



International Gorilla  
Conservation Programme

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# THE SILVERBACK STANDARD

## Better Methods, More Effort, and More Mountain Gorillas



Photo Credit: Ryoma Otsuka

After decades of collaborative protection and concerted conservation efforts to secure the future for mountain gorillas, the numbers of the critically endangered sub species in the Virunga Massif are the highest ever recorded. Survey results released 31<sup>st</sup> May 2018 by the three Partner States of the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration (DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda) in Rubavu, Rwanda, reveal that the numbers in the Virunga Massif have increased from an estimated 480 individuals in 2010 to 604 as a minimum count as of June 2016. Combined with the published Bwindi 2011 results the global population estimate of the mountain gorillas now stands at 1,004. The full survey report is forthcoming, but while the methods have improved, the survey effort doubled, the population shows signs of genuine increase.

A registered increase in mountain gorillas does not necessarily mean that the threats have reduced. These magnificent animals still live in small isolated populations facing threats such as snare traps, climate change, infrastructure development and diseases. We need to double our efforts even more to ensure that the increasing population stays safe and secure by continuously guarding its limited habitat, introducing more strict regulations on tourism, intensifying anti-poaching patrols and campaigns

and improve involvement of the park adjacent communities in conservation.

Commenting on the released Virunga census results, the IGCP Board Chairperson and Wildlife Practice Leader, WWF (World Wide Fund For Nature) Margaret Kinnaird says, *"This is fabulous news for mountain gorillas and shows what we can do for wildlife when NGOs, governments and their communities work together. However, the high number of snares encountered and the numerous other threats they face including climate change indicate that the battle is far from won. The three gorilla range countries and their partners must continue to work together to safeguard the Virunga Massif - not only for the protection of these incredible creatures but also for the welfare of the local people with whom they share the landscape. The mountain gorilla story can be a model for how to restore and maintain our earth's precious biodiversity."*

The census findings are the result of intensive surveying coordinated by the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration and supported by the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP – a coalition programme of Fauna & Flora International and WWF) along with other partners; the Protected

Area Authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda (l'Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature, the Rwanda Development Board and the Uganda Wildlife Authority), the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, the Institute of

Tropical Forest Conservation, Gorilla Doctors, and the North Carolina Zoo, Fauna & Flora International, WWF, and Partners in Conservation at the Columbus Zoo & Aquarium and Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe.

## Sweep One of Bwindi Mountain Gorilla Census Successfully Completed

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is extraordinarily tough; it has a unique rugged terrain, steep and slippery slopes, large and flood-prone rivers, thick and thorny vegetation, and biting insects. For nine weeks the teams of about 75 field team members alternated between two weeks on and two weeks off. Clearly it takes a brave, curious and committed heart to endure the census process.

Irakoze Emmanuel, a tracker and ranger with Rwanda Development Board, reveals that he always wanted to know why Bwindi is called impenetrable and participating in this year's census gave him the answers he needed. *"Bwindi Census is the most difficult census because of the steep and rugged terrain. Unlike Virunga where there are some flat or less steep areas that don't require hiking, in Bwindi it is hiking both to and from the park through very thick and thorny*



Census team 5 at Nest site of Mukiza gorilla group measuring and collecting dung samples for genetic analysis.  
Photo Credit: Census teams

*vegetation. I got to appreciate why it is called impenetrable! Nonetheless it is our job to watch out for the mountain gorillas, so we enjoy doing it even amidst all these challenges".*

The census teams also covered the contiguous Sarambwe Nature Reserve in DRC for the first time ever!

Adding on this Eustrate Uzabaho, Assistant Field Officer, IGCP says *"The first sweep of Bwindi 2018 census was well organized both logistically and technically. Irrespective of the*

*challenges we encountered we still pushed on. To say the least, it was a difficult task, but the commitment of the teams helped a lot in overcoming these challenges".*

Last conducted in 2011, the 5<sup>th</sup> mountain gorilla census in BINP kicked off in March 2018. Conducted in four phases, the census field teams from over 10 participating organizations combed Bwindi Impenetrable national park and the contiguous Sarambwe in search for mountain gorilla signs. The field teams surveyed approximately 330 sq-km, collected data on mountain gorillas and other select large mammals like elephants and chimpanzees, collected mountain gorilla fecal samples for genetic and pathogen analysis, and found and destroyed 39 snares. The teams also recorded signs of illegal tree cutting in the forest.

Asked what they think about the completed sweep one of the census, Jena R. Hickey (PHD), IGCP Conservation Scientist says, *"I think it was great and the teams did an incredible job. We look forward to sweep two in Sept – Nov 2018"* while Pontius Ezuma the Chief Park Warden Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Area (BMCA) notes *"we are particularly grateful to the funders of the census, to the field teams and to all the organisers plus participating institutions"*.

