



At last! Walikale gorillas captured on camera

After 16 years of trying, the Gorilla Organization's team at Walikale, DRC has finally managed to capture on camera one of the 500 Grauer's gorillas known to be living in the reserve.

The Walikale Community Reserve is located in one of the most inaccessible – and inhospitable – parts of Africa. A small, dedicated team has been running a community-led conservation project there since 2003. Against a backdrop of war, illegal mining and abject poverty, the team has recruited more than 50 local rangers to patrol the forest and protect its resident population of critically-endangered gorillas from poachers and militia fighters.

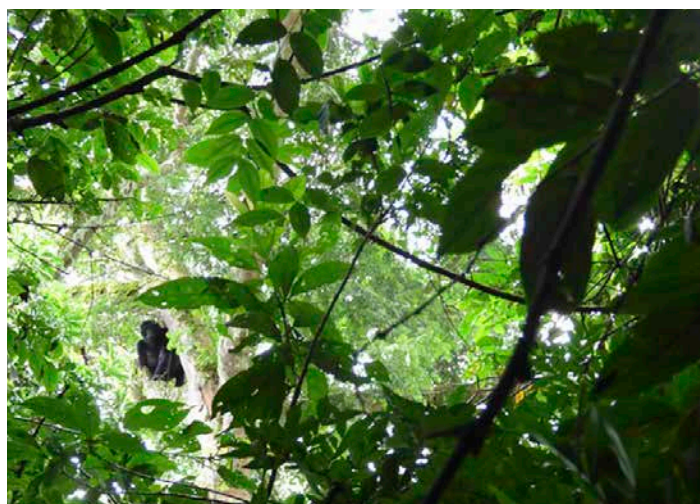
After 16 years, a picture

However, up until now, nobody has been able to provide photographic evidence of Walikale's gorillas. Over the years, the rangers have identified at least 500 new Grauer's gorillas (an additional 13% on the known population of 3,800).

But even though the rangers know where the gorillas will be each day, their natural shyness and fear of hunters, as well as the denseness of the lush forest, meant that capturing one on camera had long seemed like an impossible task.

"The gorillas in Walikale are not used to humans, unlike the mountain gorillas of Rwanda," explains André Byamungu, who leads the project. "And when you think that there are many hunters and rebels here who shoot at them, it's understandable that the gorillas live in permanent fear of humans!"

However, André adds, a small team of rangers got lucky and came across three adult female gorillas



A shy adult female gorilla found deep in the forests of Walikale, DRC

up in the trees. Fortunately for the rangers, the gorillas had become temporarily separated from their silverback. Even though they tried to intimidate the rangers, one of the team succeeded in leaving the forest with the first known picture of a Walikale gorilla.

"This is proof that our long-term commitment is paying off," says Director Jillian Miller, who shed tears of joy upon receiving the photo. "There are no quick fixes in conservation, least of all in gorilla conservation, so I'm thrilled that our team have finally managed to get that elusive picture!"

Amazing to see

Dan Bucknell, Executive Director of Tusk Trust, adds: "After so long it's amazing to see this image from Walikale. Tusk is proud to have supported the Gorilla Organization on this project from its very early days, and have deep admiration and respect for the team. This photo really

shows how scarce, inaccessible and vulnerable gorillas are in that part of the world."

Now they have their photograph, the team are more determined than ever to keep Walikale's gorillas safe. But they know it won't be easy. The reserve is not an official national park. This means that, while it is afforded some protection, militia groups fight to control the 70,000-hectare territory which is rich in natural resources.

Alongside the ranger patrols, the team carries out vital outreach work. Village chiefs have agreed to become custodians of the forest and the number of snares being left on the forest floor is falling. At the same time, André and the team have also built a school and are busy training 19 teachers to spread the message of conservation. Now that they have a picture of the elusive gorillas of Walikale, getting the local communities on side will become that little bit easier.

Memo
from
Walikale

I cannot tell you how happy I am that we finally succeeded in taking a picture of a gorilla here in Walikale. The whole team are overjoyed.

For years, I have been worried. Worried that the people who fund our important work here would maybe start to doubt that there are hundreds of gorillas who need our help. But people far away from Walikale never stopped believing in us.

We would like to thank the Gorilla Organization's supporters for their help over the years. We have seen the appeals that have been sent to people's homes and heard of the generous responses that have always come back. We also thank the Tusk Trust who have supported us for many years, never giving up even when it seemed like a lost cause.

Thanks to the generosity of the Gorilla Organization's supporters, our rangers have good boots for their patrols, camping equipment to spend the night in the forests, and enough money to set up schools to educate children about the importance of gorillas. And, of course, some of our supporters also gave us the money to buy a camera – the very one we used to photograph our gorillas for the first time!

André Byamungu



Digit News is 50

From the very first issue, *Digit News* has kept Gorilla Organization supporters up-to-date with the latest in gorilla conservation in Africa, as well as about fundraising achievements closer to home.

