



2019-2020

ANNUAL REPORT





TRACKING FORWARD

Our mission at Gorilla Doctors is to conserve wild eastern gorillas through life-saving veterinary medicine and science using a One Health approach. In Fiscal Year 2019 – 2020, we found ourselves at the very nexus of our mission with the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout this report we will summarize the field activities, scientific research, capacity strengthening programs, and additional safety measures we have implemented to continue our critical care for ill and injured wild gorillas in the face of extraordinary challenges.

We do not know what a post-pandemic world looks like yet, but as we begin a new year, we can continue to learn and ensure that gorilla health safety measures are a permanent best practice. Imagine a future where we have an overall decrease in illness, and thereby healthy, thriving and growing eastern gorilla populations. In 2021, let us track forward together, blazing a new trail in wildlife conservation.



“Dian, if ever you are going to contact gorillas, you must follow their tracks to where they are going rather than backtrack trails to where they’ve been.”

—ALAN ROOT, Photographer

Excerpt from Dian Fossey’s *Gorillas in the Mist* as she shares one of the most valuable lessons she ever learned.

Sub-adult mountain gorilla, Karueta of Katwe group looking up, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. Photo by Dr. Ricky

(Cover Photo) A posturing infant mountain gorilla in Pablo group, Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. Photo by Skyler Bishop

GORILLA DOCTORS IMPACT CONTINUES

Between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, Gorilla Doctors conducted 272 health checks and monitoring visits across three countries, five national parks, 54 groups and nearly 700 individual gorillas. We performed 37 clinical interventions, with almost 25% of those happening between March – June 2020, when most of the world was on COVID-19 lockdown. Gorilla Doctors' veterinary care was deemed an essential service by the governments of Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo, and our dedicated staff continued their work in the face of tremendous challenges.

Our 10-years of work with the USAID-funded PREDICT Emerging Pandemic Threats Project prepared Gorilla Doctors to lead, and in February 2020 we sent a memo to all partners outlining the potential risks of the newly emerged SARS CoV-2 virus. By early April additional health and safety protocols had been implemented to protect both people and gorillas and we will continue to advocate that these become permanent best practice. As we all experience the reality of emerging infectious pathogens, Gorilla Doctors' work and One Health approach addresses the true global impact of saving a species, one gorilla at time.

Mountain gorilla family huddling in the rain, Isimbi group, Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. Photo by Dr. Noel



“It is very, very important that we save mountain gorillas because when we save gorillas we save ourselves.”

—DR. GASPARD NZAYISENGA, Field Veterinarian, Rwanda



Scan with your iPhone camera or other code reader for more on Dr. Gaspard's philosophy about his work.



CARING FOR RWANDA'S MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

Gorilla Doctors' Rwanda team – Drs. Julius, Noel, Gaspard, Methode, and Adrien – saw a 43% increase in clinical interventions on ill or injured gorillas from the previous fiscal year. Between July and December 2019, the team conducted 73 gorilla health checks and monitoring visits, as well as a snare removal from a golden jackal.

The second half of the fiscal year (January – June 2020), was quite different. The team conducted an additional 54 health checks and monitoring visits, and **10 clinical interventions**, seven of which were to treat a respiratory infection outbreak in Pablo and Isimbi groups in February. This respiratory illness was confirmed to not be COVID-19 and all treated individuals made a full recovery. Scan the QR code below to watch a video of the Rwanda team in action.



“My favorite thing about being a Gorilla Doctor is always about the outcome. When you're doing an intervention it is very stressful and challenging. It takes a team. After a while you see results – an individual getting healthy, a female having a baby – so you feel like, wow, I've been a part of this.”

—DR. JEAN BOSCO (NOEL) NOHERI, Field Veterinarian, Rwanda



Scan with your iPhone camera or other code reader to watch Dr. Noel treat a sick mountain gorilla & learn why he remembers every single intervention.



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CLINICAL
INTERVENTIONS

Mudakama and her curious infant, Urugwiro group, Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. Photo by Dr. Gaspard

A DIFFICULT YEAR IN UGANDA

Gorilla Doctors' Team Uganda – Drs. Benard, Fred and Ricky – and their gorilla patients had a dramatic year. It began in August 2019 with the successful, 10-hour effort by Dr. Ricky to rescue infant Tulambule from a snare and reunite her with her gorilla family. In December 2019, the world was thrilled with the Bwindi-Sarambwe gorilla population count, announcing an increase to a minimum of 659 individuals, bringing the total world population of mountain gorillas to 1,063.

