



PRESS RELEASE

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Images of 24 infants [here](#)
(credit RDB)

On World Gorilla Day conservationists celebrate the naming of 24 infant mountain gorillas born in Rwanda

**As a regional contingency plan is developed across three range
countries to better protect mountain gorillas from the risk of coronavirus
transmission**

Kwita Izina is the annual mountain gorilla naming ceremony in Rwanda and this year 24 infants will be named at the event, which is taking place virtually for the first time in its sixteen-year history, due to coronavirus precautions. This year, the event will focus on conservation and sustainable tourism and the infants will be named by the men and women, who protect and care for them every day in the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. ¹

**Clare Akamanzi, the Chief Executive Officer of the Rwanda Development Board
said of the first virtual Kwita Izina:**

“This year’s Kwita Izina is special in that we have chosen to go back to our history and tradition to name our baby gorillas as it was done in the past, which is the people that spend a lot of time caring for these babies are the ones that are given the honour and privilege to name them. This year, we have chosen that the majority of the people naming the babies born over the last year will be the rangers, the trackers, the guides, the vets and all those who look after these animals on a day to day basis. This is our special and humble way of us thanking them for ensuring the majestic mountain gorillas are conserved.”

Sustainable eco-tourism underpins mountain gorilla conservation and the closure of the industry earlier this year due to the pandemic, impacted heavily on the region’s economy. However, such a move was necessary, given that mountain gorillas share much of our DNA and are susceptible to other human respiratory illnesses. It is assumed the SARS CoV-2 virus, which causes the disease COVID-19 in humans, poses a risk to mountain gorillas. Minimising human-gorilla interaction was a priority to protect this endangered sub-species, as well as the health and safety of key personnel.



As mountain gorilla tourism begins to reopen it's critical that best practice procedures are in place, including the mandatory wearing of face coverings. To that end, the International Gorilla Conservation Programme is championing implementation of the Gorilla Friendly™ guidelines. Sixteen different conservation institutions have endorsed the pledge - including Conservation International, Fauna & Flora International and WWF - available in English, French and German.

The challenges of protecting mountain gorillas during a pandemic has also prompted the development of a region wide strategy. Under the umbrella of the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration, all three mountain gorilla range countries – Rwanda, DRC and Uganda – have been involved in the development of a framework, which has been designed to enhance regional cooperation in the preparedness and response to COVID-19.

Commenting on the new regional contingency plan, Anna Behm Masozera, Director at IGCP said:

"Responding to the threat of COVID-19 has presented us with many challenges over the last few months. But by working together across the three mountain gorilla range countries, we can share information quickly and respond at speed to any detection or escalation of the disease. In doing so, we can better manage and monitor the risk to mountain gorillas and provide support to local communities, whilst also informing returning tourists to solicit their support and compliance to strict protocols in place."

Mountain gorillas are widely regarded as a conservation success and the story of the efforts to boost the population in the transboundary Virunga Massif from an historic low of an estimated 250 more than forty years ago, to over 600 today, recently featured in "Extinction: the facts," a programme presented by Sir David Attenborough.

Cath Lawson, primate expert at WWF-UK said:

"It's taken decades of collaborative and people-centred conservation effort to bring the mountain gorilla back from the brink of extinction. The global population now stands at more than 1,000. The 24 infants being named at the 2020 Kwita Izina ceremony remind us that there is much to celebrate. But, as the threat of the coronavirus pandemic has shown, there is no room for complacency - mountain gorillas remain a conservation dependent sub-species."

Ends



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NOTES TO EDITORS

- Learn more about Kwita Izina here: <https://www.visitrwanda.com/kwita-izina/>
- Link to 24 images of infant mountain gorillas (**Credit – RDB**)
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/kwitaizina/albums/72157716088999873>
- The Rwanda Development board is live-streaming a webinar, entitled “**Conversation on Conservation**” on 25th September at 1500 CAT. This is part of the celebrations marking Rwanda's 16th Kwita Izina gorilla naming ceremony. The event will be on the Visit Rwanda YouTube. To join register [here](#). More information about the conversation can be found here: <https://www.visitrwanda.com/kwita-izina/conversation-on-conservation/>
- Assets [here](#) of **archive** images of infant mountain gorillas in Rwanda.

About International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) (www.igcp.org)

IGCP is a coalition programme of Conservation International, Fauna & Flora International and WWF with a mission to secure the future for mountain gorillas. IGCP achieves this through working in partnership with State and non-State actors in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda. Its Directorate is located in Kigali, Rwanda



About WWF

WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) is one of the world's largest independent conservation organisations, active in nearly 100 countries. Our supporters – more than five million of them – are helping us to restore nature and to tackle the main causes of nature's decline, particularly the food system and climate change. We're fighting to ensure a world with thriving habitats and species, and to change hearts and minds so it becomes unacceptable to overuse our planet's resources.

WWF. For your world.

For wildlife, for people, for nature.

Find out more about our work, past and present at www.wwf.org.uk

About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity.

About Conservation International (CI) (<https://www.conservation.org/>)

Conservation International uses science, policy and partnerships to protect the nature that people rely on for food, fresh water and livelihoods. Founded in 1987, Conservation International works in more than 30 countries on six continents to ensure a healthy, prosperous planet that supports us all.