It's even inspired some of our supporters to take action and do their bit to help save gorillas in the wild from extinction.

Dr. Emma Nicholls of the Homiman Museum in London, recalls giving out copies of the newsletter

while fundraising for gorillas as a child. "I remember raising money selling toys in the village hall and handing out leaflets with 'Just 650 Left' written across them. There are now more than 1,000 mountain gorillas so it feels like things have greatly improved," she says.

"Without the support of the Gorilla Organization's conservation initiatives in Rwanda, Uganda, and the DR Congo, mountain gorillas would no doubt be in very poor

shape. Would they even be here at all?"

Someone else who has long looked forward to *Digit News* dropping through his letterbox is Carl Graham (pictured right).

A passionate supporter since 2004, he says: "I've kept all the correspondence I've received over the years. It's made me love gorillas even more. I've even had the chance to feed gorillas at my local safari park!"



Supporter Phred Newbury has held on to all her past copies of Digit News (below)

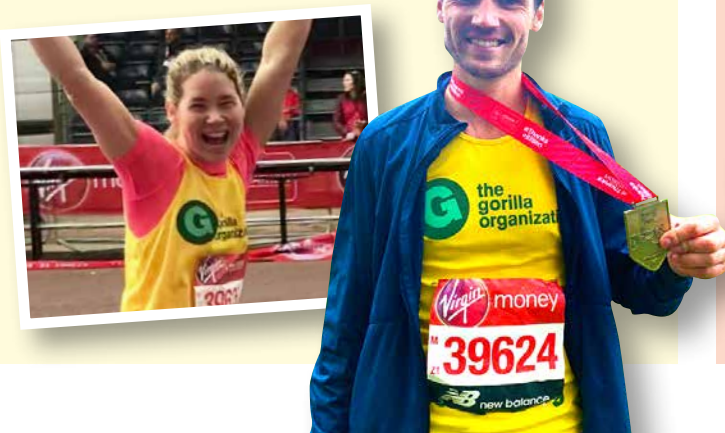


Dr Nicholls enjoys a close encounter with Kabujo in Uganda

Go Team Gorilla!

Team Gorilla were out in force at the 2019 London Marathon in April. A team of 10 runners set off on the 26.2-mile course, and all of them successfully made it over the finish line! In all, they raised more than £20,800, which will be used to fund frontline gorilla conservation and community development projects in Africa.

Team Gorilla is already recruiting for the 2020 London Marathon. To get involved email events@gorillas.org



Time for tea

Supporters old and new came together recently for a London tea party in aid of the Gorilla Organization.

Chairman Emeritus Stanley Johnson told stories from his colourful life in travel and conservation while two new Patrons – star of stage and screen Hayley Mills and television's celebrity auctioneer James Lewis – mingled with guests at the Royal Overseas League.

Guests were also invited to learn more about leaving a legacy to the Gorilla Organization, to safeguard gorillas for years to come.



Stanley Johnson and Hayley Mills at the London tea party

This autumn Ian Redmond OBE will host another legacy tea party at the beautiful Nature in Art Gallery and Museum in Gloucestershire (pictured left). One special guest will be our dedicated supporter Mariane "Phred" Newbury, who along with husband Rob has raised over £40,000 for the gorillas since she first fell in love with them on a visit to Africa in 1993. To find out more email anna@gorillas.org



A new project brings new hope for all

Grauer's gorillas remain vulnerable in Congo's dense forests

The Itombwe Nature Reserve in South Kivu Province, eastern DR Congo, is one of the last true refuges of the Grauer's (or eastern lowland) gorilla.

In 2016, a full decade after it was initially gazetted, Itombwe's borders were officially recognised, offering new hope not just to the resident gorillas, but also to the other iconic species, including chimpanzees and elephants, living in the dense montane forests of the reserve. Now, the Gorilla Organization is helping local communities to take a leading role in the conservation of this fragile ecosystem, including its critically-endangered gorillas.

The first gorillas were identified in the Itombwe Massif, a part of the vast Albertine Rift, in 1908. It wasn't until the 1960s, however,

that the area was properly surveyed, revealing the rich biodiversity of its forests. The most recent official census, carried out in 1996, identified 857 gorillas living in Itombwe. By 2006, however, that number had plummeted to just 220 individuals as hunting, poaching and habitat loss took their toll.

The perfect challenge

In 2016, the Congolese authorities finally confirmed the creation of the Itombwe Nature Reserve. While this offered some protection, the area was nevertheless placed outside the National Park system, meaning it has so far received little



support from either the Congolese government or from local or international NGOs. Now, however, the Congolese national wildlife authority, the ICCN, has reached an agreement with the Gorilla Organization to work alongside local communities to carry out vital research in the reserve and to protect its native gorillas and other species.

