Gorilla Journal

Helping People. Saving Gorillas.

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PABLO GROUP SPECIAL ISSUE

DIAN FOSSEY GORILLA FUND EST. 1967

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Studying the Gorillas: From Dian Fossey's First Steps to Today's Discoveries

By Tara Stoinski, Ph.D.
President & CEO/Chief Scientific Officer



Dian Fossey overcame numerous challenges to begin her pioneering research.

When Dian Fossey first climbed into the mist-shrouded Virunga mountains in the late 1960s, long-term gorilla research was little more than an audacious idea. There were no roadmaps, few established protocols and very little certainty that such an effort could even succeed. What there was, however, was Dian's extraordinary determination to understand mountain gorillas, and to protect them.

As someone who now has the privilege of leading the organization she founded, I am continually struck by how much of what we do today traces directly back to those first steps she took into the forest.

First challenges and basic methods

In those early days, before systematic data collection could even begin, Dian faced a host of practical challenges. She had to accustom gorillas to her presence in the forest, a process we now call habituation, learn how to recognize individuals, navigate steep volcanic terrain and relentless weather, and solve countless logistical problems that come with living and working in such a remote place. Only then was she able to begin the daily, methodical research that would change our understanding of gorillas forever.

What she documented first may seem somewhat basic today, but it was revolutionary at the time, and included the gorillas' individual identities, group compositions, dominance hierarchies, home ranges, movement patterns and daily life histories. These early observations established the baseline for what has now become nearly 60 years of continuous scientific research – the longest-running study of any great ape species.

Just as importantly, Dian developed techniques that remain central to mountain gorilla research today. Individual identification using noseprint patterns, standardized behavioral categories, continuous demographic monitoring and ecological data collection all began under her leadership. These methods made long-term research possible, and increasingly powerful, as years turned into decades and as new technologies and tools became available.

Early scientific breakthroughs

During the early years, Dian and the researchers she brought on board produced some of the most foundational discoveries in gorilla science.

In the early 1970s, Dian conducted the first systematic study of gorilla vocal communication, identifying distinct vocalizations and linking them to social and environmental contexts. This work opened entirely new avenues for understanding great ape communication. Around the same time, meticulous home-range mapping revealed how mountain gorillas use their habitat – where they feed, nest and travel.

As poaching intensified in the 1970s and 1980s, Dian documented its devastating effects firsthand, including snare injuries, disrupted family units and the loss of dominant silverbacks. Her observations provided some of the earliest scientific evidence that active anti-poaching patrols were essential to save the population.

One particularly influential study revealed the uniqueness of gorilla society. Research published in *Nature* in 1976 demonstrated that both male and female gorillas disperse from their natal groups – males emigrating and females transferring between groups – a very rare phenomenon among primates and one which reshaped scientific understanding of gorilla social dynamics.

In the following decades, continued research documented the complexities of silverback leadership, feeding competition and group cohesion. These studies revealed that dominant males maintain stability not through constant aggression, but by carefully balancing authority, tolerance and social mediation.

What decades of data now show us

While early research necessarily focused on basic behavior and demography, today our scientists can ask much bigger questions because they are standing on the foundation that Dian built. With nearly six decades of continuous data to work with, combined with new



Habituating the gorillas to the presence of humans in the forest was key to learning more about their identities and family groups.

technologies like genetic analysis, GPS and physiological measures, Fossey Fund researchers are now exploring how mountain gorillas respond to changing ecological conditions and shifting population densities, as well as seeking further insights into their complex social behaviors and dynamics.

For example, we showed that as conservation efforts succeeded and mountain gorilla numbers increased, violent inter-group encounters also became more frequent. These clashes led to injuries, increased infant mortality, slower female reproductive rates and a measurable slowdown in population growth, demonstrating that conservation success itself can create new pressures that must be carefully managed.

