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Report chronicles over 30 years of impact in mountain gorilla conservation

On World Gorilla Day 2024, a new report outlines how 30 years of sustained effort and partnership contributed to the recovery of the only great ape in the world not in steep decline.

Uganda: 24 September, 2024; Since 1991, the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP - a coalition of three leading nature conservation organizations: Conservation International, Fauna & Flora and WWF), working closely with many local, regional and international partners across the mountain gorilla range, has recorded remarkable successes and overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges along its journey.

In a report released today to commemorate World Gorilla Day: “**Over 30 Years of Impact in Mountain Gorilla Conservation,**” - <https://igcp.shorthandstories.com/30-years-impact-report/index.html>

IGCP chronicles the milestones achieved over several decades of working in close collaboration with the three gorilla range countries: Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. These efforts have contributed to an increase in the mountain gorilla population from about 600 individuals, less than three decades ago to 1,063 individuals globally according to the 2019 Bwindi – Sarambwe mountain gorilla census report. This remarkable bounce back has inspired renewed global conservation efforts to restore hope for the survival of these gentle giants of the mountains. Although mountain gorillas are the only great apes whose population size is increasing, they remain a conservation-dependent species.

“We have worked tirelessly for over three decades, innovating and adapting our approaches to support mountain gorilla conservation at the population and transboundary landscape levels,

working to support and enhance the capacity of individuals and institutions across international borders,” said Mr. Wellard Makambo, IGCP Director. “This collaboration, across the three countries that are home to the world’s wild mountain gorilla, has enhanced social and political support for conservation, boosted tourism revenue-sharing among park-adjacent communities, strengthened community livelihoods and access to resources, and improved how effectively mountain gorilla parks are managed,” he added.

Over the last three decades, IGCP in collaboration with protected area authorities and other partners has championed mountain gorilla censuses and various ecological surveys right from planning, coordination and implementation, to the publication of results. This investment has allowed conservationists to verify population trends of gorillas and understand their ecology, and the threats they face, thus enabling more effective and targeted conservation.

IGCP has created opportunities for communities to benefit directly from mountain gorilla conservation, established genuine partnerships with communities who are enabled to be stewards of mountain gorilla conservation, strengthened community livelihoods and access to key resources like fresh water, and supported communities to manage and reduce conflicts between people and wildlife.

Despite many achievements over IGCP’s 30+ year history, the journey has not come without its challenges. Both existing and emerging threats - including poaching, habitat loss, political instability, disease and infrastructure development - continue to threaten the long-term survival of mountain gorillas and the people living alongside them.

Wellard Makambo, IGCP Director said:

“Mountain gorilla numbers have been rising steadily over the past two decades. Thanks to science-based conservation actions and innovative approaches, they now number over 1,000 from less than 600 three decades ago. Following this increase their threat status was downgraded from ‘Critically Endangered’ to ‘Endangered’ in the [IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#) in 2018”.

Wendy Elliott, Biodiversity Practice Interim Leader, WWF said:

“The fact that all other great apes - barring ourselves - are in steep decline, makes the recovery of the mountain gorilla remarkable. But more remarkable still is how this was achieved. IGCP, as a partner organization itself, focusses on deep partnerships with local communities, governments and many others, and this is where real success finds its roots. IGCP is living proof that conservation works, and that conservation done in partnership works best.”

Cath Lawson, Senior Programme Manager, Eastern Africa at Fauna & Flora said:

“Mountain gorillas are a conservation success story because of IGCP, its effectiveness as a transboundary facilitator, its focus on people - centered approaches, and its ability to catalyze the global community to respond as one through the coalition.”

Agnes Mukarubibi, a community member in Kinigi Rwanda said:

"Conserving mountain gorillas is very important to us. Through the revenue sharing of proceeds from mountain gorilla tourism, schools have been constructed within our community. Growing up, I used to walk hours to school, but today it only takes my child five minutes. These benefits bring us closer to the mountain gorillas and are a reminder that protecting them is key as it benefits us too".

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Notes to Editors:

1. This report details the impact made by the IGCP over its 30-year journey and summarizes its ambitions for further impact for the incredible mountain gorilla and beyond. International Gorilla Conservation Programme (shorthand.com)
2. Mountain gorillas are found only in high-altitude mountainous forests with elevations of 2,500 to 4,000 meters. IGCP works across their entire range, focusing on these four protected areas: Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (Uganda) 321 km²), Mgahinga Gorilla National Park (Uganda) (33.7 km²), Volcanoes National Park (Rwanda) (160 km²), Virunga National Park (DRC) (255 km²) including Sarambwe Nature Reserve (9.8km²).
3. The latest survey results are - Bwindi – Sarambwe - 459 gorillas (2018/9; minimum estimate) Virunga Massif - 604 gorillas (2015/6; minimum estimate). Global total 1,063 mountain gorillas. Every 5 – 10 years since 1971 comprehensive mountain gorilla censuses are conducted to determine the global population estimate of endangered mountain gorillas.
4. Following the steady increase in mountain gorilla numbers, in 2018 the IUCN revised their status from 'critically endangered' to 'endangered' (IUCN Red List).
5. Bwindi – Sarambwe is one of the two natural habitats on earth where mountain gorillas can still be found, the other habitat being Virunga Massif comprising Virunga National Park, Volcanoes National Park and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park. The Bwindi-Sarambwe ecosystem encompasses Bwindi Impenetrable National Park of approximately 331 km² in Uganda and Sarambwe Nature Reserve of 9 km² in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The previous mountain gorilla census in Bwindi-Sarambwe took place in 2018 resulting in an estimate of 459 individuals in 36 social groups and 16 solitary mountain gorillas. Together with the Virunga census results of

2015, the Bwindi census results of 2018 brought the global total population of mountain gorillas to 1,063 individuals. The 2018 survey in Sarambwe Reserve was the inaugural count for the mountain gorilla in the area.

About WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) (<http://www.panda.org>)

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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

IGCP is a coalition programme of Conservation International, Fauna & Flora and WWF with a mission to secure the future for mountain gorillas. IGCP achieves this through working in partnership with State and non-State