



digit news

saving the world's last gorillas

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the gorilla organization

New Charter pledges to raise mountain gorilla numbers to 1,000 by 2018

As mountain gorillas continue to teeter on the edge of extinction, the Gorilla Organization has launched a new initiative aimed at securing the long-term future of the great apes.

Over the past few years, the number of mountain gorillas left in the world has been rising, thanks in no small part to the move away from traditional models of conservation towards community-led, grassroots alternatives. Encouragingly, the latest censuses carried out in Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo indicate that there are now around 890 mountain gorillas living in the Virunga mountains, the only place on the planet where they are found.

Nevertheless, despite recent successes, mountain gorillas, as with all other sub-species of the great ape, remain critically endangered, and numbers are still believed to be well below the carrying capacity of their native environment and insufficient to guarantee long-term survival. As Dr Linda Vigilant of the prestigious Max Planck Institute



Despite recent gains mountain gorilla numbers remain perilously low

for Evolutionary Anthropology explained to *Digit News*, “smaller populations are intrinsically more vulnerable to environmental change, epidemics, or, over the long term, loss of genetic diversity”.

A Charter for the future

To help stabilise the mountain gorilla population, the Gorilla Organization has launched its new Target 1,000 Gorillas appeal. The aim of the ambitious appeal is to help increase the number of mountain gorillas living in the wild to 1,000 by the end of 2018. Underpinning the appeal is a new Gorilla Charter (left), outlining how this target can be achieved and asking supporters to sign up to be part of the generation that brings mountain gorillas back for good from the brink of extinction.

“The Gorilla Charter encapsulates everything we’ve learned in more than 20 years of working to save gorillas from extinction,” says Executive Director

Jillian Miller. “With it we pledge to work with local communities to ensure the long-term survival of gorillas, while also supporting more immediate conservation efforts such as ranger patrols and ongoing research. We know that this is the best way to protect gorillas and, hopefully, will ensure we meet our ambitious target.”

Funding frontline conservation

To succeed in ensuring that there are at least 1,000 mountain gorillas living freely in the forests of Central Africa by 2018, £750,000 needs to be raised over the next 36 months. All of the money will be used to fund vital frontline conservation work as well as innovative grassroots development projects aimed at addressing the factors that drive habitat loss and poaching.

A copy of the Gorilla Charter can be found on the Gorilla Organization website. “Please read it, pass it on and play your part in making sure these wonderful animals are around for generations to come,” adds Jillian.



Letter from the Virungas

Here in the Virunga region of Africa, we take great pride in the rich variety of wildlife we live alongside.

Above all, though the communities living alongside the protected parks have great respect for all animals, it is the gorillas they revere the most.

Now, however, those of us working to save wildlife, including gorillas, are really feeling the effects of the economic troubles of the rest of the world. Funding we have previously relied upon has been drying up, making a tough job even tougher.

We know the good will is there, but this drop in financial support makes it hard for us to carry out vital frontline conservation work at a time when, for economic reasons, many of our neighbours are turning back to the resources of the protected forests.

It’s no secret that many of us fear the advances made over the past 20 years could soon be undone. We should be proud of what we have achieved – and we are.

But we know that, in these most difficult of times, we are more reliant than ever on outside support if we are to keep gorillas from vanishing forever.

TUVER - WUNAI

Goma, DR Congo



Crossing continents for nature's gentle giants

Some fundraisers really do go the extra mile for gorillas, and Kyran Young is one of them. In fact, the young conservationist is getting ready to walk the 2,600 miles from Mexico to Canada for the great apes next spring.

To prepare, Kyran spent his summer holidays rambling across the Spanish Pyrenees. Walking 14 hours a day and overcoming dense fog, occasional bouts of loneliness and regular dreams of pizza, he made it to the Mediterranean coast after just four weeks, and is now confident that he's ready to go even further for a species close to his heart.

"I've loved gorillas since I was a boy," Kyran says. "And so when I learned how this beautiful, hazel-eyed pacifist has been pushed to the brink of extinction, I knew I had to do something."

The 'Gorilla Walker' believes his trans-continental trek will take him up to four months to complete and he's calling on his fellow great ape lovers to help him hit his sponsorship target of £10,000. At the time of going to print, he'd already raised almost £1,000.

To follow Kyran on his journey, visit his blog at www.gorillawalker.com, where you'll also find out how you can donate.



Kyran Young, the 'Gorilla Walker' hits the high road



GO flag flies on top of Africa once again

The flag of the Gorilla Organization once again flew over Africa when Chairman Ian Redmond reached the continent's highest point on a special fundraising mission.

The globe-trotting primatologist was part of a group of conservationists taking part in the expedition to the top of Mount

Kilimanjaro to highlight the plight of great apes around the world.

"We're all of us 98.4 per cent chimp, 97.7 per cent gorilla and 96.4 per cent orangutan, so this was a great chance to unite to save our cousins," Ian said from the summit.

Since the team made it to the top of Kilimanjaro on World Ranger

Day, the climb was dedicated to those who work on the frontline of conservation, and above all to the brave men and women who have lost their lives protecting gorillas and other endangered species.