In another study, spanning 55 years of demographic data, we found remarkable resilience among young gorillas. While early-life adversities – such as the loss of the dominant silverback or major disruptions to their social group – increase the risk of dying before the age of 6, our data revealed that individuals who survive beyond age 6 show no long-term negative effects on lifespan or reproduction and they may even experience lower adult mortality. This finding highlights the powerful role of social buffering within gorilla groups but also brings up many more questions about why this is the case, when the opposite pattern has been observed in other species that have been studied.

Social relationships, diets and more

More recent analysis has uncovered the depth of gorilla social memory. By tracking female movements over more than two decades, we found that females preferentially transfer into groups containing other females they lived with years earlier. Dispersal, it turns out, seems to be influenced by long-lasting female social bonds, rather than just characteristics of the males.



Gorillas have unique noseprint patterns used since Fossey's time for identification.

Long-term behavioral and health data have also shown that social relationships come with trade-offs. Strong social bonds can bring reproductive or protective benefits, but in some contexts they also increase disease risk. Like us, gorillas navigate the costs and benefits of close relationships.

Finally, through ecological research comparing groups across different habitats and elevations, we found that gorilla diets vary significantly, with bamboo being the only food consumed consistently everywhere. These dietary differences influence energy use, seasonal strategies and potentially long-term health and reproduction.

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Pablo formed the group in 1993 and was succeeded by the legendary Cantsbee, and then by Cantsbee's son Gicurasi.

The Remarkable History of the Pablo Gorilla Family: A Legacy Lives On

Among all the mountain gorilla families studied in the Virunga mountains, few have accumulated a history as rich, dramatic and influential as the Pablo group. Spanning more than three decades, and rooted in a lineage that stretches back to Dian Fossey's earliest research years, the Pablo family offers one of the most-important windows into gorilla social life – its stability, its tensions and its remarkable capacity for change.

The group has been protected and studied by Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund staff throughout its entire history. It was born from the split of a previous group, then expanded to record-breaking size, was guided for decades by legendary silverbacks, and is still thriving and evolving today.

Origins: Pablo and the legacy of Group 5

The Pablo group traces its origins to Group 5, one of the primary gorilla families Dian Fossey studied beginning in the late 1960s. In 1974, Fossey observed an infant male in the group and gave him the name "Pablo." She soon developed a special affection for him, describing his infectious sense of play and his ability to draw other youngsters into his games – an early signal of the charisma he would later bring to his own family.

In observing Pablo as a juvenile, Fossey wrote: "For Pablo, rules were made to be broken, observers were meant to be entertained, and familial group members were created for his own enjoyment…."

Yet, when he was only 4 years old and newly weaned, Pablo's mother – Liza – transferred to another group, leaving Pablo behind. However, Pablo continued to thrive, benefitting from the support and friendship of others in the group, especially a silverback named Beethoven, and acceptance by a dominant female – Effie – and her offspring. And so he grew into a strong silverback.

In 1993, following the death of Group 5's dominant silverback, the group split into two new families. One was led by silverback Shinda; the other by the now fully matured Pablo. And thus the Pablo group was formed.

Ironically, Pablo's reign did not last long. Within a year, a younger male – the soon-to-be-legendary silverback Cantsbee – rose to dominance. Even after ceding leadership to Cantsbee, Pablo remained a respected presence in the group for more than a decade, occasionally leading temporary sub-groups before they reunited with the main family. He stayed with the group until 2008, when, at age 34, he was involved in an interaction with another gorilla group and succumbed to his injuries.

Pablo's legacy – in the form of the group that carries his name – continues to shape gorilla conservation and research to this day.

The golden era: Cantsbee's 20-year reign

When Cantsbee became dominant in 1994-95, the Pablo group entered a period of extraordinary growth and stability. First seen by Fossey in 1978 as a newborn – and famously named when Fossey exclaimed "It can't be!" upon realizing his mother was actually female – Cantsbee matured into the most successful silverback ever documented.

