



digit news

saving the world's last gorillas

issue 43 spring/summer 2013

the gorilla organization

Gorillas threatened by rise in deadly snares and traps

Rangers are struggling to keep the forests of the Virunga Massif free from snares as the number of traps being left by poachers keeps rising.

For several months of last year, fighting between rebel militia and the Congolese government made ranger patrols all but impossible in many parts of the Virunga National Park. Once the fighting had eased and rangers were able to get back to work, they discovered that the number of both rope and wire snares littering the forest floor had increased dramatically.

The biggest rise has been seen in the Mikeno Sector of the park, where patrols have been finding and destroying as many as 200 snares a day. Elsewhere in the National Park, rangers have been destroying snares at a rate of around 3,000 a month, though even this is likely to be just a small fraction of the amount put down since the violence erupted.

Though the Mikeno Sector was one of the areas of the park that was invaded by rebel forces at the height of the recent fighting, with soldiers blamed for laying a large proportion of the snares, the problem is not confined to DR Congo. Indeed, rangers working in Rwanda and Uganda have similarly been



Mountain gorillas are at grave risk from an increase in lethal snares

reporting an increase in the number of illegal traps they are finding on the forest floor, though this rise has been partly attributed to the usual spike in demand for bushmeat and other sources of protein during, and just after, the Christmas holiday season.

While such traps are laid to catch small mammals such as duiker and antelope for bushmeat, mountain gorillas can also become entangled in them, sometimes with fatal consequences. At particular risk are younger gorillas, whose small limbs can easily get caught in the traps and even if rangers and vets are able to tranquilise a trapped gorilla and remove a snare before it causes any physical damage, this can still cause distress, both to the individual

gorilla and its wider group. Just recently, for instance, rangers reported seeing a young gorilla act aggressively towards other youngsters within its group weeks after it was freed from a snare in the Volcanoes National Park.

Given that the Virungas Massif is currently enjoying something of a miniature baby boom, this increase in snares is especially worrying. "The number of snares that have been found in the forest over the past few months is truly frightening, and these will just be a small portion of the traps that were put down while regular ranger patrols were disrupted," says Jillian Miller, Executive Director of the Gorilla Organization.



Letter from the Virungas

Even when the fighting stops, this part of the DR Congo is a hard place to work, to say the least.

Just days after we were able to get our Goma Resource Centre up and running, a passenger plane crashed just a few hundred metres away, yet another reminder of how dangerous this city can be. Meanwhile, though calm may have returned to the city, nobody can say for certain how long it will remain like this. Thousands of soldiers, as well as thousands of rebels, are now biding their time in the forests, many of them within walking distance of our country's precious mountain gorillas.

But still, our work must continue, and continue it does. As well as regular ranger patrols resuming, we've also been busy with our conservation education programmes. While the present may be filled with uncertainty, the enthusiasm Goma's students show for learning more about the environment makes me hopeful that the future will be brighter, both for ourselves and our cousins, the gorillas.

TUVER - WUNAI

Goma, DR Congo



Crude traps set for bushmeat can be fatal for gorillas

www.gorillas.org

Bill's Back! And he's getting set for the biggest Great Gorilla Run ever...



A school run with a difference

Unable to take part in the 2012 Great Gorilla Run, a group of enterprising students at Reed's School in Surrey decided to do the next best thing and organise their own fundraising event.

Donning full gorilla suits, 50 members of Mullens House ran laps of the school's playing fields, with each kilometre clocked up helping raise vital funds for the Gorilla Organization's field projects.

In all, students and staff raised £4,097, money that will help fund conservation education projects across Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo, including the innovative Pedal-Powered Cinema, which brings great ape documentaries to some of Africa's poorest communities.

Speaking after the event, teacher Tom Murdoch explained: "While in the past we've supported

health charities, this year the students voted to support a charity working with endangered animals and marginalised people.

"We're all extremely proud of the fundraising efforts of all the young people here and we are delighted that the proceeds will be going to the Gorilla Organization's environmental education programme."

The Gorilla Organization's Executive Director Jillian Miller visited Reed's School to collect the cheque and to speak with students about the plight of gorillas in the wild and what can be done to ensure their long-term survival.