The 2018 Bwindi-Sarambwe populations survey of mountain gorillas, large mammals, and illegal activities are being conducted by the Protected Area Authorities in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Uganda Wildlife Authority and l'Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature) under the transboundary framework of the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration. The census is supported by the Rwanda Development Board, International Gorilla Conservation Programme (a coalition of Fauna & Flora International and WWF), Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation, Gorilla Doctors, Conservation Through Public Health, Wildlife Conservation Society Uganda Country Office, WWF Uganda Country Office, and Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust. The census is funded by Fauna & Flora International, WWF, and Partners in Conservation at the Columbus Zoo & Aquarium.

## LEADING THE CHANGE

There's no better way of supporting conservation-compatible development than involving the community and letting them lead the change; empowering communities to be instruments of their own development ensures ownership and long-term success. IGCP with support from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) through WWF – Sweden are implementing a five-year project "Leading the Change: Civil Society, Rights & Environment." The Sida-funded project aims at empowering community-based organizations (CBOs) and civil-society organizations (CSOs) in the Virunga - Bwindi landscape to exercise their rights in decision making and influence policy on natural resource management. Commenting on the project Allan Carlson, Senior Conservation Advisor, WWF – Sweden, says, "if empowered CSOs are forces for transformational change". In this project, IGCP is building the technical and institutional capacity of the CSOs/CBOs and also facilitating and guiding them to implement a series of conservation friendly/ livelihood improvement activities. The project also aims educating and empowering the CSO/CBOs to **integrate and strengthen**

human rights, gender and conflict sensitivity in their work. Strengthening the institutional capacity of the CBO/CSOs will secure better governance of the institutions and facilitate strong inclusive leadership while strengthening the technical capacity will create deeper understanding of their roles and rights in natural resource management. This understanding will influence equity and fairness in sharing benefits from gorilla tourism and other opportunities from gorilla conservation.

Commenting on the five-year project the IGCP Director Anna Behm Masozera says “By mainstreaming gender and social diversity in decision-making and leadership, community-based organizations can reach greater achievement for their members and for long-term conservation of wildlife like mountain gorillas”. Great things have started happening and impressive strides have been registered as shared in the stories below:

## Provision of Safe and Clean Water as a means of Mountain Gorilla Conservation

“We have suffered for a long time with the lack of safe and clean water sources. Often, we trek long distances to the Park for water, foregoing a lot of other chores. Our children go late to school because they have to first help out with fetching enough water for the day. On average a household uses 80 litres of water a day. When we can't make it to the park we resort to open ponds within the community. Unfortunately, cows and goats also drink from the same ponds, the hygiene around them is also wanting. Although we boil the water our children are always sick because the water is just not safe. But with the Sida -IGCP support we have hope that it shall soon be well. With the four community tanks so far constructed in the villages, we shall finally have access to safe and clean water” shares Tumusiime Fausta.

Park adjacent communities around Bwindi Impenetrable National Park are often challenged by access to safe and clean water. They rely on the water sources inside the park for water and at

to draw this water, and even worse for children because they can fall inside these wells in the process.

In appreciation of all this and in the bid to conserve the park and the wildlife therein, NCCDF with both technical and financial support from IGCP has constructed four community rain water harvesting tanks with capacity of 30,000 litres each in the front-line villages of Kikobero, Kaholire, Nombe and Nyabaremura around Bwindi Impenetrable forest. The water tanks were originally identified as priority needs by these communities through a Community Based Planning process. This action is expected to help reduce conflict between the park and the community ensuring conservation for the habitat and wildlife and also provide safe and clean water to the communities. **A win-win situation is what it is, very healthy for conservation and necessary for the park adjacent communities.**



Open pond sometimes used by the community.  
Photo Credit: Salvatrice Musabyeyezu|IGCP.



One of the newly constructed rain water harvesting tanks.  
Photo Credit: Wellard Makambo|IGCP

times open ponds in the community. Although sometimes some individuals have used water as an excuse to enter the park and deplete other resources. This frequent human presence in the park is not safe for the wildlife let alone the habitat, but, again the choices of the community are limited since the open ponds outside the park are dirty. They are also worsened by the poor disposal of human waste and poor/shallow construction of pit latrines that often pour out into them. And as a result of all this there are increased cases of typhoid fever in the Nkuringo community. Buying water ferried from other villages on the other hand is expensive as a 20 Liters jerrycan goes for about 2000Ugx (0.5\$) implying that a household needs 8000 Ugx to purchase 80 liters of water which a household uses on average daily. This is not money the local communities can afford. So, trekking to the park becomes the only solution.

According to Faustin a mother in Nkuringo a person takes about 3-4 hours to and from the water source. Faustin adds that it is very risky as well because they are treading in the territory of wild animals that can harm them. Julius a community member in Nkuringo and also Administrator Nkuringo Community Conservation Development Foundation (NCCDF) says during the dry season the water levels go down, and it becomes difficult

## Use of Improved Farming Methods Facilitates Biodiversity Conservation

Most farmers in Shingiro sector of Musanze district in Rwanda are fond of using chemical fertilizers and artificial pesticides on their farms. Previous surveys have indicated that the artificial pesticides kill bees in the area hence failing pollination and frustrating bee keepers in the area. How then can the community live in harmony with one another – each doing their businesses without frustrating the other and other biodiversity? Salvatrice Musabyeyezu – IGCP Tourism specialist says, “there’s need to change the way we do certain things, for instance, when people take into consideration the impact on the environment around them, they can find win-win solutions to protecting their environment and producing the food and income needed to improve livelihoods”.