His record is unmatched:

Spending more than 20 years as the dominant silverback, the longest reign on record.
Creating the largest group size ever observed for wild mountain gorillas – a high of 65 individuals, in 2006.
Siring more offspring than any other known male, a testament to his stability and charisma.

Observers consistently described Cantsbee as strong yet gentle, authoritative yet peaceful. His leadership was so respected that he could stop fights simply by approaching the combatants. One researcher recalled a moment in 2013 when two younger silverbacks were locked in a fierce struggle. Without making a sound, Cantsbee stepped between them; one of the males immediately lay down, face to the ground, in a gesture that seemed almost apologetic.

"Cantsbee was an influential leader – he helped shape the personalities of many future leaders," says Veronica Vecellio, Fossey Fund Gorilla Program Senior Advisor. "Thirteen silverbacks who grew up in Pablo's group during Cantsbee's dominance have since gone on to lead their own groups, which is truly extraordinary." Remarkably, Cantsbee's life ended with a final twist befitting his legendary status.

In late 2016 he went missing, and after weeks of searching he was presumed dead. Then, months later, he reappeared! His return was described by trackers as nearly unbelievable. But his age finally caught up with him, and in early 2017, after disappearing again, his body was found and identified and now is part of the largest collection of mountain gorilla skeletons in the world and an incredible scientific resource.

Cantsbee's death marked the end of an era, but the continuity he fostered paved the way for a smooth transfer of power within the group.

Leadership shifts: From Cantsbee to Gicurasi

Cantsbee's successor was his own son, Gicurasi, born in 1995. Because his mother left the group while he was still young, Gicurasi was raised largely under his father's protection – a relationship that likely eased the eventual transition of power.

Signs of change began appearing around 2015. Gicurasi increasingly displaced his father, a subtle but clear dominance signal. In one memorable incident, he approached Cantsbee and another silverback as the group rested. Both vocalized warnings, but Gicurasi continued forward. Cantsbee stepped aside, letting him pass – a gesture that signaled the balance of power was shifting.

By 2017, Gicurasi had effectively taken over leadership. Under his guidance, Pablo group continued to thrive, though with smaller numbers than during Cantsbee's peak years. The group still included multiple silverbacks, numerous blackbacks, many females and a cohort of growing youngsters – a socially dynamic blend that kept researchers busy documenting alliances, hierarchy changes and playful juvenile behavior.

In 2022 and 2023, signs of aging began to appear in dominant silverback Gicurasi. His once-undisputed authority faced increasing challenges from younger males – especially Ubwuzu, the strong and assertive grandson of Cantsbee.

Through displacement behaviors, sexual competition and subtle leadership cues, Ubwuzu determinedly gained influence. Over time, he rose to become the group's dominant silverback, while Gicurasi played a supportive but secondary role.

This transition – mirroring the earlier shift from Cantsbee to Gicurasi – highlighted the remarkable stability Pablo group continues to exhibit. In June 2025, just after his 30th birthday, Gicurasi disappeared from the group as his health declined. His absence has left a lasting mark on the group's social balance, since his peaceful nature likely helped maintain harmony within the group. Now Ubwuzu, at only 20 years old, is the oldest male and new leader.


Ubwuzu

The legacy continues

Today, more than 32 years after its creation, Pablo group remains one of the longest-studied gorilla groups in history. It has weathered dramatic expansions, leadership transitions, multiple splits and changing ecological pressures as the overall gorilla population continues to grow.

It has also given rise to several new gorilla families – extending Pablo's legacy across the Virunga landscape. Most importantly, it continues to provide scientists and conservationists with unparalleled insights into how gorilla societies function, adapt and endure.

"It has been a true privilege to observe this group since I arrived at the Fossey Fund more than 20 years ago," says Felix Ndagijimana, who began his career as a research assistant and is now the Fossey Fund's Country Director in Rwanda. "It is amazing to realize that we are looking at a living legacy and also a testament to the many trackers, researchers and others who have helped protect these gorillas for so long."

