

THE  
DIAN  
FOSSEY

# Gorilla Journal



Daily Protection | Scientific Research | Educating Conservationists | Helping Communities

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## Reaching new heights in 2019

*Gorillas, science, community, and education*

By Tara Stoinski, Ph.D.

President and CEO/  
Chief Scientific Officer

*I'm so pleased to report* that this year — our 52nd since Dian Fossey founded the Karisoke Research Center — continued the upward trajectory we have seen in recent years.

The mountain gorilla groups we protect had many infants, our teams in Congo continued to inspire us with their protection of Grauer's gorillas, and our people-centered programs in education and communities where we work continued to grow, innovate and make significant strides toward increasing sustainable conservation.

There were many highlights this year, some of which are detailed in this issue (see pages 2–4 for a small sampling of our favorite events of the year).

**I admit to being a science geek,** so I'm also delighted to report that we published a number of important studies this year that not only reached our scientific colleagues but also were covered by the mainstream media. Whether it's a case study on gorillas



We watched as little Uhirwe got her name in this year's Kwita Izina gorilla-naming ceremony, organized by the Rwandan government.

mourning their dead or a long-term look at the shifting ranges of birds in gorilla habitat, each one of these studies informs both our basic knowledge and our ability to develop effective conservation strategies (see story on two of our incredible young researchers on page 5).

**And, of course, we couldn't be more excited** about the progress being made on our new Ellen DeGeneres Campus after breaking ground on it early this year.

**I am grateful to everyone** who helped make this year such a good one for the gorillas, their critical forests and all its wildlife, and for all of us at the Fossey Fund. Please stay tuned for a great year in 2020! ■

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# Our favorite events of the year



**A highlight for all our staff in Rwanda is attending the Kwita Izina gorilla-naming ceremony each year.** This is a time when the whole country of Rwanda celebrates the gorilla births in the past year, as well as all types of conservation progress.

We started 2019 with a wonderful event – the groundbreaking for our new Ellen DeGeneres Campus in Rwanda! This facility, nestled next to Volcanoes National Park, will provide the first permanent home for our Karisoke Research Center, and feature state-of-the art laboratories; classrooms for educational programs; a public exhibit on the legacy of Dian Fossey and on gorillas and conservation more broadly; interpretive trails; a science and conservation library; computer labs; and important meeting spaces to bring together scientists, students, community members, tourists and all those interested in gorillas and conservation.

We also saw our major programs continue to take giant strides, including our community projects in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and our scientific research and publications. From our first conservation summer camp to our detailed studies of the gorillas and their habitats, we are learning, teaching, and reaching out more every day. Here are some of our favorite events:

## Gorillas

■ We helped celebrate at the annual Kwita Izina gorilla-nam-

ing ceremony, organized by the Rwandan government each year to name the gorilla infants born in the past year. Ten infants from the groups we monitor were named. Some of our favorite names: “Uhiriwe,” which means “lucky one” and “Sururwanda” which means “visit Rwanda” (both born in Mafunzo’s group); Biracyaza,



**Newly named Sururwanda,** whose name means “visit Rwanda.”

meaning “best things to come,” born into Kuryama’s group; and Bisoke, named after the volcano in the Virunga mountains where this group often ranges.

■ Our trackers in the remote forests of Congo have now had several sightings of the Grauer’s gorillas that we follow there. Unlike the mountain gorillas we protect in

Rwanda, the Grauer’s gorillas are not habituated to the presence of humans and we follow them from a day behind, avoiding direct contact. But with more gorilla groups now in the areas that we protect in Congo, sometimes we “accidentally” see one or two of their members from a distance. This is good news, says our Congo director Urbain Ngobobo, and shows that wildlife is returning to these forests we protect, after decades of severe declines.