On February 3, 2020, lightning struck in Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, killing four mountain gorillas in Hirwa group. Another tragedy occurred in June when Rafiki, the lead silverback of Nkuringo group, was killed by a poacher. While this incident caused international outrage, it was deeply personal for our team: Dr. Ricky performed Rafiki's necropsy and determined the cause of death; Dr. Fred had conducted countless health checks on Rafiki and his group over the years; and Dr. Benard had known Rafiki since 2003 when he first joined Nkuringo group as a young blackback.



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Infant mountain gorilla rests against Mom's back, Mishaya group,
Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. Photo by Skyler Bishop



“I have seen a gorilla give birth in the wild. It was an experience of a lifetime, and it’s so humbling that they can even allow us to intrude in that kind of privacy in their natural world.”

—DR. FRED NIZEYIMANA, Field Veterinarian, Uganda



Scan with iPhone camera or other code reader
to discover why Dr. Fred was known as the boy
who talked to goats.



KEEPING GORILLAS HEALTHY IN DRC

Gorilla Doctors' Team DR Congo continues to work under highly volatile conditions in the region, presenting significant challenges to our safety in monitoring the health of mountain gorillas in Virunga National Park and Grauer's gorillas in Kahuzi-Biega National Park. In the face of the 2018 Ebolavirus disease outbreak (officially declared over in June 2020), violence from rebel attacks, and the emergence of COVID-19, Drs. Eddy and Fabrice and Jean-Paul persevered, using their expertise in infectious disease research to lead trainings across the region, helping to keep both people and gorillas healthy.

In August 2019, Bukima, lead silverback of Rugendo group, was injured in a fight with lone silverback Sebagabo. A clinical intervention to treat his wounds led to a full recovery. While fighting between silverbacks is natural, this was a particularly compelling case for Dr. Eddy. In 2006, Dr. Eddy saved then-juvenile Sebagabo from a snare.



“My first thought when Dr. Eddy told me I was the newest Gorilla Doctors Field Veterinarian is that I was very, very, very happy because my dream of contributing to animals and wildlife conservation had become a reality. I am proud to be a veterinarian. I am proud to be a Gorilla Doctor.”

—DR. FABRICE KATEMBO MALONGA, Field Veterinarian, DR Congo

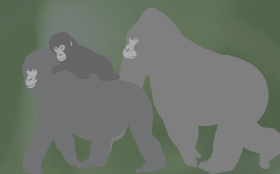


Scan with iPhone camera or other card reader to watch Dr. Fabrice during his very first days as a Gorilla Doctor.



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HEALTH CHECKS



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GROUPS



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CLINICAL
INTERVENTIONS

Infant mountain gorilla, Theodore, thriving post-snare removal, Virunga National Park, DRC. Photo by Dr. Eddy

GRAUER'S GORILLAS AT RISK

Found only in DR Congo, eastern lowland or Grauer's gorillas are critically endangered. Of the estimated 3,800 remaining, Gorilla Doctors monitors three habituated groups and a single lone silverback in Kahuzi-Biega National Park and two groups in the Mt. Tshiabirimu region of Virunga National Park. There are also eight unhabituated groups in the park, and this year Dr. Eddy has worked to develop non-invasive health monitoring protocols for unhabituated Grauer's – essential for this fragile population.

In March 2020, Dr. Eddy and team successfully rescued an unhabituated Grauer's gorilla who was outside the safety of Kahuzi-Biega National Park. We know gorillas are susceptible to human diseases so when a gorilla leaves the forest, the risk of interaction, injury and disease transmission for both people and gorillas is high. Addressing that the health of gorillas is inextricably linked to the people with whom they share habitat – One Health – is central to Gorilla Doctors' mission.

Grauer's gorilla from Chimanuka group, Kahuzi-Biega National Park, DRC. Photo by Artur Gajda



“My favorite thing about being a Gorilla Doctor is working with an endangered species like mountain gorillas, and being able to work towards saving and sustaining them, for me, is a privilege.”

—DR. BENARD SSEBIDE, Head Veterinarian, Uganda



Scan with iPhone camera or other code reader to discover why a young Benard thought veterinarians were cooler than human doctors.



GROWING UP GORILLA

The first few years of life are full of challenges when trying to grow into a strong, healthy gorilla in the wild. The greatest threats to infant mountain gorillas are trauma (e.g. snares, injuries) and illness. Health threats to infants can have population-level impact over time, and every individual life is essential to the long-term survival of the species. Gorilla Doctors monitors the health of approximately 200 infants between the ages of 0 to 3.5 years across Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo.