Top: Mullens House runners suit up for the run

Middle: And they're off!

Left: Handing over the cheque for more than £4,000



Tenth Great Gorilla Run set to be the best yet...

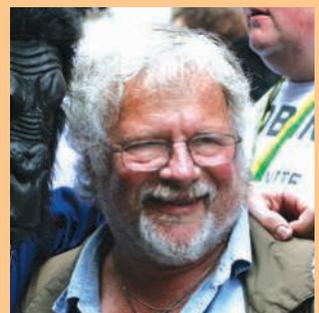
Nine years, thousands of runners, and more than £1.5 million pounds raised for gorilla conservation; the Great Gorilla Run has established itself as one of the world's best-loved fundraising events. And it now looks like the 2013 run will be the biggest and best yet.

Once again, race patron Bill Oddie will be getting the runners underway and then welcoming them back across the finishing line once they have successfully tackled a 7km course through the heart of London. And once again, all the money raised will help fund the Gorilla Organization's award-winning community-led conservation projects in Africa.

Looking forward to the 2013 event, TV personality, writer and comedian Bill says: "This is easily one of the maddest and most inspiring days imaginable. It's sad to say, but these amazing creatures do still need all the help they can get, and there's really no better way of supporting them than pulling on a gorilla suit and joining hundreds of others running through London."

The 2013 Great Gorilla Run will take place on Saturday 21 September.

Registration is now open at www.greatgorillarun.org



Patron Bill Oddie will start tenth Great Gorilla Run

Thank you!

Gorilla Organization supporters have been busy finding fun and different ways of raising money to help save gorillas in the wild – some more painful than others.

Cheryl Wild and her friends raised £300 through manning a stall at a local community fair, money that will make a real difference to conservation and development projects in Africa.

Meanwhile, friends Tod and Akman did their bit for the gorillas by taking part in a sponsored wax. For their eye-watering efforts they made an incredible £1,300.

Going bananas

The Gorilla Organization has teamed up with Fyffes for what looks set to be a most fruitful partnership.

For starters, the company has agreed to provide thousands of bananas for both participants and spectators at September's Great Gorilla Run.

Additionally, plans are in place to have teams of gorillas out and about in central London over the spring and summer months, with furl-clad volunteers handing out bananas and leaflets detailing how the public can play their part in saving the world's last remaining gorillas in the wild.

On a recent visit to the Fyffes banana ripening centre in Basingstoke, Gorilla Organization Events Manager, Rachel Deer said:

"We're so happy to be working with Fyffes and I'm looking forward to seeing how we can make both gorilla conservation and healthy eating extra fun!"

Rachel was joined on the tour of the facility by Gorilla Organization Executive Director, Jillian Miller and Fyffes Marketing Manager, Paul Barrett and Marketing Administrator, Carolyn Uglov.



In the midst of war, a gorilla baby boom...

As war raged across large parts of eastern DR Congo for much of last year, rangers tasked with safeguarding the country's fragile mountain gorilla population struggled to conduct regular patrols of the Virunga National Park.

At the height of the conflict, mortars and rockets were fired into the gorilla sector of the park itself, making any patrols impossible and placing the gorillas in grave danger.

When relative calm returned to the region and regular patrols of the National Park resumed, however, rangers discovered that, far from being decimated, the Virungas' mountain gorilla population had in fact enjoyed an unprecedented baby boom during the fighting.

In all, rangers discovered five new babies born to two habituated gorilla groups. Within the Rugendo group – the family that suffered the infamous mountain gorilla massacre of 2007 – a baby was born to Janja at the end of October.

However, it was the Kabirizi group that enjoyed the greatest expansion, with babies born to the females Bigohe, Mafuko, Rubaka and Ruzuzi as fighting raged both inside and outside of the park's

borders. This brings the group's number to 37 individuals, making it by some distance the biggest mountain gorilla family in DR Congo, though still smaller than the Pablo and Beetsme families across the border in Rwanda.

Since female gorillas only tend to have a single baby every four to five years and given the amount of stress they are known to have been suffering, these new babies have been warmly welcomed. However, for so many to be born in such a short space of time has left many conservationists puzzled. Had the gorillas taken advantage of being away from the prying eyes of humans to come closer together? Or, had the stress brought on by the fighting caused them to feel threatened and so take steps to bolster their fragile numbers?