Having chosen garlic farming as their alternative livelihood improvement project under the Sida-IGCP funding, Koushi Cooperative was encouraged to use organic garlic and organic fertilizers on their farm and about one



*Koushi women spreading garlic to dry.  
Photo Credit: Alice Mbayahi | IGCP.*

hundred hectares of organic garlic was planted in December 2017; the members have started harvesting the garlic and so far sold over 600kgs. One Kilogram of garlic costs between 180-190 RWF (2.1 - 2.2\$). “We chose garlic because it is high paying, grows well in our sector and there’s ready market for it. The use of organic seeds and fertilizers and farming method introduced to us have made it even better and easier for us” reveals Eliezer Twizerimana, Chairperson Koushi Cooperative. The farming method being used helps to retain water in the soil and turns bad plants into new fertilizers hence enhancing soil protection and

fertility. The use of this climate change adaptive method is aimed at raising awareness about other environmental friendly ways of farming, Salvatrice explains.

Supporting park adjacent communities in starting up alternative livelihood improvement enterprises aims at economically empowering the communities, boosting their income and consequently reducing their dependence on the park - conflict. “We are grateful for this project, we have hope that we shall realize lots of profit from it. We have agreed to use these profits to buy livestock and, expand our income generating sources” notes Bernadette Nyirahagumimana. **Precisely gorilla conservation is more than just gorillas but about conserving other biodiversity around the gorillas and their habitat.** If they (gorillas) are safe we are safe too. Koushi Cooperative is composed of 41 members (25 female, 16 male) and is found in Shingiro sector bordering Volcanoes national park. The involvement of more women in this group is a good sign of the group’s ability to mainstream gender and also boost the socio-economic status of women (who are often the less privileged) in the community. In collaboration with Rwanda development board the cooperative among others is involved in anti-poaching campaigns among the community and building of buffalo walls to deter problem animals from leaving the park.

## Modern Bee Keeping Improving Livelihoods and Ensuring Conservation of Gorilla Habitat

What is the change you want to lead in this project I asked Mr. Sebakara Habimana Jean Baptist, Chairperson UDASEMINYA beekeeping union in DRC? “Advocating for modern beekeeping among beekeepers,” he responded. He is clear on the kind of change they want to see and why – increase honey yields – income and conserve the park by reducing their presence there. According to Sebakara, beehives are today placed in individual farms and compounds as opposed to the past when beekeepers placed them in the park and used rudimentary methods like lighting fires to harvest the honey inside the parks.

“A lot of things have changed. We have been introduced to conservation friendly approaches like the use of modern bee hives which we have proved produce more quality honey than the traditional bee hives, and how to harvest honey in a much conservation friendly way” he explains.

Building on the past actions supported by IGCP, UDASEMINYA a union of bee keepers in DRC are under the Sida – IGCP project strengthening and bettering their work. For example, the union has managed to complete renovation of its office/factory building and open up a honey shop in Goma town as a way of marketing and selling the honey. They have also restructured their board of governance structure and hired a consultant to help them study and understand how to use the modern beehives technology efficiently. These actions are expected to facilitate stability, create market for the honey, improve the union’s visibility and better governance of the organization.

“We are grateful to IGCP for supporting us to accomplish these actions that had since failed us to progress. With the modern methods we had adopted, I am sure we are going to earn more from this project and better our lives” Olive Safari a member of UDASEMINYA notes. Oliver reveals that since they started placing bee hives in their homesteads she has seen less conflict between the bee keeping community and the park. **“I think it is good for the park and for us too since we get to monitor our bee hives with ease. We also don’t have to**

**worry about meeting wild animals or being arrested by the park authorities”** she adds.

Related actions have been done in other CSO/CBOs like in Rwanda, SACOLA the community-based group has been supported to develop a five years strategic plan that is expected to give better guidance to its operations for the next five years, the same has been done for NCCDF and Buhoma Mukono Community Development Association (BMCD) in Uganda. In Rwanda still, the bee keepers’ union (Abakunda Nzuki) have also been able to put up thirty modern beehives while in Uganda the savings scheme of Githenderi cultural group has been supported with Ugx 10,000,000 and Rubuguli women artisans group is being supported to construct a ‘home’ (show room, office, hall, and store). Having a permanent home will ensure stability for the group’s operations and marketing of their products. These initiatives are aimed at empowering the groups financially - boosting their household incomes and consequently reducing poverty and conflict.

Future newsletters will report back on the other initiatives as well and track the progress of these partner CBOs and CSOs over the five-year project.



*Farmers harvesting honey from a modern beehive*

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