



digit news

saving the world's last gorillas

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the gorilla organization

Good news for gorillas as poachers change their ways

Rubuguri is a small town on the southern tip of Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Uganda. For generations, the men of this community would enter the forests to hunt for bushmeat, with sons learning poaching from their fathers and, in turn, passing on their knowledge to the next generation in a vicious cycle.

While they only ever set traps to catch small mammals to feed themselves and their families, all too often mountain gorillas would become entangled in the crude traps, sometimes with fatal consequences.

"We never went to school, we were always too busy working in the forest," explains a former poacher who wants to remain anonymous. "Yes, there were risks – we could be arrested, or even shot – but we needed to eat and to provide for our families and this was the only way.

Now, however, thanks to the Rubuguri Reformed Poachers Association, these men do have an alternative. The Association was founded back in 2010, as an initiative of the Uganda Wildlife Authority. To start with, the men were found work in the tourism sector. Making use of



Gorillas will remain in peril as long as poachers enter the forests in search of food

their experience and knowledge of the forests, they were employed to clear paths for tourists to visit the five habituated gorilla groups living in the Nkuringo sector of Bwindi. However, opportunities in tourism are limited, meaning not all reformed poachers could be found work as trackers or porters.

"The men have all expressed remorse for their past," says Sam Nsingwire, the Gorilla Organization's Programmes Manager in Uganda. "But they maintain it was poverty that drove them into the forests and they are sad to say that, if they cannot make an alternative living, poverty may drive at least some of them back to poaching."

With this in mind, the Gorilla Organization has started funding a new sustainable agriculture project, giving dozens of former poachers the skills and resources they need to make a living outside of the gorilla habitat. Under the eye of expert trainer Regina Sanyu, the men are

being taught how to grow a range of crops, with special classes in weeding, watering, seed-sowing and the proper spreading of organic manure. The students are also being equipped with tools such as hoes, rakes and watering cans and several are benefitting from informal literacy training to ensure they are able to negotiate a good price for their produce with local businesses.

Despite the challenges of recent high temperatures and rainfall shortages, the budding farmers are already putting their new skills to good use and have successfully harvested vegetables such as cabbages, carrots, onions, tomatoes and peppers, all of which they can sell to local schools, restaurants and hotels as well as use to feed themselves and their families. From once being a hotbed of poaching, Rubuguri is now a town reborn, potentially offering a much-needed lifeline for Bwindi's endangered mountain gorillas.



A former poacher takes pride in growing his own food



Letter from the Virungas

Fighting and general unrest is, sadly, just the way of life here in eastern DR Congo. Since I last wrote, the insecurity had eased only to start up once again.

But, like everyone else here, we conservationists have learned to carry on working. If everything stopped when there was fighting, nothing would ever be done!

So, despite the troubles, it's been a busy and productive time here in the Virungas.

For starters, we welcomed our Chairman Ian Redmond over the summer. He visited our resource centre in Goma, as well as meeting up with my friends and colleagues in Rwanda and Uganda. We then welcomed our trustee Paul Baldwin and his wife, who were keen to see our varied projects first-hand, and to see the gorillas, of course.

Such visits aren't just a chance for us to meet with friends old and new. They're also vital if we're to successfully coordinate our efforts across the Virungas and move forward, whatever challenges are thrown at us.

Remember, since gorillas know no boundaries, cross-border cooperation is essential. So, though fighting may be a way of life here in Goma, we won't let this stop us from playing our part in saving our cousins, the gorillas, from extinction.

TUVER - WUNAI

Goma, DR Congo

A pop-up shop for gorillas

The Gorilla Organization celebrated the opening of a pop-up shop and campaigns centre in the heart of London's West End this summer.

Located just off the world-famous Carnaby Street, the 'Save a Gorilla' store gives both Londoners and tourists the opportunity to learn more about the plight of gorillas in the wild and about the valuable work being done to save them from

extinction. Visitors are also invited to adopt a mountain gorilla, Iwacu, or to treat themselves or a friend to a wide range of ethical merchandise, including cuddly silverback toys, T-shirts and organic Rwandan tea gift sets.

To mark the opening of the store, Gorilla Organization chairman Ian Redmond, shared his tales from the frontline of gorilla conservation, including from his time working with pioneering primatologist Dian Fossey. Joining him were staff from the London office, Great Gorilla Runners past and present and Executive Director, Jillian Miller.

Speaking at the launch night, Jillian said: "It's so great we've been able to bring the message of gorilla conservation to the centre of London and it's inspiring to see just how many people care about these magnificent creatures."



The pop-up shop



Ian Redmond shares his tales of gorillas



All of the stock on sale at the Carnaby store can also be purchased online at www.gorillas.org or through the merchandise catalogue

Workmates run for primates



Routes' Jon Howell hands over the cheque to Joyce Kigozi

When the team at Routes, a global airline networking company, chose Uganda as the destination for their 2013 conference, they also decided to do what they could to help the country's critically-endangered mountain gorillas.

