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THE MOUNTAIN GORILLAS OF VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK

THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES INVOLVED IN THEIR PROTECTION

THE PROTECTION OF MOUNTAIN GORILLAS IN VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK IS A RARE BUT IMPRESSIVE ACHIEVEMENT, IN SPITE OF WIDESPREAD GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY DETERIORATION.

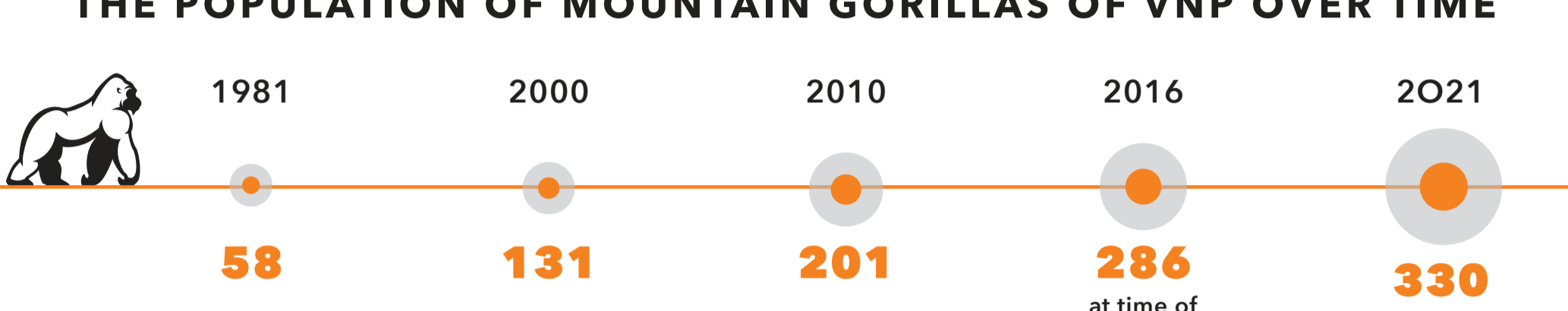


VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1925 IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND IS THE OLDEST NATIONAL PARK OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT.

THE WORLD'S ENTIRE POPULATION LIVES IN THE VIRUNGA MASSIF AND BWINDI, WHICH SPANS PARTS OF DRC, UGANDA, AND RWANDA. VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK IS HOME TO AROUND A THIRD OF THOSE GORILLAS.



THE POPULATION OF MOUNTAIN GORILLAS OF VNP OVER TIME



THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA GROWTH RATE IN DRC IS **4.7% PER YEAR**

THIS EXCEEDS THE NATURAL RATE OF THE SPECIES (3%) AND TESTIFIES TO THE SUCCESS OF THE CONSERVATION EFFORTS CARRIED OUT BY THE PARK RANGERS.

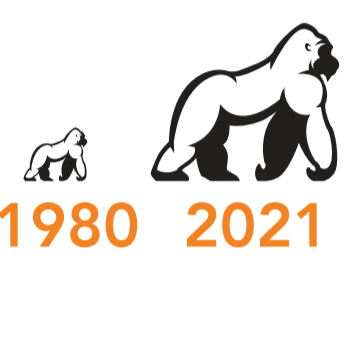
THE NEXT COMPREHENSIVE AND CROSS-BORDER CENSUS IS PLANNED FOR THE END OF 2022.

ACHIEVEMENTS

SINCE 2015, GROWTH IN NATURAL POPULATION **4.7%** PER YEAR



ESTIMATED TO EXCEED **350** INDIVIDUALS IN VNP COMPARED TO **80** INDIVIDUALS IN 1980



END OF 2021 = **225** GORILLAS HABITUATED, **17** NEW BIRTHS, **1260** SNARES REMOVED



THE STATUS OF MOUNTAIN GORILLAS WAS EVEN REVISED FROM "CRITICALLY ENDANGERED" TO "ENDANGERED" BY THE IUCN IN NOVEMBER 2018, TESTAMENT TO THE IMPROVED HEALTH OF THE SPECIES.



OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS, THE PARK HAS FACED CHALLENGES SUCH AS:



ARMED CONFLICT



MINERAL EXPLOITATION



EBOLA



COVID-19

HOWEVER, VIRUNGA'S PARK RANGERS REMAIN DEDICATED TO THE PROTECTION OF THE MOUNTAIN GORILLAS.