■ We loved seeing the worldwide remembrances of historic gorilla Poppy, the last mountain gorilla that Dian Fossey knew and studied personally, including a mention on the “CBS Evening News.” Poppy left her group at the end of 2018 and after long searches was presumed to have died at the elder age of 42. She was a member of one of the mountain gorillas’ “royal families,” daughter of legendary matriarch Effie, whose family are spread across many gorilla groups in Rwanda. Her sister Maggie was Sigourney Weaver’s



favorite gorilla while filming "Gorillas in the Mist."

### Science

■ One of the more unique studies by our scientists suggested that gorillas reacting to the deaths of others show behaviors similar to human mourning. One of these case studies involved gorilla reactions to the death of the legendary silverback Titus, who died in 2009. Our long-term detailed records, videos and photographs make possible this kind of research, comparing behaviors spread out in time and place.

■ Our new post-doctoral researcher, Dr. Robin Morrison, came on board earlier this year, just as her Ph.D. research from the University of Cambridge was published and hitting the media. Dr. Morrison's work focused on the social interactions among gorillas, showing that they form lifetime bonds with even distant relatives and unrelated "friends."



**The speckled mousebird** was among those in our bird study of gorilla habitat. This species and others were found to have shifted their ranges to higher elevations, possibly related to climate change.

■ We're closely studying other species that play critical roles in the forest where gorillas live, including birds, which distribute seeds and also help us more quickly see changes in the health of those ecosystems. In one study

published in August in the journal *Ecology*, we reported some important elevational shifts in where many bird species in Volcanoes National Park are living. Some of this may be due to climate change but more study is needed.

Another study showed a decline in the regeneration of bamboo shoots in the park. Bamboo is a key food plant for the mountain gorillas as well as the endangered golden monkeys.

### Community and education

■ We held our first-ever conservation camp for Rwandan primary school children this summer, in collaboration with Children in the Wilderness, Conservation Heritage-Turambe, and Muhisimbi Voice of Youth in Conservation. The students focused on learning about the wildlife of Rwanda and even got to visit the unique Buhanga Eco-Park.

See **Events**, page 4

## Gorilla trackers visit Rwanda's Akagera Park

The Fossey Fund gorilla trackers work every day in Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park where the mountain gorillas live, but Rwanda is also home to other national parks with different wildlife, which most of our trackers have rarely if ever seen.

This fall, as part of our commitment to offer training opportunities to our staff, we sent our trackers to visit Akagera National Park, the only Rwandan park with a savanna environment.

"I enjoyed an unforgettable experience," says tracker Hamdan Nkerakurinda. "I saw elephants, zebra, giraffe and many other animals and plants that I had never



**Most of our trackers had not seen wildlife in Rwanda's other parks.** Akagera has many different species than are found in gorilla habitat.

seen before! We all look forward to visiting more national parks and furthering our knowledge about the great biodiversity of Rwanda," he adds.

We also sent field staff and

local land owners to Kahuzi-Biega National Park in Congo to see Grauer's gorillas — some for the first time — and to develop relationships with Congolese national park authorities. ■



# Mother and daughter raise offspring together



**Pablo's group always has something special to observe.** Right now, Shishikara, left, and her mother, Gutangara, are raising new infants at the same time!

**This year our** field staff observed something quite unusual — watching both a mother and daughter in Pablo's group raise their offspring together at the same time. This situation doesn't happen often, and we are lucky to have the chance to record instances of cooperation.

Gutangara, who is 35, and her 11-year-old daughter Shishikara, both gave birth in the spring of this year, only one month apart. This mother and daughter have always had a close relationship and already spent a lot of time together, but seeing them both with their newborns is extra fascinating. Gutangara is an experienced mother of seven (four of whom are in Pablo's group, while the others have grown up and moved out). But Shishikara is brand new at

motherhood, with her first offspring.

The infants often try to engage with each other when their mothers are sitting near each other, and the mothers will often groom each other's infants. Some of Gutangara's other offspring also spend time bonding with them. We think all these bonds will create a good scenario for the youngsters as they grow up, including quicker weaning, strong protection, and successful adult lives in the future.

