books and pens have also been

given out), the provision of livestock including rabbits, goats, chickens and even cows to poverty-stricken communities, and ensuring hundreds of Batwa, and in particular women and children, have been able to access health facilities such as family planning clinics for the first time in their lives.

Ensuring a lasting impact

"Earlier this year, after more than four years of hard work, we welcomed the Rwanda's General Director of Immigration and Emigration, Anacleet Kalibata to one of the project sites," says Emmanuel. "To be able to show him how much we have achieved in so little time made us all so proud and determined to push ahead with the project, even though the European funding has now come to an end."

The long-term success of the Batwa Training Programme was given a major boost in 2011 with the purchase of 14 hectares of farmland within walking distance of the protected forests of the Volcanoes National Park. Generations after their ancestors were evicted from the forests, the acquisition of the arable land finally gave the Batwa the status of 'farmer' to go along with their new skills and knowledge, placing them on equal footing with the majority of their fellow Rwandans after years of discrimination.

"The project has helped in so many ways"

Jean de Dieu Kitmana is just one of the hundreds of people whose lives have been touched by the Batwa Training Programme. A member of the indigenous Batwa community, his ancestors had been hunter-gatherers, living in the forests of what is now the Volcanoes National Park, a lifestyle he inherited.

"Only a few years ago, I lived from hunting and from gathering resources from the forests," he says. "This was tiring and dangerous and we were never settled. My family would nearly always be on the move, making it impossible for me to put down roots or my children to get an education."

Since his community was chosen as one of ten to benefit from the BTP initiative, Jean's life has been transformed. "The project has helped in so many ways. Like the rest of my community I am practicing modern agriculture and I have even started breeding chickens. Also, my children now go to school and the project has paid their school fees and given them pens and paper."

Jean now sees a brighter future for his own family and also for the Batwa community and the wildlife in the national park. "As a community, we need to work together and manage this project by ourselves. Only this way can we improve our lives and help protect the forests and the gorillas that live there."

2007
The project is launched. The European Commission agrees to fund 75% of the €900,000 needed for the full five years.

2008
Selection of farmer trainers takes place in Rwanda. 21 trainers are selected to learn new skills, which they will pass on to their home communities.

2009
Work on a training centre in Kingi Sector, Musanze District is completed, offering a space for the trainers to learn maths, English and farming techniques.

2010
The trainers begin passing on their new skills. More than 20 villages across the north and west of Rwanda benefit, boosting living standards and reducing demand for resources found in the Volcanoes National Park.

2011
14 hectares of land purchased, ensuring the project will continue into the future and giving dozens of Batwa the status of 'farmer' for the first time in their lives.

2012
Trainers given refresher courses. Attendance rates for health and hygiene classes in communities hit 90% and 130 community members receive agricultural training.

The Gorilla Organization
110 Gloucester Avenue
 London NW1 8HX
 Tel: 020 7916 4974
 info@gorillas.org
 www.gorillas.org
 Reg. Charity No. 1117131

Trustees:

Stanley Johnson, *Chairman*
 Sandra Bakker
 Paul Baldwin
 Dr J.E. Clarke
 Jon Hobbs
 Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka
 Spencer J Phillips
 Ian Redmond OBE

Executive Director: Jillian Miller

Patrons:

Richard Adams, Michael Backes,
 Prof. Richard Dawkins FRS,
 Leonardo DiCaprio, Daryl Hannah,
 Dr Nathan Myhrvold, The Hon. Mrs
 Claire Ward

Digit News

Editor: Jillian Miller

Deputy Editor: David Hewitt

Contributors: Luis Dominguez,
 David Hewitt, Tuver Wundi

Photographs: Sam Kagame, Daniel
 Moses, The Virunga National Park,
 Tuver Wundi

DTP: Column Communications Ltd

Printing: Emmerson Press

Winning praise for building a brighter future for Uganda's gorillas

The Gorilla Organization has been thanked for its ongoing support of a project that has seen a buffalo wall built around the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park in Uganda.

