

THE DIAN FOSSEY Gorilla Journal

September 2017

Daily protection | Scientific research | Educating conservationists | Helping communities

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50 Years and forever



Conservation is a long-term investment

By **Tara Stoinski, Ph.D.**
Fossey Fund President and
CEO/Chief Scientific Officer

As we reach the 50th anniversary of the founding of our Karisoke Research Center, I am often asked how an organization like ours — with a very specific focus, working with a species and in countries that are outside of mainstream media interest — has survived all these years. It's a great question! For me, the answer comes down to a few key elements.

First and foremost, there is our founder. Our story started with one woman whose memory still impresses itself on us even three decades after her death. Dian Fossey's work to discover the intimate lives of the gorillas and to take on the poachers who were trying to kill them touched the hearts of people around the world. Her single-minded



Dian Fossey founded the Karisoke Research Center on Sept. 24, 1967, and soon realized their future was in danger.

focus and passion inspired a generation of conservationists that followed. And

her constant commitment, despite so many challenges, still motivates so many who support our work (and her initial vision) today. While her tragic death could have ended the quest to save mountain gorillas, it actually had the opposite effect — it solidified her legacy and thus her mission. Her passion and perseverance live on today in the people of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

Less than a decade after Fossey's death, the Rwandan genocide enveloped the country and its people. After this devastating time, with so many losses, it was hard to know what the consequences might be. But thanks to the dedication of our trackers, we never gave up protecting the gorillas, and we continued our direct, on-the-ground commitment to saving them no matter the obstacles. We all owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the individuals who worked with the Fossey Fund at that time — putting

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**THE DIAN FOSSEY
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The Gorilla Journal is a publication of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund® International, 800 Cherokee Ave., SE, Atlanta, GA 30315-1440, 1-800-851-0203.

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Dr. Tara Stoinski's favorite gorilla Bwenge, who died in 2014. He was the son of legendary silverback Titus and formed his own group in 2007. Dr. Stoinski enjoyed studying him for her work on male gorilla social dynamics, observing him interact with his growing group, especially the infants and his brothers.

50 YEARS, *continued from page 1*

their own lives at risk to ensure the gorillas' continued protection.

Additionally, we have been so lucky in our 50-year history to work side by side with amazing partners who share our dedication to the long-term survival of the species. Our primary partner, the Rwandan government, is deeply committed to the conservation of its animals and resources, and we are proud of its efforts to work in concert with us and others.

The Fossey Fund would not be here today without our vast international community of supporters and friends. Some of these donors have been with us for more than 30 years and their giving history is a

real signal of their passion for our cause. Our donors have saved gorillas, enabled development within Rwandan and Congolese communities, and funded important scientific advances through their giving.

And then, of course, there are the gorillas themselves. They are so much like us, especially in their rich social lives, how they care for and protect their families, and in how they mourn their dead. We know them well – indeed, they are like family members to us – and our ability to be with them every day and to tell their stories is one of the best examples of how we carry on the work started by Dian. Knowing the gorillas so personally enables us to keep inspiring new generations of conservationists to

take on the difficult job of protecting these amazing individuals. From Fossey's favorite silverback Digit, to my favorite silverback Bwenge, these gorillas have touched the hearts of not just us at the Fossey Fund but of the world. They are truly a world treasure.

What has 50 years taught us

Karisoke is the longest-running gorilla research site in the world. More than five generations of gorillas have been meticulously observed by researchers from all over the world. For almost any topic you can think of, we've done a study on it. Yet, one of the most important lessons we've learned from 50 years of this huge bank of research is that, honestly, we still have a lot to learn.

Gorillas are intelligent and complex animals who live in ecosystems that are equally complex and ever-changing. They're highly adapted to change, having shown time after time that there is no one way to be a gorilla; instead, being a gorilla means being flexible within the situation at hand. We have seen the gorillas go through periods when groups were very small, as they were in Fossey's time, to periods when groups grew to as large as 65 individuals. Group size, which might seem to be a minor element of the gorillas' lives, ultimately can affect feeding behavior, reproduc-



We're celebrating Dian Fossey's courage and commitment in protecting gorillas on this 50th anniversary, with a special campaign to continue her legacy for many more years to come.

Please visit our website at gorillafund.org/protect to find out how you can join the campaign to ensure a future for gorillas.



50 years and forever

tive strategies, infant survivorship, even decisions about whether to strike out on your own or stay in the group where you were born. The gorillas of today are not the same as those of Dian Fossey's time, and they will not be the same as those we will observe 20 years from now. Cataloguing the gorillas' incredible behavioral diversity is truly one of the most special, unique and powerful aspects of the Fossey Fund's work.