Did you know our health monitoring of infants averages \$5 per day per infant?

That means that you can support health monitoring of one infant gorilla by becoming a Gorilla Guardian™ with a recurring donation of \$150 each month. This ongoing commitment of support, in any amount, sustains our efforts to keep our gorilla patients healthy.



“It is very important that we save gorillas because each individual matters and we want the future generations to also see what is called a mountain gorilla.”

—DR. RICKY OKWIR OKELLO, Field Veterinarian, Uganda



Scan with iPhone camera or other card reader to watch Dr. Ricky at work in the forest and learn more about why each individual gorilla matters.



Scan with your iPhone camera or other card reader to learn how you can become a Gorilla Guardian!

Or visit: gorilladoctors.org/guardian

Fuzzy infant mountain gorilla, Pablo group, Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. Photo by Skyler Bishop

THE ORPHANS ARE ADULTS NOW

Gorilla Doctors provides healthcare for the four orphaned mountain gorillas living at the Senkwekwe Center in Virunga National Park, DRC. All four were rescued from poachers when they were very young. Matabishi, Ndakasi (aka “The Troublemaker” by his caregivers) and Ndeze are now young adults and exhibiting appropriate behaviors – sometimes attempting to escape their enclosure and playing rough with their caregivers. The Park is developing plans to improve and expand this facility to best serve the health and safety of these special gorillas and their caregivers.

In June 2020, Muzuka, the youngest of the four orphans, was not eating well, losing weight and appeared listless. Dr. Eddy conducted a physical exam and administered antibiotics, deworming medication, pain relievers and vitamins. He also recommended dietary changes and she made a full recovery.

Orphan mountain gorilla Muzuka naps in the sun at Senkwekwe Center, Virunga National Park, DRC. Photo by Skyler Bishop



“I had never seen gorillas other than in images, so the first time we hiked to the group, for the first 15 minutes I was just looking at them, trying to breathe and understand what I was seeing. It was very exciting.”

—DR. METHODE BAHIZI, Regional Laboratory Technician



Scan with iPhone camera or other card reader to learn how a cow, motorcycle and pineapple inspired Dr. Methode to become a veterinarian.



TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

Gorilla Doctors provides invaluable hands-on clinical and research experience through mentoring veterinary students and early-career veterinarians. Gorilla Doctors has supported veterinary medical capacity-building for the region at the Center for Rehabilitation of Primates at Lwiro in DR Congo, through the Graueri Conservation Action Plan.

Gorilla Doctors also supports advanced training for our staff and key partners. This year Gorilla Doctors helped support 10 staff and outside veterinarians in earning their Master's degrees across multidisciplinary programs in wildlife ecology, epidemiology, public health, and wildlife conservation. Before COVID-19 eliminated travel, Gorilla Doctors' veterinarians participated in wildlife conservation and infectious disease meetings around the world.



“During my first internship [with Gorilla Doctors] I said, ‘this is my dream’ and it came true that now I am helping to save the endangered mountain gorillas.”

—DR. ADRIEN EMILE NTWARI, Project Veterinarian



Scan with iPhone camera or other code reader to learn about how Dr. Adrien first discovered the existence of doctors who treat gorillas!

Shy mountain gorilla, Mishaya group, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. Photo by Skyler Bishop

IT'S ALL CONNECTED

Gorillas are an umbrella species for the thousands of animals, insects and plants that comprise their forest home. Protecting them protects the entire ecosystem. With Gorilla Doctors' One Health approach, this extends to the humans whose health and livelihoods also benefit from a thriving gorilla population. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the extraordinary impact of our collective choices.

The inverse of this is powerful: ***our individual choices can become a collective solution.***

When Dian Fossey called the world's attention to the plight of the mountain gorillas, Gorilla Doctors soon followed. Individualized veterinary care to wild gorillas plays a critical role in the recovery and long-term sustainability of the entire population — as does your connection to Gorilla Doctors.

The resting feet of one of the orphan mountain gorillas at Senkwekwe Center in Virunga National Park, DRC. Photo by Skyler Bishop



“Everything that surrounds us is important, from plants to animals, the whole environment is part of us. We have a huge role to play so that we can conserve this world and whatever it contains for the future generations.”

