

THE DIAN FOSSEY Gorilla Journal

May 2020

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We never leave

Adapting to new challenges

By Tara Stoinski, Ph.D.

President and CEO/Chief Scientific Officer

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, its staff, and the amazing gorillas and other wildlife that we protect have faced many hard times and difficult challenges during the 52 years of our existence.

From the enormous efforts that Dian Fossey made to connect with the gorillas and find ways to protect them, to the years of strife in the 1990s when our trackers continued to monitor the gorillas even during Rwanda's most difficult times, we have always persevered. We have never left our mission to protect and study the gorillas and their critical forest habitat.

Today, as the entire planet confronts the new pandemic, our work faces new challenges yet again, as do the efforts of so many everywhere across the world.

We are proud that the governments of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo moved quickly to protect not only the gorillas but their people. Tourism to see the gorillas was put on hold in March, and Rwandans were asked to shelter in place, and Congolese in many areas were as well. These measures not only protect the local people but also the gorillas, who could be susceptible to COVID-19. As of this writing in late

April, we don't know when the governments will deem it safe to lift those restrictions.

New protection protocols

These events meant that we had to immediately adjust the way we conduct our daily protection of the mountain gorillas in Rwanda. We developed new protocols for our our trackers, including health checks, use of masks, limited time near the gorillas, and two-week work rotations, staying isolated from the larger community to minimize their

potential exposure to the virus. (*See details on page 2.*)

In Congo, our trackers already work several weeks at a time deep in the remote forests, where the gorillas are not habituated to human presence. Our community programs, other than critical agricultural assistance, are temporarily on hold while these government restrictions are in place, with staff working remotely.

You can rest assured that we will always find ways to protect the gorillas, as well as our brave and dedicated staff.

Focus on mission

And we will never lose hope because that is the essence of our mission: We *can* and we *will* continue to save the gorillas, protect their critical forests, and help the communities around them. We know our constant presence and persistence work.

All of us at the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund remain immensely grateful for your support and send our best wishes to all of you in these challenging times. ■



Mountain gorilla Ishyaka

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**THE DIAN FOSSEY
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Adapting for greater protection

On March 21, the Rwandan government put in place strong measures to protect both its people and the gorillas and other wildlife from the COVID-19 virus. This included cessation of tourism, closure of the national parks where gorillas and other primates live, as well as prohibition of non-essential business and movements around the country. As this newsletter went to press (April 23), these restrictions were still in place.

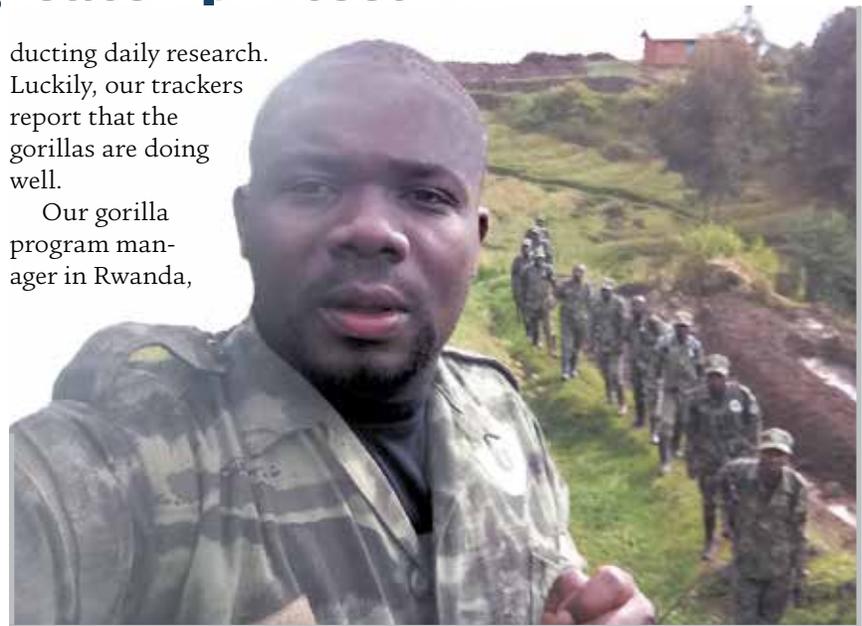
Naturally, the restrictions led to changes in our work protecting the gorillas there. We don't know if the gorillas are susceptible to this virus, as they share a lot of our DNA and do get other respiratory viruses. We've also made adjustments in our community programs and in how our staff work, adapting and finding creative ways to make sure the gorillas stay protected, to continue progress on our new Ellen DeGeneres Campus, and to support our community programs.