From Fossey's first affectionate observations of a playful infant named Pablo to the modern challenges of inter-group dynamics and shifting silverback leadership, the Pablo group stands as a living chronicle of mountain-gorilla life – rich in personality, history and hope for the future.



The Pablo Group Comes to Screens Everywhere

For almost 60 years, the Pablo group (and its predecessor Group 5) has offered an unparalleled window into the intricate world of mountain gorillas.

This April, the extraordinary Pablo gorilla family will be introduced to millions through a new Netflix documentary, narrated and presented by Sir David Attenborough, whose 1978 encounter with the young Pablo during the filming of "Life on Earth" garnered worldwide attention. The moment is now regarded as one of the most iconic scenes in nature filmmaking.

The Fossey Fund participated closely with the filmmakers for more than six years, working with the film crew in the field, providing the rich life history of the group and its members, and interpreting the real-time drama that unfolded during the course of two years of filming – the longest span of filming with the gorillas ever.

The resulting "A Gorilla Story: Told by David Attenborough" documentary reflects decades of research, discovery and dedication that have shaped our understanding of gorilla life and provides viewers with a rare, dramatic and inspiring inside look at a crucial time in the group's evolution – the shift of dominance from one silverback to another, as well as other never-before-filmed behaviors.

"A Gorilla Story" is a Silverback Films production with the backing of All3Media International, Netflix, and Appian Way Productions, with input from the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. It was directed by Oscar-winning filmmaker James Reed.

Take Action: Watch, Learn, and Share

Learn more about the gorillas featured in the film, explore upcoming special events taking place this spring across the United States and find everything you need to host your own watch party.

Visit us online: gorillafund.org/life-of-pablo

STAY TUNED
Symbolic adoption of Pablo group members launches in 2026. The story continues beyond the documentary.

Shaping Gorilla Science: Group 5 and Pablo Group

Throughout the decades of mountain gorilla research, only a small number of gorilla families have contributed continuously to scientific discovery across multiple generations of researchers. Dian Fossey's Group 5 – and its later and current iteration as the Pablo group – stands out as one of those rare lineages.

This group became a focal system for testing and refining scientific ideas about dispersal, leadership, group cohesion and long-term social dynamics. Its remarkable value lies in how consistently it could be observed through changes throughout the years.

During the 1970s, Group 5 was one of the first and ultimately best-documented gorilla families by Dian Fossey and associated researchers. Because she had identified individual gorillas and they were then followed extensively, the group became especially important for examining how dominance relationships, mating access and group membership shift over time.

Data from Group 5 were incorporated into early comparative analyses that demonstrated variation among gorilla groups in social structure and stability. These findings helped move the field toward recognizing them as flexible systems shaped by individual behavior and social context.

Dispersals, transfers, group structures

Group 5 played a direct role in advancing an especially influential conclusion within gorilla behavioral science – that both males and females disperse from their natal groups. Because multiple transfers and emigrations were documented in detail, observations from Group 5 contributed to the 1976 *Nature* publication demonstrating this very unique aspect of gorilla social life. The ability to track identified individuals before and after transfer allowed researchers to link dispersal decisions to reproductive opportunity, social relationships and leadership changes – an approach that would become standard in great ape studies.

When Group 5 split and the Pablo group emerged, researchers retained a rare advantage – continuity. The same individuals, lineages and social relationships could continue to be followed without interruption, allowing hypotheses developed in earlier decades to be revisited and refined.

As the Pablo group persisted, it became a key reference system in studies of:

- Multi-silverback group structure, contributing to published work in the 1980s and 1990s showing how dominant males maintain cohesion without constant aggression.
- Leadership transitions, providing examples used in analyses of social stability and dominance succession.
- Female transfer strategies, particularly how social familiarity and group composition influence transfer outcomes.
- Mother-infant relationships, showing how factors such as maternal experience, dominance status and infant gender influence maternal behavior and investment.



We have learned so much about gorillas from the Pablo group throughout its long history.