Pictured left: Ian at the summit with GGR flyer

Great Gorilla Run 2014

The fur flew in London for the 2014 Great Gorilla Run, with more than 500 participants raising tens of thousands of pounds for gorilla conservation.

As always, celebrity conservationist Bill Oddie was on hand to wave the gorillas off on the 8km course, which saw them cross Tower Bridge and race past City Hall and Tate Modern.

Bill was joined by illusionist Uri Geller in welcoming the runners back across the finish line, where

they were rewarded with a medal and, of course, a banana.

"You guys are a perfect example of animals inspiring the best of humans," Bill told the crowd of runners and supporters after the event. "I truly do treasure this event and can't wait for next year to do it all again!"

To find out more about the Great Gorilla Run and to sign up for the 2015 event, please visit www.greatgorillarun.org



Bill Oddie and Uri Geller get the Great Gorilla Run started

Stanley takes up role of President Emeritus

Stanley Johnson has officially taken up the role of the Gorilla Organization's first-ever President Emeritus.

The author, explorer, campaigner and some-time politician served as Chairman between 2009 and 2012, during which time he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and raised large sums of money for conservation projects in Africa.



Stanley, a President for life

Now, despite being busier than ever, Stanley has accepted a new position of President Emeritus, bringing both boundless enthusiasm and invaluable experience to the role.

"My main concern is raising funds for gorilla conservation," he explains. "My colleagues on the ground in Africa work incredibly hard to protect the gorillas and their

habitat and they need all the financial help we can give them, especially during these turbulent times."

As President Emeritus, Stanley will also play an instrumental role in lobbying on behalf of gorillas and raising valuable support for the Gorilla Organization's grassroots conservation and development projects in Central Africa.

New partnership to halt loss of gorilla habitat

The trees of the Kahuzi Biega National Park provide the endangered eastern lowland gorillas living within its boundaries food and shelter.

However, it's not just great apes that have always been dependent on the rich forests of this part of DR Congo. For centuries, the trees have also provided humans with food, fuel and shelter.

Over the past few decades, the number of people settling within walking distance of the park has soared. Internal migration of refugees has caused the regional population to expand significantly, while crippling levels of poverty mean many people have little choice but to trespass into the forests in search of natural resources.

Gorilla habitat shrinking

Despite the best efforts of the authorities, the forests have been shrinking at an alarming rate, placing the gorillas in grave danger. To counter this, the Gorilla Organization has already planted tens of thousands of trees along the park's boundaries, placing a vital buffer between gorillas and humans.

Thanks to the Goma team's strong track record in working with local communities to successfully reforest large areas of land, the Gorilla Organization has been named the preferred partner of an ambitious new project being funded by the Africa Development Bank (ADB).

Through the initiative, more than two million seedlings will be planted with the aim of reforesting some 1,000 hectares of land.

In addition to working with the ADB, the Gorilla Organization team will also be working alongside people living in the Kalehe, Kabare and Walungu territories, with grassroots cooperation crucial to the long-term success of the project.

Massive potential for project

According to Henry Cirhuza, Programmes Manager at the Goma Resource Centre, this forward-thinking new partnership has the potential to make a big difference to both local communities and their gorilla neighbours.

"The areas around Kahuzi Biega are very densely populated, so the need for wood to burn and timber for construction is huge," he explains.



Gorillas rely on the Congo's lush forests for food and shelter

"This is why this type of project has always won the support of local communities. Now, we can not only start to restore significant parts of the precious forest, giving gorillas some vital breathing space, but by planting fast-growing trees that can be used for firewood and timber, we can reduce reliance on the trees found on the other side of the park boundary."

The partnership with the ADB

is testament to the high regard the Gorilla Organization is held in this part of Africa. With the ink still drying on this new agreement, Henry and his team are hopeful that they may soon get even more opportunities to build on their community-led approach to changing people's lives for the better and building a brighter future for the Congo's critically-endangered lowland and mountain gorillas.

Community conservation credited for rise in gorilla numbers

Giving local communities a central role to play in conservation is the most-effective means of safeguarding Africa's critically-endangered gorillas: that's the Gorilla Organization philosophy and that's also the conclusion of a new report from the Rwanda Development Board (RDB).

Released to coincide with the tenth annual Kwita Izina baby gorilla naming ceremony, the official statistics show that the total number of mountain gorillas found in the country has risen by an encouraging 26.3 per cent over the past decade.

Cooperation not coercion

Notably, it's not merely tougher law enforcement in and around the gorilla habitat that's credited as the main reason for this remarkable turnaround. Rather, according to Rwanda's Head of Tourism and Conservation, the main driver of change over recent years has been increased "community ownership of projects around the Volcanoes



Gorilla numbers rising

National Park, along with the support of the international community".

It's not always been this way, however. Emmanuel Bugingo, the Gorilla Organization's Programme Manager in Rwanda, has been at the forefront of this changing approach to conservation since 2002.

