



## **NEWS**

February 10, 2010

### **Mountain Gorilla Census to Provide Current Status of Highly Endangered Species**

The current status of the critically endangered mountain gorilla will soon be revealed through a census to determine its population size in the Virunga Volcanoes area that straddles the borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Uganda in Eastern and Central Africa. The Virunga Volcanoes is one of only two locations where mountain gorillas live, whose total numbers are currently estimated at 680 individuals. Though the area is now relatively calm, recent conflict in the Mikeno sector of Virunga National Park in the DRC has left the gorillas there vulnerable. The last Virunga Volcanoes census in 2003 resulted in an estimate of 380 individuals, with the remaining individuals living in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park Uganda. The Wildlife and National Park Authorities of Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC will collaborate on the census, which is planned for March and April 2010.

The census is an opportunity to make an accurate count of the total gorilla population in the Virunga Volcanoes. Fecal samples will also be collected for genetic analysis to confirm the population size and for better understanding the genetic variability and health status of the population. Such monitoring is vitally important in understanding the long-term viability and measuring the effects of recent history in the region on such a small population of critically endangered animals. Launching on March 1<sup>st</sup>, it will involve 80 team members. Team members, which will be drawn from the staff of the various protected area authorities and their partners, will traverse the entire Virunga gorilla habitat range over a period of approximately eight weeks.

The census is being carried out by the Rwanda Development Board/ Tourism and Conservation, the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature and the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The exercise will be supported by the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (a coalition of AWF, WWF and FFI), the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Results will be vital in looking at population trends and determining the best collaborative way forward for mountain gorilla conservation.

#### Participating institutions / contact information:

**ICCN: About L'Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature.** The Congolese Wildlife Authority (ICCN) and its Rangers work throughout the country to protect the National Parks of Congo and their wildlife from poachers, rebel groups, illegal miners and land invasions. Over 150 Rangers have been killed in the last 10 years protecting

the 5 parks of eastern DRC, and Rangers worked throughout the civil war, rarely receiving a salary. For additional information and/or photographs please contact: **Samantha Newport**, Communications Director, Virunga National Park: [samantha@gorilla.cd](mailto:samantha@gorilla.cd) or +243 99 384 1267. **Emmanuel de Merode**, Director of Virunga National Park: [edemerode@gorilla.cd](mailto:edemerode@gorilla.cd) or +243 99 344 8133

RDB/ Tourism and Conservation. **About the Rwanda Development Board/ Tourism and Conservation.** The Rwanda Wildlife Authority was created in 1973 as the national authority managing Rwanda's parks and tourism sector. RDB/ Tourism and Conservation staff manage three national parks in Rwanda, the Parc National de l'Akagera, the Parc National des Volcans and Nyungwe National Park, and one forest reserve, the Réserve Forestière de Gishwati. : For further information, please contact RDB-Tourism & Conservation office at (+250)252576514/252576515 or email [public\\_relations@rwandatourism.com](mailto:public_relations@rwandatourism.com) or visit our website at [www.rwandatourism.com](http://www.rwandatourism.com)

UWA. **About the Uganda Wildlife Authority.** The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) was established in August 1996 by the Uganda Wildlife Statute, which merged the Uganda National Parks and the Game Department. UWA is in charge of management of 10 National Parks, 12 Wildlife Reserves, 14 Wildlife Sanctuaries and provides guidance for 5 Community Wildlife Areas. UWA's vision is "To be a leading self-sustaining wildlife conservation agency that transforms Uganda into one of the best eco-tourist destinations in Africa." For further information please contact Ms. Lillian Nsubuga, Publica Relations Manager, UWA. (+256 414 35500, 312 35500), [lillian.nsubuga@ugandawildlife.org](mailto:lillian.nsubuga@ugandawildlife.org)

IGCP: **About the International Gorilla Conservation Programme.** The International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) is a coalition of three international conservation organisations that have been operating in the Great Lakes Region since 1979. The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) formed the IGCP in 1991; with the mission to empower people to jointly manage a network of transboundary protected areas so that they contribute significantly to sustainable development and protecting the mountain gorilla and its afro-montane habitat. To learn more about the International Gorilla Conservation Programme, please visit: [www.igcp.org](http://www.igcp.org), [www.awf.org](http://www.awf.org), [www.fauna-flora.org](http://www.fauna-flora.org), [www.wwf.org](http://www.wwf.org); or contact **Jamie Kemsey** (IGCP Communications Manager), +250 580465, [jkemsey@awfafrica.org](mailto:jkemsey@awfafrica.org)

MPI: **About the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.** The Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology is a research institute whose aim is to increase understanding of evolutionary anthropology, including the evolution, behavioural ecology and population biology of primates closely related to human beings. To learn more about The Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology visit: [www.eva.mpg.de/primat.html](http://www.eva.mpg.de/primat.html) ; or contact Dr. Martha Robbins, +49 341 3550 210 or +256 0782083611, [robbins@eva.mpg.de](mailto:robbins@eva.mpg.de)

DFGFI: **About the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International.** The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International is dedicated to the conservation and protection of gorillas and their habitats in Africa. The Fossey Fund operates the Karisoke Research Center in Rwanda, and maintains a staff of scientists, trackers and anti-poaching patrols in Volcanoes National Park. The Fossey Fund also works with community-based reserves and national parks in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and is building a rehabilitation center there for gorillas rescued from poachers. The Fossey Fund also operates health,

education and community development programs in the region. More information: <http://www.gorillafund.org>

**MGVP: About the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project.** Founded in 1986 shortly after the death of Dian Fossey, the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project provides veterinary care to the approximately 750 mountain gorillas living in Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It monitors the health of wild mountain gorillas, treats trauma and illness, researches significant issues in gorilla health, and develops protocols and partnerships to support the Mountain Gorilla One Health Program in the Virungas and environs. It works in close partnership with the governments of Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other gorilla conservation organizations to achieve mutual goals, and its work is shared to strengthen wildlife conservation efforts around the world. The MGVP depends upon grants and donations to conduct its operations. More information: <http://www.gorilladoctors.org>.

**About the Mountain Gorilla One Health Program.** As a partnership between the MGVP and the University of California, Davis Wildlife Health Center, the Mountain Gorilla One Health Program investigates the disease threats facing mountain gorillas, helps expand medical care for the humans working in and around the gorilla parks, and improves the health and well-being of livestock to benefit the families who depend on them for nutrition and income. The program was established in April 2009 with a leadership gift from the Packard Foundation, and involves some of the world's leading great ape scientists and conservationists. Utilizing both public and private support, the program is a model for the One Health approach to conservation ([www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/whc](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/whc)).