These studies benefited from the group's unusually long observation history, which made it possible to distinguish short-term social fluctuations from durable patterns.

In recent decades, individuals originating in the Pablo group have been incorporated into large-scale demographic and behavioral studies drawing on the Fossey Fund's long-term dataset. Because some individuals later transferred to other groups, their life histories link multiple social units, strengthening population-level analyses of social networks, resilience and inter-group dynamics.

As a result, the Pablo group has also functioned as an anchoring lineage within broader research, including work on dispersal behavior, social bonds and demographic processes.

Why this group matters scientifically

Group 5 and the Pablo group highlight the scientific importance of observation and deep documentation on a continuous long-term basis, allowing researchers to test ideas repeatedly, across generations, as methods improved and questions evolved. This exemplifies a core strength of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund's research program – the ability to return to the same individuals and families year after year, asking new questions of the continually growing dataset – and finding answers that continue to inform both basic knowledge and conservation needs today.

As research continues, the scientific contributions of this group are still unfolding, embedded within data that grows more valuable with every passing year.

Advancing science, mentorship and gorilla protection

As the Senior Manager of Primate Research for the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund in Rwanda, Dr. Winnie Eckardt has spent more than 20 years helping to deepen our understanding of gorilla behavior, strengthening our research capacity and training a new generation of conservation scientists. Her career exemplifies how dedicated, long-term commitment can create lasting impact for wildlife and the people who protect it.

Studying, teaching and more

Winnie's journey with the Fossey Fund began in 2004, when she arrived at our facilities in Rwanda as a young research assistant, after finishing her diploma at the University of Leipzig in Germany and an internship at the Helmholtz Center for Environmental Research Center in Leipzig.

"When I learned about the opportunity with the Fossey Fund, my heart told me that I must at least try, though I never truly believed I would get it. The position was meant to be for one year, but when I met gentle silverback leader Titus, my first gorilla in the wild, along with his peaceful family as they allowed me to wander along with them through the breathtaking Virunga mountains, I knew deep inside that I wanted this journey to last much longer."

Winnie went on to pursue her Ph.D. at the University of Chester (Liverpool) in the UK, with a dissertation on mother-infant relationships among the mountain gorillas, supervised by Dr. Alison Fletcher, who had studied social development among these gorillas in the early 1990s. "I could not have wished for a better supervisor and long-term friend. Her insight into the study population and untiring support were invaluable and shaped my values as a scientist and mentor," says Winnie.

After finishing her Ph.D., Winnie became a teaching fellow with the National University of Rwanda, to train and supervise graduate students conducting research and internships with the Fossey Fund.

In 2011, she was hired as a post-doctoral researcher under the mentorship of Dr. Tara Stoinski, who was then serving as the Fossey Fund's vice president, to examine environmental and human factors influencing stress in the gorillas. Together with another former Fossey Fund research assistant, Dr. Stacy Rosenbaum, she helped lead what has become one of the most comprehensive studies of stress physiology ever undertaken in wild gorillas, combining detailed behavioral observations with noninvasive hormone and parasite analysis, with data collection continuing to this day.



Winnie studies the many factors that can influence the gorillas' lives in the forest.

By following gorillas through their daily lives – mothers with newborns, juveniles navigating social play, silverbacks protecting their families – she worked to answer critical conservation questions: What are the main sources of stress for gorillas and how do they impact gorilla conservation?

Overseeing our primate research

Today, Winnie's role extends far beyond her own research projects. She oversees ongoing primate research at the Fossey Fund in Rwanda, guides scientific publications, strengthens collaborations with universities worldwide and helps manage data collection as well as the enormous database of information the Fossey Fund has now collected for nearly 60 years.

Most importantly, she is a passionate mentor for the next generation. Hundreds of Rwanda's rising conservation scientists have been trained under her guidance – a legacy she considers just as important as her research.