—DR. JULIUS NZIZA, Head Veterinarian, Rwanda



Scan with your iPhone camera or other code reader to learn how his family chickens inspired Dr. Julius to eventually become a veterinarian.



YOU KEEP GORILLA DOCTORS HEALTHY

As a supporter of Gorilla Doctors, every time we rescue an infant from a snare, treat the wounds on an injured silverback, or administer life-saving antibiotics to a gorilla family during a respiratory infection outbreak, you also have a hand in the recovery of each individual patient.

Whether you give \$5 or \$50,000, your gift makes our work possible, and your impact is in each life we save together.

From July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020, Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, Inc. and the Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center raised a total of \$1,899,573 and spent \$1,698,262 as follows:



Program: 87%

Administration: 13%

Mountain gorilla hanging out during feeding, Pablo group, Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. Photo by Skyler Bishop; (Opposite) Silverback Charles watching over Umubano group, Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. Photo by Dr. Noel



Drs. Kirsten, Fred and Noel with Gorilla Doctors' Goodwill Ambassador, Emmy Rossum, at the GDLA fundraiser, September 19, 2019

"I've learned one thing with absolute certainty – Gorilla Doctors' legacy belongs to all the people who have dedicated their talent, energy, passion, resources and commitment to helping us grow and evolve into the organization we are today."

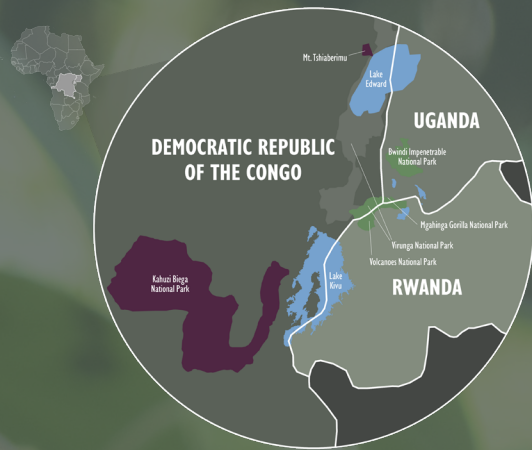
—DR. KIRSTEN GILARDI, Executive Director & Chief Veterinary Officer



Scan with your iPhone camera or other code reader to support Gorilla Doctors' work saving a species, one gorilla at a time.

GUARDIANS OF GORILLA HEALTH

Gorilla Doctors, the original guardians of gorilla health, first began in 1986 at the request of Dian Fossey. In the early 1980s Dian expected mountain gorillas would be extinct by the year 2000. Today, they are the only great ape in the wild whose numbers are increasing, and half of the annual population growth rate of habituated mountain gorillas is credited to Gorilla Doctors' veterinary care.



Our 10 veterinarians work across five national parks in Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo, guarding the health of nearly 700 human-habituated wild gorillas in their forest homes, year-round, rain or shine.

Did you know the average cost of an intervention is about \$3,000?



Scan with your iPhone camera or other card reader to support Gorilla Doctors!
Or visit: gorilladoctors.org/donate



“Gorillas are teaching us many, many things. They are teaching us to be love. They come united when it is to save one of them. That is really something that I have seen.”

—DR. EDDY KAMBALE SYALUHA, Head Veterinarian, DR Congo



Scan with your iPhone camera or other code reader to watch Dr. Eddy rescue a wild Grauer's gorilla and return him safely back into the forest!

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THIS CALENDAR IS CARBON NEUTRAL

Gorilla Doctors' One Health approach recognizes that the health of people, gorillas and the environment are intrinsically connected. To that end, the carbon emissions created by the printing and mailing of this calendar have been offset through Gorilla Doctors' support of the myclimate.org Efficient Cooking Stoves Project.

The goal of this project, which is led in Rwanda by our partner IGCP, is to reduce firewood demand around Volcanoes National Park by 70% with the distribution of 50,000 locally-made stoves that require two-thirds less firewood than traditional stoves. This helps reduce deforestation and the number of people entering the park illegally, thereby protecting gorilla habitat and reducing the risk of disease transmission between people and gorillas. These clean-burning stoves are also less damaging to human health by reducing soot particles in the air. Finally, this Gold Standard-verified project keeps 60,000 tons of CO₂ (greenhouse gas) out of the atmosphere every year. It's a win for gorillas, people and the planet.



*Photos courtesy of myclimate.org
IGCP = International Gorilla Conservation Programme (igcp.org)



To learn more about this innovative project and the scale of their impact, scan with your iPhone camera or other code reader.



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