From now forward

We are proud of the successes we've had in protecting mountain gorillas since Dian Fossey's day. This growth has also created new challenges, such as the limitations of habitat they may now face. However, relative to what could have been a downward trend toward extinction, any new problems that emerge from the survival of the species is regarded as a "good" problem to have.

While mountain gorillas thrive, we do continue to struggle and work against the decline other gorillas are experiencing. In particular, for Grauer's gorillas the level of loss is simply staggering — 80 percent have been killed in the last 20 years. Without a continued, major commitment on the ground, we will lose Grauer's gorillas, and many of the amazing animals who share their habitat, in the next decade. The story begins to feel an

awful lot like what Dian faced 50 years ago — a fragile species in need of massive intervention.

Conservation of this magnitude requires local, organizational, and global investment. It's not a job that can be done in isolation by one agency, community, or by governments that struggle with complex and challenging human needs, let alone conservation concerns. Any sustainable conservation work must have as its ultimate aim the thriving of species, humans, and dynamic ecosystems. It must serve the needs and aspirations of animals and people alike. In our case, the work to save gorillas is mirrored by the work to empower people who share the gorillas' forest home. And that is why we deliberately chose our motto: "Helping People. Saving Gorillas." We know that without educated local leaders, a trained emerging generation of African conservationists, strong food and water security, and the like, gorilla conservation will ultimately fail in the long-term.

I feel incredibly lucky to be able to continue the amazing legacy that Dian Fossey created. This year marks my 23rd year of working with gorillas, and to be able to lead the amazing people who are the Fossey Fund is such an honor. At the same time, I also feel a lot of responsibility for the gorillas and for our teams and staff who work diligently every day to follow in Dian's footsteps to

know, study, and protect the gorillas of Rwanda. And what a privilege we have to add to her mission today by turning our experienced conservation model toward Congo and its fragile Grauer's gorillas.

Today, when I see images of Dian from those earliest years, I see something real and inspiring in her eyes. I see her courage, her conviction, and even sometimes her tiredness. But I also see fierce determination and sheer humanity in the face of a big challenge. Those things are our reference points for the next 50 years here at the Fossey Fund, and I'm excited to be part of our next chapter.

National Geographic, an early supporter of Dian Fossey's work and writing, is celebrating our 50th anniversary with a feature article in the September issue of *National Geographic* magazine and a three-part television series to air in December.

The TV series includes rare archival footage and is narrated by Fossey Fund honorary chair, Sigourney Weaver, who played Fossey in *Gorillas in the Mist*.

Inaugural World Gorilla Day launches on Sept. 24



In honor of Fossey's 50th anniversary, the global conservation community is launching the first-ever World Gorilla Day!

Organizations around the world will be celebrating with special events, activities and conservation opportunities, all to help foster greater awareness for supporting protection of gorillas and other endangered species. **Visit** www.worldgorilladay.com

50 years ago

Fossey's first weeks at Karisoke, 1967

On Sept. 24, 1967, Dian Fossey set up two small tents in the wilderness of the Virunga mountains in Rwanda, and began a pioneering study of endangered mountain gorillas, under the auspices of famed archeologist Dr. Louis Leakey. Fossey named her two-tent facility "Karisoke," after the nearby mountains Mt. Karisimbi and Mt. Bisoke.

This auspicious day came after Fossey had already spent some seven months studying mountain gorillas on the Congo side of the Virungas, which she had to abandon when political, security, permits and other issues forced her to abandon that area.

This excerpt is from a letter she wrote in November 1967 about her first few weeks studying gorillas from her Karisoke camp:

"I am now located on Visoke in Rwanda and have found an abundant

gorilla population on this mountain — one of the Virunga chain. I'm not much more than five hours walking distance from my old camp on Mikeno....

"I imagine my camp here on Visoke will be a permanent one, or at least I hope it will be permanent, for there is a high concentration of gorilla, I have all the government red-tape sorted out and lastly, this area is far more desirable from a physical point of view — comfort, accessibility, etc. than the Kabara study area in the Congo was.

"My camp is located on a flower-filled, grassy meadow that separates the mountain of Visoke from the foothills of Karisimbi. The meadow extends for roughly three miles east to west and is not more than a ½ mile in width. It is crossed by bubbling creeks, one runs right outside my tent, and filled with huge, moss-laden Hagenia trees. The scenery is of such perfection that one feels that everything must be planned as a park...."

Fossey then reported that she'd already met four gorilla groups within a three-hour radius of her camp and noted the need for a detailed gorilla survey to be done on the Rwandan side of the volcanoes.