A happy coincidence

"Most likely, it's just a happy coincidence," says the Gorilla Organization's Chairman Ian Redmond. "I know some people have suggested a possible causal link between the gorillas having had fewer human visitors during the unrest, giving them more privacy.



Mountain gorilla mothers have been tenderly caring for their new arrivals despite the presence of ongoing fighting in the region

But, as gorillas will often mate when tourists, researchers and even whole film crews are present, there seems to be little evidence to support this idea. Either way, however, it's certainly very good news."

Now regular patrols have resumed within the Virunga National Park, rangers have reported that all of the new arrivals are doing well, again news that has been welcomed by conservationists. Encouragingly,

none of the four infants born in the Kabirizi groups have been injured by recent tussles for supremacy, as can often be the case.

For now, the ageing silverback Kabirizi has managed to maintain his supremacy, but with younger rival Bageni getting stronger by the day, the large group may soon break into several smaller units, adding a new chapter to the story of the Virunga's mountain gorillas.

Working to put Walikale's gorillas on the map

Four days on foot from the nearest town, the Walikale Forest in eastern DR Congo is one of Africa's last true wildernesses. It's also one of the few places on earth home to the eastern lowland gorilla.

With numbers having fallen by 90% to just 5,000 following years of civil unrest and unchecked poaching, Walikale looks set to become a key battleground for the gorillas' survival. As such, the Gorilla Organization



Rangers at Walikale monitoring the gorillas' health

is pushing ahead with pioneering Walikale Community Gorilla and Conservation Project, designed to enable local communities to take the lead in the conservation efforts.

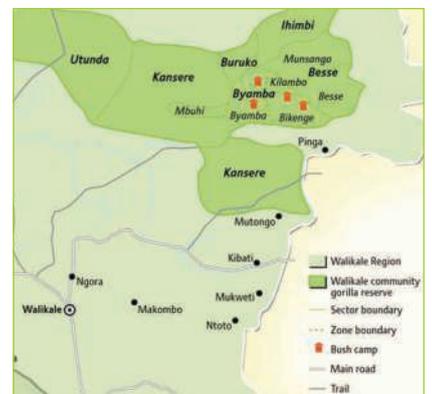
And taking the lead they are. Though Walikale may lack National Park status, thanks to a partnership between the Gorilla Organization and tribal elders – whose initial vision got the scheme up and running – it is now designated a 'Community Reserve'. In the short-term, enthusiasm for conservation is helping create jobs, with 34 trackers appointed so far, while, looking to surrounding forests where poaching and hunting have proven unsustainable and economically damaging, the elders have been calling for a more responsible approach to using the resources of the forest

"The people here are aware that, due to its rich biodiversity, this forest deserves special protection," says

Henry Cirhuza, the Gorilla Organization's Programme Manager for DR Congo.

Looking forward, the main challenge lies with mapping the area. Spread across 70,000 hectares, the Community Reserve is vast, with trackers and rangers only able to visit a fraction of it. While it is estimated that an isolated but crucial population of 700 gorillas live here, the total could be much higher, though without proper mapping and surveying, it is impossible to be certain.

Not only will proper mapping allow for a better understanding of Walikale's gorillas, it will bring a range of socio-economic benefits for local communities. At best, the communities may one day be enjoying the benefits that come with tourism, though, according to



Mapping the Walikale area will be crucial to conservation success

Cirhuza, the arrival of the first visitors could be some way off yet.

"Tourism can only be introduced once we have one or more habituated gorilla groups, and since we're still having trouble locating the gorillas, this could take some time."