Rather than keeping poachers out, the wall has been built to keep animals including buffalo and even gorillas from crossing the park's boundaries and raiding the crop fields of local communities. In all, almost

10km of wall has been either built or refurbished over the past two years, creating a vital buffer zone that keeps conflict between the animals and their human neighbours at an absolute minimum.

In a letter from June of this year, Uganda Wildlife Authority chief executive Dr Andrew Seguya wrote: "The Uganda Wildlife Authority wishes to acknowledge and



Mgahinga Park conservator puts another brick in the buffalo wall

appreciate the generous support the Gorilla Organization has extended to Mgahinga Gorilla National Park to reconstruct and repair the buffalo wall in order to mitigate the human-wildlife conflicts arising from problem animals destroying people's crops and property."

The Mgahinga National Park, which is located in the very south-west of Uganda, forms part of the greater Virunga Conservation Area, which is home to around half of the world's remaining mountain gorillas. Work will continue on repairing a further 5km of the buffalo wall in the hope of fostering even better relations between the communities living beside the national park and the wildlife living in it.

Lord Spencer Phillips joins GO board

When it comes to standing up for the great apes, the Gorilla Organization's board of trustees have always led by example. And the latest addition to the board is no exception. Lord Spencer Phillips celebrated his appointment as trustee by donning a full gorilla suit and running 7km through the streets of London for the 2012 Great Gorilla Run.



Spencer Phillips

"I first became an Amy adopter with The Gorillas Organization about ten years ago – my wife

Mandy, supporting my passion for gorillas, having bought me the adoption as a Christmas present – and then I was lucky enough to meet Ian Redmond. So, when I was asked to become a trustee, it really was a dream come true!"

"I'm looking forward to playing my small part in helping save these wonderful creatures from extinction – and completing next year's Great Gorilla Run in under 40 minutes!"

As well as the one lord-leaping across Tower Bridge for the Great Gorilla Run, one other Gorilla Organization trustee, Paul Baldwin, also joined in, while chairman Stanley Johnson was similarly on hand to see the runners set off.

Second wave of Solar Sisters return



Following in the footsteps of their Congolese counterparts, Rwanda's Solar Sisters have arrived home, ready to put their newly-acquired solar engineering skills to good use. The four ladies spent six months at the Barefoot College in India learning to become solar power engineers. Now, they will get to work bringing electricity to their rural Rwandan communities, improving livelihoods and reducing reliance on the resources found in the gorilla habitat.

Meanwhile, across the border in Uganda, two ladies from the village of Kagandu have also just returned from the Barefoot College and are getting set to install electricity to their home community, which borders the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park.

THANK YOU

Great Apes Film Initiative, CGMK Foundation, Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Body Shop Foundation, Tusk Trust, Marjorie Coote Animal Trust, Rowan Charitable Trust, St Katherine's Fund,

European Commission, Rhododendran Trust, Henry C Hoare Charitable Trust, Jack DeLoss Taylor Charitable Trust, Dschma Charitable Trust, Walker 597 Animal Trust, Shirley Pugh Foundation, Great Virunga Transboundary Collaboration, The Evan Cornish Foundation, Bill Wilson, Animal

Friends, Christie Briers-Hand, and the estates of Mr Joseph Williams Davies, Mrs Ondre Moira Buxton, Mr Arthur Frank Hamilton Barlee, Mrs Sylvia Anne McGuigan, Mrs Mary Guess, Mr Ron Bennett, Jonathan and Julia Aisbitt, Sandra Bakker, Paul and Sarah Baldwin, Carlton, Valerie and Natasha

Evans, Peter Hall and Laura Smith, Nish and Mary Malde, Anthony and Helena McCurley, Peter McDougall, Lee and Caroline Portnoi, Brian Taylor CBE and Susan Taylor, Colin and Mrs Galinda Williams, Kamal Omari, and also to all our wonderful volunteers and fundraisers.

