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## Mountain Gorilla Numbers on the Rise

*New count released from Bwindi-Sarambwe survey increases total mountain gorilla population*

DAVIS, California, Dec. 16, 2019 -- A 2018 survey shows that mountain gorilla numbers have increased in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda and Sarambwe Reserve, DR Congo, according to the Uganda Wildlife Authority. The 2018 Bwindi-Sarambwe mountain gorilla survey found a minimum of 459 mountain gorillas in these regions, an increase from the previous survey estimate in 2011 of 400. When combined with the 2015-2016 population survey results of 604 mountain gorillas in the Virunga Massif, the total world population of endangered mountain gorillas now stands at 1,063.

"Mountain gorillas are the only great ape in the wild whose numbers are increasing but their total population number is small so we must remain vigilant," stated Dr. Kirsten Gilardi, Gorilla Doctors' Executive Director, Chief Veterinary Officer and Co-Director of the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center at UC Davis. "Given ongoing risks to mountain gorillas such as habitat encroachment, potential disease transmission, poaching and civil unrest, this increase should serve as both a celebration and a clarion call to all government, NGO and institutional partners to continue to collaborate in our work to ensure the survival of mountain gorillas."

Gorilla Doctors provides life-saving veterinary care to mountain gorillas in Uganda, Rwanda and DR Congo and is credited for half of the annual population growth rate of human-habituated mountain gorillas (gorillas that are accustomed to the close proximity of people to facilitate research and tourism). From July 2018 to July 2019, in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park alone, Gorilla Doctors conducted 126 health checks and performed 23 veterinary interventions to treat ill or injured gorillas.

For the census, Gorilla Doctors served as part of the organizing team, participating throughout planning, execution and analysis of survey results, helping to train census workers and managing the storage and preparation of all fecal samples collected. All DNA analysis was conducted by the Mammalian Ecology and Conservation Unit of the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory (MECU) at UC Davis where they isolated and genotyped DNA from nearly 2,000 georeferenced fecal samples to identify individual and group identities associated with each one. The MECU team also conducted data analysis and helped with preparation of the final report. Gorilla Doctors collected and preserved additional fecal samples to study the impact of pathogens, including parasites, on gorilla health.

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## **About Gorilla Doctors**

Gorilla Doctors is dedicated to conserving wild mountain and eastern lowland (Grauer's) gorillas through life-saving veterinary medicine and science using a One Health approach. Gorilla Doctors is the only organization in the world providing these endangered animals with hands-on care which is credited with half of the annual population growth rate of habituated mountain gorillas. Gorilla Doctors is a partnership between the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, Inc. and the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center at the University of California, Davis.

[www.gorilladoctors.org](http://www.gorilladoctors.org)

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## **Bwindi-Sarambwe Census Leadership**

The 2018 Bwindi-Sarambwe population surveys of mountain gorillas, known as census, were 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 was supported by the Rwanda Development Board, International Gorilla Conservation Programme (a coalition of Conservation International, Fauna & Flora International and WWF), Mammalian Ecology and Conservation Unit (MECU) of the UC Davis Veterinary Genetics Laboratory, 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 was funded by Fauna & Flora International, WWF, and Partners in Conservation at the Columbus Zoo & Aquarium.

## **Partner Links**

Uganda Wildlife Authority - <https://www.ugandawildlife.org/news-events/news>

International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) - <http://igcp.org/blog/>

UC Davis Wildlife Health Center - <https://whc.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/>

UC Davis One Health Institute - <https://ohi.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/>

Mammalian Ecology and Conservation Unit - <https://mecu.ucdavis.edu>