Another infant was born in Pablo's group this year, to mother Teta, who is also a first-time mom. So there is, as usual, so much to watch and learn in and from Pablo's group!

**To see previous episodes** of "Life with Pablo Gorillas" please visit our website at: [gorillafund.org/Pablo](http://gorillafund.org/Pablo).

## Events

*Continued from page 3*

■ In Congo, our fish farming project got off to a great start, with our team testing out artificial insemination of native catfish. If successful, farming this local fish would provide a sustainable source of protein for local people — a great win for both community health and conservation! We also provided training to local people who already have fish farms.

■ Research assistant Nadia Niyonizeye, who started with us as a University of Rwanda college student and then a professional intern, was featured in a Canadian television documentary that aired in September, called "In the Footsteps of the Primates." This film looks at women field scientists who are following in the footsteps of the great primatologists Dian Fossey, Jane Goodall and Birute Galdikas.

■ Another one of our up-and-coming young scientists in Africa, Narcisse Uwitzone, was named a National Geographic Young Explorer this year for his project on gorilla food plant regeneration. Narcisse also trained with us while at the University of Rwanda and is planning to pursue graduate studies on helping local communities through science and conservation.

■ One of our youngest supporters, Addison Barrett, age 11, was named a winner of the 2019 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, which celebrates young people from across the U.S. and Canada who have made a significant difference to people and the environment.

Addy founded "Gorilla Heroes" to raise awareness and funds to protect the mountain gorillas through a variety of creative projects, including a gorilla gala, social media campaigns, selling T-shirts and holding raffles. "My hope is that at least one person who I have touched might also take action to help gorillas," she says. ■



# Young researchers becoming experts

**One important program** at the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund involves helping to train and provide experience to up-and-coming scientists where we work in Rwanda and Congo.

This includes creating classes and research opportunities for more than 400 local college science students each year, providing internships for students and graduates, and hiring some of those who choose to continue for positions in our conservation, science and education programs.

Marie Rose Umuhiza and Alexandre Gategoko fit this profile perfectly and have become experts in some very specialized areas of research. Their efforts produce invaluable information for our scientific studies of the gorillas and of the golden monkeys, which are the only other primate living in the forest with the mountain gorillas in Rwanda.

Marie Rose is our lab coordinator in Rwanda, and has become a whiz at extracting important information from gorilla fecal samples, which is used in many research studies and for conservation purposes.

Alexandre, who works with our field research on golden monkeys, is the expert identifier of individual golden monkeys, which makes it possible for us to study the demography and behaviors of this endangered species.

## Marie Rose and the ‘poop’ lab

Marie Rose joined the Fossey Fund as an intern in 2010, after completing her bachelor’s degree in applied science. Her first project was assisting with a doctoral study on silverback and infant behavior. Then she began work in our lab processing gorilla fecal samples, which are used to extract all kinds



**Marie Rose**, our lab expert, analyzes gorilla fecal samples. **Alexandre** is our expert identifier of golden monkeys.



of useful information ranging from DNA and hormone levels, to the health of the gorillas.

None of this work is easy, especially the delicate process of extracting hormones such as cortisol from the samples, which can show levels of stress in the gorillas.

And identifying and determining which parasites may be affecting the gorillas is also important.

Marie Rose is passionate about all of it. “The work I do in the lab is providing solutions for better conservation of the mountain gorillas,” she says.

And she still wants to keep

learning more all the time, attending seminars and additional training on such topics as parasite identification.

## Alexandre and golden monkeys

Alexandre was one of the many University of Rwanda students who has studied with the Fossey Fund, completing his senior thesis with us, then holding a professional internship position. He became a Fossey Fund research assistant in 2017 when he began working with a Ph.D. student to collect data on golden monkeys. After that project finished he was hired as our first research assistant fully dedicated to our golden monkey studies, collecting long-term data on their behavior, ranging and demographics, and training other staff in long-term data collection.