"Long-term conservation can only thrive when local scientists are empowered," Winnie says. "Sharing the knowledge and experience I've gained over the last two decades with young Rwandan conservationists and scientists is an incredibly fulfilling and rewarding part of my work and a wonderful way to give back to Rwanda what I have received from the country, its people and the gorillas."

Connecting with the gorillas

After so many years working with mountain gorillas, Winnie has also established long-term connections with many of the gorillas protected by the Fossey Fund. This



Winnie works with trackers and researchers in the field, providing training on data collection.

includes the historic Pablo group, which has been a mainstay throughout her career.

"As researchers, we get to know the gorillas like our close family and friends," Winnie explains. "I was fortunate to join the Fossey Fund when Pablo's group broke the world record, reaching 65 gorillas, led by the one and only silverback Cantsbee.

"I deeply admired Cantsbee's ability to protect and keep this group together. He knew when to step in during social quarrels – a daily occurrence in such a large group – and when to let things go. I always knew where to find the youngsters in this large group – usually hanging out with Cantsbee, forming a sort of kindergarten."

Continuing dedication and passion

Even after decades of study, the mountain gorillas are still revealing their secrets, says Winnie, showing how long-term monitoring is an essential tool for understanding. "Like our own surroundings, the world of these gorillas keeps changing and requires flexible behavior to survive. Only through long-term monitoring can we understand how they cope and evaluate the effectiveness of conservation strategies," she says.

Winnie's dedication echoes the spirit of Dian Fossey's original vision – protecting gorillas through science, presence in the forest and the belief that every observation matters. Her work is also a reminder that effective conservation is built not just on passion, but on sustained commitment, strong partnerships and the confidence that informed action can shape a better future for wildlife.

CHEST BEATS

Check out some of the latest accomplishments by our team!

- **Congratulations to our community and biodiversity teams, who have been facilitating the distribution of record amounts of tree seedlings to primary and secondary schools and to the local community in Rwanda.** In the past few months alone, thousands of tree seedlings have been distributed and planted around Volcanoes National Park.
- **Kudos to Yvonne Mushimiyimana, who was recently promoted to Visitor Experience & Hospitality Manager at our Ellen Campus.** Yvonne started at the Fossey Fund over 10 years ago when she was a recent graduate of the University of Rwanda. We are so proud to have her build her career at the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.
- **Congratulations to research assistant Aime Bruce Nzeyimana Ngenzi (Bruce), as he was awarded the first Cleveland Metropark Zoo Fasha Fund grant to support his professional development.** Bruce is specializing in arthropods – invertebrates with a hard exoskeleton, like beetles – and their impact on ecosystem health.
- **We're in awe of Senior Program Manager for Community Engagement in Rwanda, Hilary Hilsabeck, who participated in the Serengeti Girls Run.** For three days in a row, Hilary and other participants ran a half marathon every day of the event across Serengeti National Park in Tanzania, spreading advocacy for the futures of Tanzanian young women and local conservation.

Earth Day in Action at Our Ellen Campus

Earth Day was first celebrated in 1970, born from a growing global awareness that protecting the planet requires collective action and long-term thinking. It has since grown into the world's largest civic environmental movement – a day when people from all walks of life mobilize for nature and climate protection.

That spirit – recognizing the deep connection between people, wildlife and healthy ecosystems – aligns closely with our vision and mission here at the Fossey Fund. In 2026, Earth Day's global theme, *Our Power, Our Planet*™, invites people and communities everywhere to take action for clean air, clean water, renewable energy and a thriving planet – values that echo the focus of the Fossey Fund's work and programs.

This Earth Day, we're proud to spotlight how the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund's Ellen DeGeneres Campus in Rwanda embodies sustainability in action. Located near Volcanoes National Park, the campus was envisioned not only as a world-class center for conservation science, education and community engagement, but also as a living example of environmental stewardship. From its earliest planning stages through daily operations, sustainability has guided every decision.