Which is why, on a warm early summer's morning, spectators watching the 2013 Bupa Great Manchester Run, were treated to the surreal sight of a gorilla chasing a giant banana with legs.

The two strikingly costumed runners were part of an 11-strong

team of employees tackling the 10km urban course to raise money for the Gorilla Organization's conservation projects in Uganda.

£1,179 raised

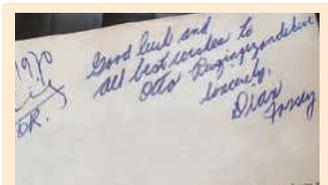
In all, the effort raised an incredible £1,179, with Jon Howell, Tourism Development Manager at the company, handing over the cheque in person to the Gorilla Organization's Operations Manager in Kisoro, Joyce Kigozi, when he travelled to Uganda for the Routes Africa forum.

Also present at the handing

over of the cheque was Dr Andrew Seguya, Executive Director of the Uganda Wildlife Authority.

"Our work is only possible because of thoughtful contributions from people like you," Joyce told the Routes team.

"I want to assure you the money will be put to good use to save the Gorillas. On behalf of the Gorilla Organization and its entire staff in both London and Africa, we want to thank you so much."



The room where Dian Fossey spent the night when she came down from her gorilla camp in Rwanda's mountains is once again open to guests.

The famed primatologist stayed at the Muhabura Hotel in Muzanze when it was owned by Otto Rusingizandekwe. Now, it's owned by his three daughters, Gaudence, Veridiana and Therese and is welcoming tourists trekking into the forests to see gorillas in the Virungas mist.

Below: the sisters pose with the copy of National Geographic magazine Dian signed for their father. See her inscription above.



Hope at last at Tshiaberimu

On Mount Tshiaberimu, an isolated outcrop of the Virunga National Park in eastern DR Congo, good news stories are hard to find. Here, people struggle to survive in the face of abject poverty and chronic insecurity, and the fragile population of gorillas has fallen to less than a dozen individuals over the past few years.

Despite the hardships, the team working on the Gorilla Organization's project here have had reason to be cheerful. Early this summer, rangers found Katsavara, silverback and leader of just two gorilla families living here, to be more agitated than usual. Rather than slinking off into the forests, he would bare his teeth, scream and charge at the rangers, warning them to keep back.

The team were hopeful this aggression signalled that a female in his group had recently given birth, with the father determined to protect the newborn. Sure enough,

once Katsavara dropped his guard, rangers were able to see the tiny infant, bringing hope that all is not lost for Tshiaberimu's gorillas.

"Katsavara's group have been through so much over recent years," says Programme Manager Jean-Claude Kyungu. "His family has been torn apart by war, and just last year his mate, Kwiterwiterina, vanished when rebels invaded. So, a new arrival really is something to celebrate!"

Following the news, Kyungu's team were awarded \$1,500 worth of ranger equipment from the German NGO Berggorilla Regenwald. Alongside raincoats, boots and waterproof bags, they were equipped with a GPS tracking system and a new digital camera, both vital for monitoring wild gorillas.

As luck would have it, just days after receiving the digital camera, rangers were able to get close enough to Katsavara to take



Baby gorillas stay hidden from humans for the first few months: Jean-Claude's team hope to photograph the new arrival soon

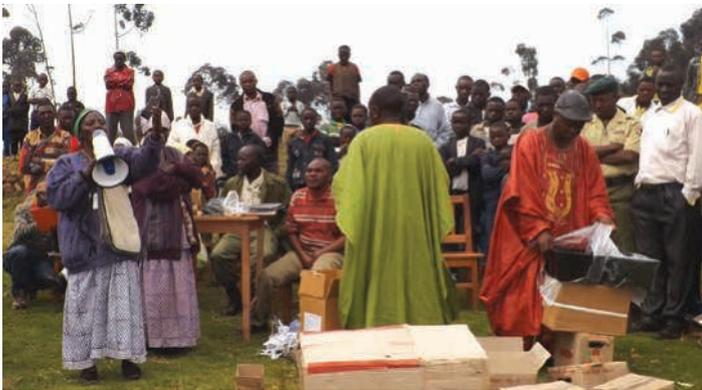
the first picture of the seldom-seen silverback for many months. As always, the mountain's dominant male was wary of humans, though his relative lack of aggression was taken by rangers as a sign that both the mother and baby are doing well in spite of the challenges they face living in an area where fighting and poaching are rife.

"For three years we have not been able to get a picture of Katsavara, due to his aggressive and threatening behaviour," explains Jean Claude. "On this occasion, however, he let us watch him from a distance and so we now hope to have a first picture of the new baby soon."

It's not just the gorillas who have been given a boost. Thanks to a lull in the fighting, staff from the Goma Resource Centre were able to bring solar power equipment, including 150 panels, to the village of

Burusi, on the edge of the mountain. Joining the team were a couple of 'Solar Sisters', Congolese women sent by the Gorilla Organization to India to learn how to become solar power engineers. These remarkable ladies were on hand to demonstrate how the solar panels can be used to produce a reliable source of electricity, something this community has never had.