"When I started in this job, coercive measures were seen as the best – and only – way of protecting

gorillas," he recalls. "This means, the communities were hardly involved at all, not even to share their thoughts on how native forests and wildlife could be protected.

"Now, saving gorillas has really become a real community endeavour," Emmanuel adds.

People support themselves

"Conservation, research and veterinary jobs are open to all, and many more people support themselves and their families through tourism, including through the revenue sharing scheme in which five per cent of money made from selling gorilla trekking permits to tourists goes to support the socio-economic development of some of our country's poorest towns and villages."

Not for nothing was the 2014 Kwitza Izina festival given the theme of 'Empowering and Growing'. As well as looking back and celebrating the successes of the past decade, this summer's RDB report also looked to the future, and

again, the community-based ideals upon which the Gorilla Organization was founded are seen as the key to ongoing success.

In particular, education and outreach projects aimed at inspiring a new generation of gorilla guardians are now a central part of conservation efforts, another thing that was not always the case.

"As a native of this area, I remember that when I was young, talking about gorillas and volcanoes was seen as quite risky," Emmanuel adds. "Talking about some parts of nature was seen as tempting bad luck, so it's incredibly important that attitudes have changed so much and so quickly."

Sadly, even with numbers up by 26%, Rwanda's mountain gorillas are still in peril, with habitat loss and poaching the main threats to their survival. However, with conservationists and the authorities now agreed on the best way to address these threats, the great apes have been brought back from the brink of extinction, for now at least.

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Ymke's legacy lives on

Four years after her tragic death, Dr Ymke Warren's presence continues to be felt in the exciting world of gorilla conservation.

In the wake of her murder in Cameroon, friends and family of the respected primatologist set up a special fund in her memory to assist promising young African conservationists.

The first recipient of this grant, Denis Ndeloh, worked alongside Ymke researching Cross River gorillas. The funding has enabled him to carry on this pioneering work and, just recently, participate in the inaugural meeting of the African



Denis busy at work in the forest

Primate Working Group, designed to facilitate African leadership in the study and conservation of the continent's primates.

"Dr Warren was a strong supporter of capacity building in Africans and she would have been very supportive of the working group," Denis says "I would like to thank all those whose constant support made this happen, including the team at the Gorilla Organization.

"It is my wish that this grant continues to support many more African gorilla researchers and conservationists."

Goodbye, Rano

Less than five years after the death of its legendary founding silverback, the Titus gorilla group suffered another loss, with the passing of alpha male Umushikirano.

The lifeless body of Rano, as he was popularly known, was found by rangers carrying out a routine patrol of the Volcanoes National Park. Initial examinations showed no signs of violence and further tests indicate he died from natural causes.

Rano was just 21 years old when he died, but in those years he had a dramatic life. "He spent many years wandering the forests as a sole silverback," explains the Gorilla Organization's Emmanuel Bugingo, who visited him on many occasions. "However, after a few years of solitude he returned to take over his father's group, fighting off the rival silverback Kuryama, who was also his brother."

Living on the Eastern slopes



Silverback Rano is sadly missed but his family is still thriving

of the Karisoke volcano, the Titus group is arguably the most famous great ape family in the world. The group was established by Titus himself, the gorilla who, as an infant, so famously climbed over broadcaster Sir David Attenborough

and who went on to father a record number of offspring.

Despite Rano's death, the group, now officially named the Umushikirano group, thrives, with an infant born last year bringing their current number to nine.

Adoptions: the movie

The Gorilla Organization's award-winning adoption pack gives gorilla-lovers the chance to learn more about the great apes while also playing a role in saving them from extinction.

A short film explaining just how adopting a single infant gorilla can help an entire species can be found online at: www.gorillas.org



Batwa farmers battle against extreme weather

A lack of arable land to call their own and a shortage of funding have not stood in the way of Kisoro's pioneering Batwa farmers.

Thanks to the Gorilla Organization's innovative Batwa Training Programme, they've overcome these challenges and more to at long last make a living without having to rely on the natural resources found in the gorilla forest they live

alongside. In fact, this season, 125 local families have benefited from the project, with many even growing enough produce to feed themselves and sell the surplus at a local market.

Now, however, the budding agricultural entrepreneurs face another problem: climate change. The dry weather which hit the Kisoro district in May was responsible for lower-than-expected harvests and

could be a sign of things to come. The Batwa will now plant their crops earlier in an effort to guard against the extreme weather that seems to be becoming more commonplace in this part of Africa. Farmers crossed they can face this challenge with the same determination and resourcefulness they've shown since the BTP initiative was launched back in 2008.

THANK YOU

The Estate of the Late Janet Holloway, The Estate of the Late Ms Marie Therese Jones, The Estate of the Late Mrs Elizabeth

Cowan, The Estate of the Late George McNeil, Mrs Sarianne Durie, Mr A Del Tufo, Mr Chris Gepp, Mrs Joan Pibouleau, Miss Phyllis Peters, Fountain of Youth UK, Props 'n' Frocks Ltd, Fyffes

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