"This is exactly the kind of challenge we are equipped to deal with," explains Director Jillian Miller. "Our work at Itombwe is a natural extension of the work we have carried out in other parts of DR Congo and elsewhere in Africa. Above all, our experience working alongside rather than against local communities, will be key to

keeping the gorillas of the Itombwe Reserve safe for many generations to come."

A team led by Jean-Claude Kyungu, who previously headed up the Gorilla Organization's Mount Tshiaberimu conservation project, is already busy at work forging friendly relations with local village chiefs (or *Bamis*).

Following the model that has been working so effectively at Walikale, the team are training and equipping rangers to carry out regular patrols of the dense forests. As well as keeping the gorillas safe from poachers, the rangers will also conduct monthly research patrols in an effort to learn more about the lives and behaviour of the endangered apes.

At the same time, the Gorilla Organization team is also busy engaging the local communities, empowering them with the knowledge and ability to become guardians of the forests they too call home.

Looking to the future

Moving forward, plans are in place to start broadcasting radio programmes aimed at promoting conservation and illustrating the long-term benefits of moving away from poaching or sustenance farming and towards sustainable agriculture.

Furthermore, the Gorilla Organization will work with the communities to identify legal and sustainable artisanal mining sites, giving people the chance to earn a living from the mineral riches of the Itombwe Massif without damaging the precious habitat.

Mineral rich areas of the Itombwe Massif are attracting unwanted attention



There's gold in that gorilla habitat...

Many of the people living in the Itombwe Nature Reserve earn a living through small-scale artisanal mining. In some cases, though not all, communities respect the forests and try to cause as little damage as possible.

Over recent years, however, large, international mining companies have begun targeting Itombwe. Perhaps the biggest threat to the habitat, and therefore the gorillas, comes

from large-scale gold mining.

According to Jean-Claude Kyungu, the Canadian mining concern Banro has not only carried out exploratory work, it's also started putting up installations within the Reserve. "We hear helicopters flying over the forests every day now," he reports. "We fear it's only a matter of time before the big companies come, but we will continue to fight for the forests and for the gorillas."



The Itombwe Nature Reserve is on the eastern edge of DR Congo

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

Trustees:

Ian Redmond OBE, *Chairman*
Bishu Chakraborty
Steve Crossman
Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka
Martin Payne
Lord Spencer J Phillips
Professor Stuart Semple
Belinda Wakeling

Executive Director: Jillian Miller

Patrons:

Michael Backes, Baroness Lynda
Chalker, Prof. Richard Dawkins FRS,
Leonardo DiCaprio, Daryl Hannah,
James Lewis, Hayley Mills,
Dr Nathan Myhrvold, The Hon.
Mrs Claire Ward

Digit News

Editor: Jillian Miller

Deputy Editor: David Hewitt

Photographs: Mike Davison,
Samson Werikhe, Emma Nicholls,
Anna Somerset, Virunga National Park,
Carl Graham, André Byamungu

DTP: Column Communications Ltd

Printing: The Production Hub

Supporters step up to protect gorillas from Ebola outbreak

In February we needed your help more than ever. Ebola was spreading through DR Congo, getting ever closer to the gorillas of the Walikale forests and the Virunga National Park.

We sent out an appeal for money to fund a human shield around the gorillas to keep them safe from the deadly virus. The response was overwhelming. More than 2,000 people sent generous emergency gifts, enough to keep the human shield of dedicated rangers in place for six months. Thank you!

Sadly, however, Ebola is not going away. In fact, it's getting worse. The virus is spreading through DR Congo, inching ever closer to the gorilla habitat.

"If Ebola spreads to the gorilla habitat, it would be a disaster," explains Director Jillian Miller. "We need to step up our efforts to keep human-gorilla contact to an absolute minimum, which



Both silverbacks and young gorillas are at grave risk from Ebola

means more ranger patrols and more community outreach work. Once again, we hope our generous supporters will be there for the

gorillas in their time of need."

To learn more and find out how you can donate, visit: www.gorillas.org/news

More bees to keep Bwindi's wandering gorillas safe



Project Managers Samson and Jovia inspect the new hives at the Gorilla Organization's beekeeping centre in Uganda

In February, the Gorilla Organization team in Uganda took delivery of 700 bee hives.

How does this help gorillas? The bees will form part of an "organic fence" around the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Since gorillas hate bees, they will be less tempted to stray outside of the park boundaries in search of tasty maize and other crops. That means no more angry farmers with a grudge against greedy gorillas!

Ex-poachers go green with Regina's help

Thanks to Regional Technical Officer and farmer trainer Regina Sanyu, the gardens of the Gorilla Organization resource Centre in Kisoro, Uganda have been transformed.

Regina uses her expert knowledge to help local communities gain the skills and knowledge they need to make a sustainable living from farming not poaching.



STOP PRESS

As *Digit News* went to press, reports emerged from Uganda that Ebola has crossed the border after a young boy visiting his mother in DR Congo returned home with the virus. The race is on to stop it spreading into more communities and into the gorilla habitat in both countries.