Reforesting for the future

Before construction began in 2019, the campus site had been heavily degraded by years of agriculture and grazing. Since opening in 2022, it has been undergoing a remarkable transformation. We have planted more than 250,000 native trees and plants representing over 120 species. The campus now functions as a reforestation research site, providing valuable data that can inform future habitat restoration efforts throughout the region, as we use the area as a living laboratory.

Working with nature's systems

Innovative water and waste systems allow the campus to operate in harmony with natural processes. Rainwater is captured from green roofs and reused across the site, while wastewater flows through a constructed wetland, where plants and microorganisms naturally filter and clean the water before it returns to the landscape. These systems conserve resources while demonstrating practical, nature-based solutions.



Our campus tree nursery helps support local communities.

Thoughtful design, reduced impact, growing trees

The campus buildings themselves were designed to minimize environmental impact. Natural daylighting, cross-ventilation and passive cooling strategies reduce energy needs, while the green roofs help regulate temperature, manage stormwater and provide habitat for local species. Locally sourced materials – including volcanic stone excavated on site – were used wherever possible, lowering transportation emissions and supporting regional livelihoods. Now, we even have our own tree nursery on campus, to provide seedlings for school nature clubs, local community projects and other environmental efforts.

As a place where science, sustainability and community come together, our Ellen Campus reflects the enduring ideals behind Earth Day. This April 22, we celebrate not only the planet we share, but the meaningful steps being taken every day to ensure a thriving future for gorillas and the landscapes they call home.

Celebrate Earth Day by Doubling Your Impact
A generous $50,000 matching gift will make every contribution go twice as far for gorilla conservation. Give by April 22!
gorillafund.org/earthday2026

Where Knowledge Grows, Conservation Thrives



The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund is proud to celebrate the opening of the first public library near our Nkuba Conservation Area in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Developed in close partnership with the community, the library is more than a physical structure. It is a shared investment in knowledge, curiosity and possibility – a place where young people can read, study and imagine futures shaped by education and opportunity.

The Nkuba Conservation Area is a community-managed forest spanning more than 2,400 square kilometers, safeguarding remote habitat for critically endangered Grauer's gorillas and extraordinary biodiversity. Here, conservation is inseparable from community wellbeing and the Fossey Fund works alongside local partners to support sustainable forest management while investing in education and community-led development.

For many in Nkuba, access to books, educational resources and shared learning spaces has long been limited. Today, the new library extension is already serving students, teachers, researchers and young people, offering a welcoming place to learn, exchange ideas and preserve local traditions.

"We extend our most sincere thanks for your invaluable support in the realization and opening of the library in Nkuba," says Ghislain Mungo Bushoki, coordinator of the local educational association Baraza Des Jeunes Bunakima. "Your constant support made it possible to create this space of knowledge, culture and sharing at the heart of our community. Thanks to this commitment, young people, pupils, teachers and researchers now have a place that promotes education, reading and the conservation of local heritage."

Supporting initiatives like the library is central to the Fossey Fund's approach to conservation. When communities have access to education and opportunity, they are empowered to lead – strengthening both human wellbeing and the long-term protection of forests and wildlife.



Studying the Gorillas

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Carrying the scientific legacy forward

From Dian Fossey's earliest handwritten notes in a small two-tent camp in the Virungas to today's sophisticated, decades-long ecological and behavioral datasets, the scientific story of mountain gorillas is one of continual discovery. Understanding these larger questions about them is made possible by the long-term data we have on hundreds of individual gorillas throughout their lives, from birth to death, truly a unique treasure trove not available for many other wild animals.

I see it as both a responsibility and an honor to help steward this legacy. At the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, our scientists and partners continue to build on it every day, turning curiosity into data, data into understanding and understanding into conservation action when needed. In doing so, we carry forward the vision Dian planted more than half a century ago – that mountain gorillas and their critical habitats are worthy of sustained commitment, rigorous science and uncompromising protection. That vision has never been more relevant than it is today.

Thank you to our Partners for their extraordinary support in 2026

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