"My feet just turn to blisters when I think of all the ground that has to be covered, but it certainly is a challenge as it has not been done before and should prove valuable as far as a population count is concerned. So far I've found one strip of forest belt that is used as a passageway for gorilla between Karisimbi, Mikeno and Visoke, and it seems to be the only corridor they use to come on Visoke from the other two mountains. I next want to find out if it is possible for them to travel from Visoke to Sabinio, and then from Sabinio to Gahinga and Muhavura, and by the time I'm finished surveying all this area, I guess I'll be walking on my knees!"

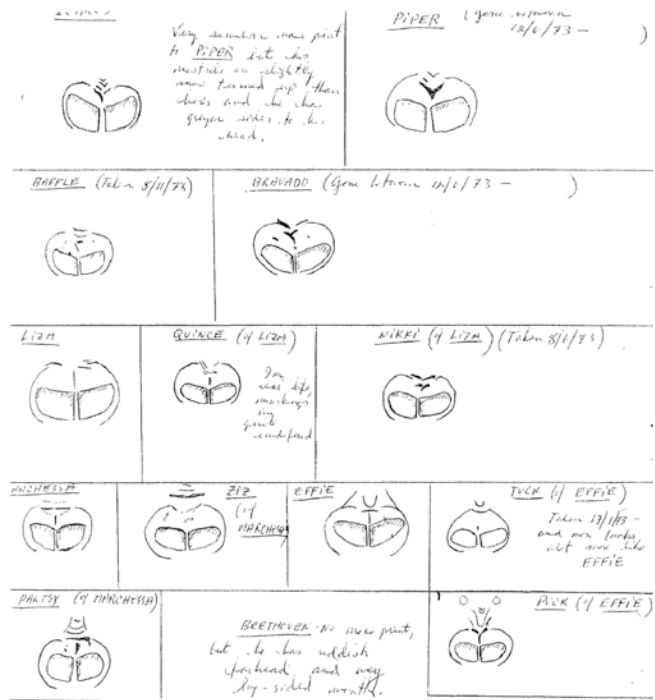
Identifying the first gorillas at Karisoke

The first gorillas mentioned in Fossey's journals after she set up camp at Karisoke slowly gained names, as she figured out who was who and which individuals populated the groups she regularly encountered.

Often, these early names were created due to physical or behavioral characteristics that she used as her first method of distinguishing individuals. And some of them were named after members of her own family!

Soon, she began to systematically and clearly identify many gorillas, and to carefully document them using drawings and photographs of their noses, which showed unique patterns of wrinkles and were called "noseprints." Today, photographing noseprints is still used for definitive recognition and documentation of all the gorillas in the Karisoke database.

The following pages contain excerpts about a few of the first gorillas Fossey focused on, including Whinny, Uncle Bert, Digit and Peanuts.



Early drawings of mountain gorilla noseprints.

At noon when I'm trying to follow the group in an obscured position, I stand up long enough to see Whiney sitting some 20' from me with just his eyes and forehead showing above the foliage. I immediately retreat and only then does he vocalize. His series of short barks, nine in all, are preceded by what sounds like a deep belch followed by a high-pitched and wheezy yelp. After this he gives two short chest-beats and leaves to follow the group. I wait some fifteen minutes before following but am unable to approach the group closely again because Whiney is bringing up the rear position and is aware of my presence. At one o'clock I meet him at 10' and retreat to a treed position which elicits two screams from him followed by an hour and a half of occasional chest-beats and barks. During this time it poured rain and was very foggy, but not once could I see another member of the group or hear their vocalizations in response to Whiney.

The notes above, from Fossey's 1967 journal, refer to her contact with Whinny.

Whinny

A 'raspy' voice made for easy identification

One of the first to be named was "Whinny" (also spelled "Whiney") because of the strange noises he made while vocalizing. She first noticed him on Sept. 25, 1967, when she encountered his group while he was feeding on thistles. After about a half hour watching the group, during which she made sure they were aware of her presence by chest beating and breaking branches in response to the same behaviors by a young

blackback, the silverback in question looked directly at her.

"At this time he gave a long series of barks of alarm but they were very hoarse and whispery and unlike any noise I've heard before, thus substantiating for me that this was not a group I knew. (This noise was typical of this silverback throughout the observational period.)"

This "raspy squeaking vocalization" of the silverback is one she would hear again the next week, and it allowed her to identify this as the same group. By Oct. 3, she'd named the silverback "Whiney" (also spelled "Whinny") and wrote: "Of all the animals in this group, I think Whinny is the most likely candidate for habituation."

Indeed, a few days later she found herself looking directly up into his face, as he "neighed four times with a wide open mouth before moving slightly away behind foliage protection and began to eat."