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DTP: Column Communications Ltd

Printing: Emmerson Press

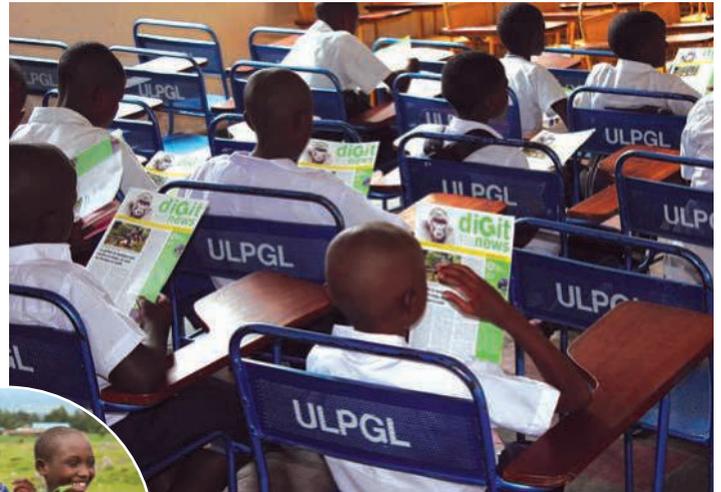
Goma staff get back into the swing of gorilla education

After several months of insecurity, life is getting back to normal in the city of Goma, DR Congo, including the Gorilla Organization's pioneering conservation education projects.

In February, the Goma Resource Centre organised a special day of workshops and talks aimed at inspiring the city's youth to take up the cause of gorilla conservation.

In all, 128 students from 64 schools were invited to the event, which was held at the Université Libres des Pays de Grands Lacs. As well as listening to talks from local conservationists, the students were invited to get involved, with the Gorilla Organization's Tuver Wundi being encouraged by the inquisitive nature of the young people, and in particular the questions they were asking.

"The students wanted to know how Congo's young people can get involved in conservation efforts and they were also interested in hearing



Taking gorilla conservation to the classroom encourages students to get in touch with nature



about how their local communities can benefit from the gorillas, through tourism, for example," he says.

At the end of day, the students left with not just a greater understanding of the gorillas they live

alongside and the threats facing them, but also a determination to play their part in ongoing conservation efforts.

"The students pledged to do what they can to help the environment around them, from keeping their homes clean to planting trees around their communities," adds Tuver.

Stepping into Stanley's shoes

How do you replace a chairman of Stanley Johnson's stature? It's no easy task but, fortunately, the Gorilla Organization has been able to call on one of the world's most-respected conservationists to step into Stanley's well-travelled shoes.

Ian Redmond (pictured) began his career in primatology working as a research assistant to Dian Fossey in the forests of Rwanda. Over the years, he has served as the UN Ambassador for the Great Apes, appeared in countless wildlife documentaries, headed up the Ape Alliance and, just as importantly, clocked up a respectable time in the Great Gorilla Run.



"I feel honoured to be asked to serve as Chairman of the Gorilla Organization, a charity with a long history of pioneering new approaches to solve old problems.

"Of course, we can only carry on with this task with the help of our members, donors and supporters and I know Dian would be thrilled at the level of support we enjoy after all these years."

The Gorilla Organization also welcomes Belinda Wakeling onto its board of trustees. With a background in international business, she brings to the role a life-long passion for conservation.

Ants keep Uganda's beekeepers busy



Ugandan beekeepers enjoyed another fine year in 2012. Record swarms, attributed to sunshine and rain of equal parts throughout spring, led to a late summer honey harvest of five tonnes, providing a much-needed source of income and reducing local reliance on the gorillas' forest home.

However, the enterprising apiarists are now being forced to find inventive new ways to tackle a pesky problem. Attracted by the volcanic soil that surrounds the hives, hoards of black ants are marching in and attempting to colonise the region, often leading bees to fly away for good.

Since greasing the poles holding the hives up didn't do the trick, the enterprising beekeepers are



now turning to organic bee-friendly pesticides. The battle with the ants continues...

THANK YOU

Blackpool Zoo, S M Rickard Animals Charity, Henhurst Trust, Paget Trust, St Mary's Charity, The Great Projects, St Katerine's Fund, Aylesford

Family Trust, Inchcape Foundation, Jack DeLoss Taylor Charitable Trust, Fiona Sutherland, Scott Stanton, Georgie Cooke, Liz Dawson,

Michael Poppell and Dexter Reed's School and the estates of Mary Maclean, Cynthia Kathleen Penton, Pamela Joy Taylor, Pearl Thorne and David

Sydney Charles Summerfield, and to all our wonderful volunteers and fundraisers.