He also leads the process of identifying golden monkeys, which live in large groups and are not easy to distinguish. This work included setting up identification protocols, testing whether other

observers can accurately follow the identification process, and managing an ever-growing golden monkey individual photo database.

As a side bonus, Alexandre gets to choose many of the names for these monkeys. His favorite monkey is one called “Adam,” whom he describes as gentle, handsome and loved by many females in his group.

“As a young researcher, I’m very proud to be the one who identifies golden monkeys because this is a key to most of the studies that can be implemented on them,” he says. “We need to know as much as we can about this endangered species!” ■



## Become an insider

# Adopt a gorilla and help save a species

The Fossey Fund's symbolic gorilla adoption program has been a significant source of support for our daily gorilla protection work over the past 20 years, and also offers a wonderful way to get the detailed, inside stories of some of the individual gorillas we monitor in the wild every day.

Through our vigilant daily protection and monitoring, the Fossey Fund has amassed a huge amount of information about the lives of each of the gorillas, which we share with adopters.

This includes their life histories and information about their daily activities and group members, along with photographs and unique learning materials. Each year, we have an infant, a mother-infant pair, a silverback and often other gorillas available for adoption.

Each gorilla has an interesting and special story, as shown by the many gorillas who've been adopted over the years.

For example, male Tetero was one of our Adoptees in 2005, when he was just 2 years old. He was known at the time for his sociable and good nature, as well as for an independent streak. And now, true to form, he has become a strong silverback, who helps lead a group of gorillas, along with his group-mate Igihozo.

Leading silverback Gicurasi was one of our Adoptees in 2010, when he was 15 years old and living in the historic Pablo group, the largest of the groups we monitor every day.



**Tetero**, above, was one of our Adoptees in 2005 at just 2 years old.



**Tetero today**, above, is a strong silverback, as is leader **Gicurasi**, below, of Pablo group.



The group was then led by the historic late silverback Cantsbee, who was the long-time leader of this group until his death in 2017.

In 2010, we predicted that Gicurasi would most likely take over as the dominant silverback and that is indeed what happened. Gicurasi is now the dominant silverback of this historic group, and is actually assisted by two other former adoptees — Dushishoze, who is also a son of Cantsbee, and younger silverback Ubwuzu, who is a grandson of Cantsbee.

### Historic gorillas, too

And then, of course, there are some historic gorillas who've been in our Adopt program too, though the elders among them have since passed on. These even include a few who were known to Dian Fossey herself, such as leading females Puck and Maggie.

Puck was one of the most-studied mountain gorillas in history during her lifetime. She was first observed by Dian Fossey upon her birth in 1968 and was the daughter of a dominant matriarch named Effie, whose descendants are spread among many mountain gorilla groups today. Puck is also the mother of silverbacks Cantsbee, Isabukuru and Mafunzo. Puck's sister, Maggie, was born in 1980 and also became a top-ranking female, helping to protect her

**Gicurasi was an Adopt in 2010.** We predicted he would one day lead the historic Pablo group.



## Daily Protection



**Former Adopt historic Puck** was one of the most-studied gorillas in history.



**Macibiri** is an important member of our current Adopt gorillas, named after Dian Fossey's Rwandan nickname.

group when needed and even leading them when the dominant silverback died after being severely injured during an interaction with a lone silverback.

### The current adopts

One of the current Adopt gorillas we are most excited about is young

Macibiri. This is the infant named in memory of Dian Fossey, whose nickname when she worked in Rwanda was "Nyiramacibiri."

Little Macibiri received her name in the 2017 gorilla infant-naming ceremony organized each year by the Rwandan government.

That year marked the 50th anniversary of Dian Fossey's work and the Karisoke Research Center she established. And, our CEO Dr. Tara Stoinski was given the honor of choosing the name as well!