"Whinny's head seems exceptional large, almost gross, and he has a very broad upper lip. As I was still quite obscured by foliage, I moved away some 15 feet downhill to a tree, but in spite of increasing our distance to some 85 feet, the sight of all of me had a negative effect on Whinny. He neighed excitedly and ran further uphill breaking branches enroute."

Yet Whinny always seemed to calm down and resume his intent stare and curiosity about Fossey and he featured prominently in her earliest days at Karisoke.

Uncle Bert

Fossey said he had a 'most human face'



By mid November of 1967, Fossey is recognizing many more individual gorillas, and another silverback obtains a name when she gets her first full view of him.

"He has perhaps the most human face I've yet seen in a gorilla, and reminds me exactly of my uncle Bert, so from now on he is named 'Uncle Bert'."

"He appears to be the oldest gorilla I've yet seen although his white hair does not continue down along his flanks and arms.... I get the impression of age from his lean, bony face, the bags under his eyes, his sharp occipital ridge, his sagging breasts and the vast wrinkled area that exists between his nose and upper lips. He has a very 'hang-dog' expression...."

Unfortunately, Uncle Bert was killed by poachers in 1978. However, to this day, two groups that are followed daily by the Fossey Fund – Titus and Kuryama – are a legacy of Uncle's Bert's Group 4.

Digit

Fossey called him 'gentle, trusting'

Fossey continued to have a certain fascination and affection for particular gorillas, especially Digit, after whom she named the Digit Fund, which is today the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

Fossey first saw Digit in 1967, when he was just a few years old. His parents were elderly and Digit soon became an orphan, but he had many family members and others in his group to help him survive and thrive during his earliest years.

He had an injured finger

She gave him the name "Digit," when she noticed that one of his fingers was injured, probably from being caught in a poacher's trap. She also noticed other things about him that struck her as notable, as she wrote in her journal:

"He isn't an easy animal for identification purposes as his nose at first sight is a misshapen mess and only in certain lights can one see that the left nare is far wider than the right. The fastest and easiest way to identify him is the deep straight line from the left nare and the small 'dot' on the right nare.



Also, today it was found that the ring finger of his right hand is still deformed and cannot be flexed. It still appears swollen but is the same color black as the rest of his fingers."

Fossey and Digit bonded

Over the coming years, Fossey formed a special bond with Digit, calling him "gentle and trusting."

As a youngster, he was playful and curious, especially among his human observers and was known to approach Fossey and play with equipment, such as cameras, gloves, boots and other clothing, as well as to smell and touch her gently, as in this excerpt from her 1971 journal:

Fossey had a deep affection for Digit, who was killed by poachers in 1977. She named the Digit Fund after him, which now is the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

"At 10:20, Digit comes directly up to the back of me and sounds of chewing can be heard from him as he finishes up his nettle stalks. Then softly I feel a touch on my back, my socks and my boots – I slowly turn my head to see him sitting on the same

stone my legs are leaning on while one arm turned to examine various articles of my clothing and even my jacket lying at the side. He also leans forward on elbows to smell different parts of me some more – all done very gently and if I move a fraction, he begins to flinch.

A victim of poachers

Sadly, Digit was killed in 1977, when his group was attacked by poachers on New Year's Eve. As a peripheral male, he was able to protect the other group members, allowing them to flee as he held off the poachers, taking the spears into his own body.

50th Anniversary 'adoption' special of Digit

Gorilla "adoptions" are a symbolic way to support our daily gorilla protection.

We are offering a limited-time-only "adoption" of Digit, in honor of his role inspiring Dian Fossey, her work, and the creation of what is now the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. You'll receive a certificate, profile and more.

Adopt at gorillafund.org/adopt



Peanuts

Trust leads to first contact

Another gorilla Fossey met in the early days, who proved to be historic in very special ways, was a young adult called “Peanuts.” He first got his name on Jan. 4, 1968.

She noticed that every time she turned around Peanuts seemed to be staring at her intently, with a very “puckered” expression. A few days later, she noted:

“Peanuts stares from behind some leaves in the trees and descends breaking a lower branch as he hits the ground. He then comes forward to about 8 feet on the same trail I’m sitting on, and we ‘exchange’ glances for only a few seconds during which time he had a frank and open expression that showed no fear — I looked away first.”

Another time, when Peanuts begins strutting directly toward her with others, Fossey wrote:

“I don’t like their approach mainly because there are no trees for me to climb and when Peanuts starts strutting up to me, I leave slowly



pretending to feed until I can get into a tree about 20 feet away. I left everything — cameras, lenses, thermos, water canteen, binoculars, knapsack, another sack — everything just spread out....