THIS CONSERVATION SUCCESS IS THE RESULT OF INTENSE COLLABORATION BETWEEN:

- STATE ACTORS
- CIVIL SOCIETY
- PRIVATE SECTOR OF THE 3 MOUNTAIN GORILLA HOST COUNTRIES:



CONTRIBUTING TO THESE ACHIEVEMENTS IS VIRUNGA'S CLOSE CONSERVATION STRATEGY WHICH ALLOWS FOR DAILY MONITORING OF MOUNTAIN GORILLA FAMILIES BY:



PARK RANGERS



TRACKERS



VETERINARIANS



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MORE THAN **770+ PARK RANGERS** WORK TIRELESSLY TO PROTECT THE MOUNTAIN GORILLAS:

This commitment has culminated in **40 years** of regular patrols and close monitoring of the species. In 2021, each habituated gorilla family was located every **1.3 days** on average. Consistent monitoring facilitates assessments of an individual's health and social status and allows for timely specialized veterinary intervention where necessary. Ranger patrols also detect and disable traps laid by poachers; in 2021, 1,260 snares were cleared from the Park.

The monitoring of the 10 mountain gorillas groups of Virunga National Park allows for a better understanding of the ecology of the species, such as:

- MAPPING THEIR HABITAT
- UNDERSTAND BEHAVIOR AND FAMILY DYNAMICS
- IDENTIFICATION OF INDIVIDUALS THROUGH AGE, SEX, AND UNIQUE NOSEPRINTS



ON AVERAGE, VIRUNGA'S RANGERS CONDUCT **2,200 PATROLS**

EACH YEAR, APPROXIMATELY SIX PATROLS PER DAY, TO COMBAT POACHING AND SAFEGUARD THE MOUNTAIN GORILLAS HABITAT.



OVER 5 YEARS, PARK RANGERS HAVE PATROLLED OVER **250,000 KM** - A DISTANCE GREATER THAN THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE EARTH EACH YEAR.



DUE TO THE MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN, RANGERS HAVE CLIMBED **2,500 KM** OVER 5 YEARS - THE EQUIVALENT OF AN EVEREST CLIMBED EACH MONTH.



© Brent Stirton

CHALLENGES



IT COSTS ALMOST **\$20 MIL**

ANNUALLY TO SAFEGUARD THE PARKS ENTIRE 7,769 SQ KM RANGE. THE GORILLA SECTOR ACCOUNTS FOR APPROXIMATELY 257 SQ KM OF THE PARK'S TOTAL AREA AND HAS GENERATED AROUND USD 8 MILLION SINCE 2015. WHILE THIS REVENUE STREAM IS VITAL, IT IS ALSO VOLATILE DUE TO THE FRAGILE SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH KIVU.

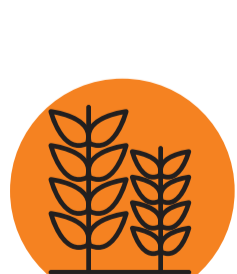
The ongoing militia occupation of the gorilla sector has put a halt to tourism and restricted monitoring activities. Like all of the Park's conservation efforts, mountain gorilla conservation aims to be self-sufficient once tourism resumes. However, success and sustainability are not solely dependent upon finances.

Ecological factors such as high population density and rates of poverty and chronic political instability continue to challenge the protection of mountain gorillas and their habitat. The threats to mountain gorillas will persist if the conservation of the species translates into a hindrance rather than a benefit for the millions of local residents in and around the Park.

FOR THESE REASONS, VIRUNGA NATIONAL PARK HAS INSTIGATED A LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM CALLED THE VIRUNGA ALLIANCE WHICH FOCUSES ON:



ECO-TOURISM



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

“I joined Virunga in 2011, and after working as a Ranger for one year, I encountered wild gorillas for the first time in 2012. I was fascinated by them right away. In 2013, I was fortunate enough to be appointed Chief of the Patrol Station in Bukima, placing me in charge of gorilla monitoring for the first time. Following my appointment, I got to develop the gorilla identification system, which recognises each gorilla based on their unique nose prints. I also had the privilege of being in charge of the habituation of new gorilla groups, a long-term dream of mine. I'm very proud of my important yet difficult job and grateful for the trust that Virunga's management has shown me.”

JACQUES KATUTU, HEAD OF GORILLA MONITORING



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