Henry Cirhuza, Gorilla Organization Programme Manager in DR Congo explains that, though simple, this new equipment can transform the lives of those people living on and around the mountain. "By having electricity, children will be able to study after dark, their parents will be able to work longer and everyone will have a better quality of life. It's such good news for a community that has suffered so much."



The Solar Sisters share their skills with the local communities

Another ranger gives his life for Congo's gorillas

Tragedy struck the Virunga National Park in DR Congo again this summer as yet another ranger was killed in the line of duty.

Ranger Kasereka Kipako, who was just 34 years old and a father of two, was ambushed at his patrol post while the rest of his team were out on a morning anti-poaching patrol. While the perpetrators have yet to be identified, the park authorities believe he died while defending the post from Mai Mai militia.

While the eastern part of DR Congo has long been troubled by violence, the death of a member

of the 'thin green line' protecting species such as gorillas and elephants from poachers always sends shockwaves through the conservation community.

"Ranger Kipako was well-liked and well-respected among everyone working in conservation here in Congo," says the Gorilla Organization's Henry Cirhuza. "He knew his work was dangerous but still, like all rangers, he was devoted to his job and was prepared to sacrifice everything to protect the animals he loved."

It is not only in DR Congo

where rangers are paying the ultimate price simply for doing their jobs. At the end of last year a ranger was shot dead while out on patrol in the Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda and, with poaching still rife in the park, conservationists are always at risk.

However, with insecurity still rife in and around the city of Goma, the Congolese section of the Virungas remains by far the most dangerous place for mountain gorillas and the brave men trying to protect them.



Despite the risks, rangers love their work protecting gorillas

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Academic success for Mount T's gorilla expert

Studying for a Master's degree while working full-time is hard enough at the best of times. However, when you live and work in the midst of a war zone and when the subjects of your study have a habit of disappearing into the forest for months at a time, it's doubly difficult.

Despite facing both of these challenges, Jean-Claude Kyungu has spent the past three years combining his job as the head of the Mount Tshiaberimu Conservation Project with his postgraduate studies. Making use of computer models, as well as data from on-the-ground research, he has been investigating the small and fragile population living on what locals call the 'Mountain of Spirits' and assessing their short and long-term viability.

After first submitting his thesis and then defending his research in front of his academic peers, Jean-Claude not only managed to pass his course, but he did so with a



Jean-Claude (right) knows more than anyone about Mount Tshiaberimu's gorillas

mark of 78%. As well as making him the leading expert on the gorillas living in this isolated spot of the Virungas, his qualification

also lends extra authority to the Gorilla Organization's pioneering community-led conservation project in this troubled part of Africa.

Gorilla conservation legend drops in

Legendary gorilla conservationist John Kahekwa (*pictured with the Princess Royal*) stopped by the Gorilla Organization's London office this summer as he visited the UK to receive a prestigious award.

John, whose uncle, Adrian Deschryver, set up the Kahuzi Biega National Park in DR Congo, has been working with gorillas for three decades, first as a ranger, then as a tourist guide, and finally as the head of his own community conservation NGO, the Pole Pole Foundation (POPOF). Since establishing POPOF

back in 1992, John has worked alongside the Gorilla Organization in getting the communities living alongside Kahuzi Biega actively involved in efforts to protect the endangered lowland gorillas found in the forests.

For his tireless work, John received the coveted Goldman Sachs Whitley Award for Nature, picking up his prize from Princess Anne at a special ceremony held at King's College London. While in London, he paid a visit to the office to meet staff and share stories from 30 years on the frontline of gorilla conservation. He also gave his thanks for the support the Gorilla Organization has given POPOF over the years.

"Without the help of international partners like the Gorilla Organization, we would never have succeeded," he said.



Trustee celebrates 10 years at the top

While for some it only seems like yesterday she was volunteering at the Gorilla Organization's London office, trustee Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka (*pictured*) has been working at the forefront of community conservation in her native Uganda for ten years now.

The vet, who is an expert in human-to-gorilla disease transference, set up the NGO Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH) back in 2003. Under her leadership, it has expanded significantly over the years, earning Gladys

international recognition and a clutch of prestigious awards, among them the coveted Whitley Award for Conservation.

Representatives of the Uganda Wildlife Authority, of which Gladys is also a trustee, joined her to celebrate the tenth anniversary of CTPH at a special dinner in Kampala this summer. Gorilla Organization staff have also passed on their congratulations and look forward to many more years working together to save Uganda's mountain gorillas.

THANK YOU

Shaftesbury Plc, Time Out London, Animal Charity Trust, Henry C. Hoare Charitable Trust, Mrs S H Adlam Will Trust, Simon Gibson Charitable Trust, Tinsley

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