After this, while the other gorillas display, “Peanuts however, goes to where I’d been sitting, for although I can’t see him, I can hear my camera equipment being handled and I start to return to ‘rescue’ it,” but then other gorillas return

Peanuts and Fossey “exchange glances for only a few seconds during which time he had a frank and open expression that showed no fear — I looked away first,” she wrote.

and Fossey retreats again. Peanuts is the one she trusts and is trying to connect with. As she gained closer and closer access to Peanuts, it became clear there was a relationship.

April 13, 1968:

“The next 40 minutes were spent with Peanuts

laying mostly on his back within 3 to 4 feet... He was so totally relaxed that after a few seconds of clasping his hand or one of his feet would slip as though he were falling asleep — breathing slow and normal and smell moderate to indistinguishable.”

It wasn’t long before one day Peanuts reached out and touched her. He outlived Fossey and died in 1989, after a challenging life trying to maintain a group.

Poppy

The last Fossey gorilla still alive

Poppy was born April 1, 1976, as recorded by Dian Fossey, and hails from a historic matriarchal line of gorillas named for her mother, Effie. Effie was noted by Fossey in November 1967 as a “fine large female.”

Effie’s descendants have since spread out in many groups within



the Virunga mountains and include dominant silverbacks Cantsbee, Isabukuru, Mafunzo, Urwibutso and Vuba.

Poppy lived many years in a group monitored by Rwandan park authorities.

But in 2015 she joined one of the groups the Fossey Fund monitors and is still there today.

Poppy’s younger sister Maggie was also followed throughout her life, first by Dian Fossey and then by the Fossey Fund. However, Maggie disappeared from our tracking region in 2015 at age 35, and has not been seen since, making Poppy the last of Effie’s direct surviving offspring.



'Murakoze' = 'Thank you,' in Kinyarwanda

Meet a donor: Sandy Price

Sandy Price is a true friend of the Fossey Fund and one of our most loyal and generous long-term major donors. She began supporting the work of Dian Fossey in the early 1980s, after reading about her in *National Geographic* and then in Fossey's book, *Gorillas in the Mist*.

"I was moved to tears by her work and her words, and that is an unusually emotional reaction for me," says Price. Soon after reading the book, Price sent a donation to Fossey's Digit Fund.

Much to her surprise she soon received a phone call from Fossey herself, who was in the U.S. just a few weeks later. Over time, their correspondence continued, with phone calls whenever Fossey was in the U.S., and through letters and reams of onion-skin papers with details of Fossey's anti-poaching patrols.

Almost meeting Fossey

In 1985, Fossey invited Price, her husband Harold and family to visit Rwanda to see the gorillas with her. Thrilled with the invitation, the Prices flew to Africa in December. They first went to Kenya and reached

In closing I want to thank you both from the bottom of my heart for your magnanimous support of The Digit Fund and your very real interest in the gorillas of the mountains. I am delighted that you both will have the opportunity to meet them for yourselves for no words or pictures can do them justice.

their Kigali hotel on Dec. 27. When their driver arrived he said he had heard on the radio that Fossey had been killed the night before. In shock and unable to get further details on the situation, the family decided to return home, since there was only one flight a week out of Kigali at that time.

The tragedy further sealed Price's determination to help the mountain gorillas. From that point forward, she provided support to keep the next director of Karisoke funded while the Digit Fund struggled to find its footing.

Soon after, Price was asked to join the board. She has remained a board member ever since, serving in various roles including as chair during the early 2000s.

The Digit Fund eventually became the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, and moved to Zoo Atlanta in the mid 1990s, where its headquarters remain today.

Price's next trip to Rwanda was

Warm Regards,

Dian Fossey

in 1992 for a board meeting, but due to the emerging civil unrest and then the genocide, her next visit wasn't until 2002. She's been back several times since for board meetings, including one held earlier this year.

Price says she is amazed that the organization has survived so many hard times, and that the protection work on the ground never stopped. That accounts for the gorillas' survival all these years, she says.

"I laughingly call myself the historian of the organization, but at some point you have to have new people join who become long-term supporters as well.

"We have to educate and inform people in new ways, so they become interested and see how they can contribute to this amazing cause," she says, especially as so much time has gone by and fewer people remember who Dian Fossey was. "Maybe it's even time to re-make *Gorillas in the Mist*!"



Sandy Price

Throughout our 50-year history, numerous companies and organizations have invested in our mission.

Such sponsorship is vital to saving gorillas, providing essential funding and awareness.

If you have ideas for potential sponsors, please email us at info@gorillafund.org

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