As an Adopter of Macibiri, you'll get the inside story of her life so far, learn more about her whole group, and have access to great photos and other materials.

And, you'll know that you are supporting the legacy of Dian Fossey and the successful conservation efforts today that have helped saved the mountain gorillas from the brink of extinction.

### A great time to adopt

It's always a great time to adopt, but the holiday season provides

even more opportunity for giving a gift that really matters.

Please visit [gorillafund.org/adopt](http://gorillafund.org/adopt) to learn more and to adopt for yourself or for friends, family and colleagues this holiday season.

This is a gift that will touch people's hearts in a special way! ■

**Mountain gorillas are endangered, but YOU can help save them.**

**When you symbolically adopt a gorilla, you protect one of the planet's most endangered animals.**

**Please visit [gorillafund.org/adopt](http://gorillafund.org/adopt) to adopt a gorilla today!**

**We cannot reverse extinction, but we can prevent it.**



**Helping People. Saving Gorillas.**

### Giving Tuesday is December 3

**YOU can also help keep gorillas safe everyday by getting involved in our 2019 #GivingTuesday campaign. Visit [gorillafund.org/givingtuesday](http://gorillafund.org/givingtuesday).**

## Donor spotlight

# Mikael Doktar

**In January 2004,** Mikael Doktar of Finland was amazed to learn that it was possible to see gorillas in the wild, after noticing an ad in a magazine for a trip to Uganda's Impenetrable Bwindi Forest. He booked the trip and trekked in the

forest for nine hours for a glimpse of the gorillas. Around the same time he also learned about the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and made his first donation.

Since then, Doktar has been to Rwanda twice with Fossey Fund trips and has had wonderful experiences seeing the gorillas there, including closeup views of silverbacks and a 1-year-old trying to learn how to walk. And his third Rwandan trip is already planned, for August 2020 when he will accompany Fossey Fund CEO Dr. Tara Stoinski on another gorilla visit.

Doktar says he was always interested in animals and wildlife in general, from a young age, and finds the great apes to be special due to their close relationship to humans. "A brief eye contact with a gorilla somehow seems to



bridge the millions of years of evolution that made us different. It conveys a kind of mutual understanding," he says.

As he learned more about the Fossey Fund, he came to appreciate the importance the organization places on

working with local people, whether recruiting them as trackers or helping build schools and health centers and supporting higher education. "All this shows how much the gorillas are worth," he says.

Now, Doktar is also a major supporter of the Fossey Fund's biodiversity work, and says that while gorillas are Rwanda's number-one attraction, "they could not survive without all the biodiversity that makes up their special habitat."

Doktar says he is heartened by the ongoing increases in the mountain gorilla population, though the situation for Grauer's gorillas in Congo is still difficult. He has high hopes for the Fossey Fund's growing efforts there.

For all those interested in gorilla conservation, Doktar reminds us that even a small donation makes a big difference. "Visiting the gorillas in Rwanda may be beyond the budget of many, but visiting gorillafund.org is the next best thing, and it's free!" ■

## Building your own conservation legacy

**Planned giving is a unique way to support the work of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund during your lifetime and beyond.**

If the Fossey Fund is in your will or other estate document, you also become a member of our Legacy Society, allowing us to recognize you appropriately for your generosity and dedication to wild gorilla conservation in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

**There are many vehicles that allow you to provide for your loved ones and make a planned gift to the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, including:**

- wills and living trusts,
- life insurance policies,
- retirement plan required distributions,
- bank and investment accounts,
- gifts of stock or securities, and
- donor-advised funds.

**To learn more, please contact Shari Henning: shenning@gorillafund.org Or visit [gorillafund.org/get-involved/plannedgiving/](http://gorillafund.org/get-involved/plannedgiving/)**

## Thank you to our Collaborating Funders for their extraordinary support in 2019

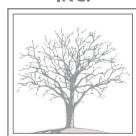
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