Two-week patrols in the forest

Our tracker teams are still hard at work protecting the gorillas and their critical forests, but using a new process in Rwanda. They are now working in two-week rotations, during which they are isolated from the larger community to minimize any risk of COVID-19 transmission. They are staying in three camps that we previously used as staging areas, and keeping a much greater distance from the gorilla groups than we normally do when con-

ducting daily research. Luckily, our trackers report that the gorillas are doing well.

Our gorilla program manager in Rwanda,



Gorilla program manager Jean Paul Hirwa, top, with trackers protecting gorillas on two-week rotations. Above, work on our Ellen DeGeneres Campus continues, with 150 local workers ready to re-start as soon as restrictions are lifted.

Jean Paul Hirwa, has been embedded with one of the tracker teams and sent these words of inspiration: "It's not easy, as you can understand, but we are doing our best. Trackers are doing an excellent job. Despite that they have left

their families during this worrying period, they are motivated and so far every day we are able to locate all the gorilla groups that we were monitoring before this time, and all the gorillas are doing well."

Hirwa says he is happy to be able

The unprecedented global challenge that we are facing with the recent outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is devastating. And just as devastating is the fact that pandemics like this one are a direct result of our larger environmental crisis. As forests are destroyed and people and wildlife increasingly come into contact, crossover of diseases between humans and animals occurs. The environmental destruction that is happening across the globe will continue to bring new challenges, making clear the importance of conservation efforts like ours to all life on earth.



to support and encourage our trackers by being in the field with them. “We plan together, go out together and reflect together. We share everything – hard conditions and worries but, most importantly, hope.”

Campus update

We’re still making progress on our Ellen DeGeneres Campus in Rwanda, even as the Rwandan government required all non-essential employees to work from home.

We’ve been able to work closely (but remotely) with the architectural and building teams at MASS design on many aspects of the campus. This includes developing content for the public exhibit, sourcing all kinds of building materials, and creating learning modules that will be used to help train local workers in new skills needed for building.

As of mid March, we’ve hired 190 workers for the campus. Eighty-nine percent of them are from nearby communities and 27 percent are female (close to our goal of more than 35 percent women).

In other campus progress, excavation for the conservation gallery has been completed and stone masonry work has started. Excavation work for the education center and research center are also underway. We’re also working on our plant nursery, developing plant propagation strategies and even making plans to re-use soil from the excavated sites for planting.

Community program updates

In Rwanda, as of this writing, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, we have temporarily suspended community engagement activities (except for supporting our agricultural/animal husbandry programs through phone consultations and continued visits by local veterinarians we have hired, since these food-related activities are considered an essential sector by the government).

Local people are also allowed to continue watering the bamboo and mushroom gardens we recently helped them establish. We have also temporarily closed our public exhibit in Rwanda. Our normal activities will resume as soon as restrictions are lifted by the Rwandan government.

In Congo, where our trackers already stay for weeks in the forest, we are maintaining our agricultural, gardening and animal husbandry programs, and working on radio broadcasts to raise awareness about the importance of the environment.

Please stay tuned to our website (gorillafund.org) and our social media channels (@savinggorillas) for the latest updates related to the COVID-19 situation where we work. ■

Welcome to our new community engagement manager

Ivan Amanigaruhanga joined our field staff as regional community engagement manager in March. Originally from the foothills of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda, he has 14 years of experience with national and international conservation organizations in Africa.

Ivan comes to us from the World Wide Fund for Nature, where he managed projects aimed at limiting the negative impacts of petroleum development on wildlife, the environment and people.

He also served as community conservation manager for the Uganda Wildlife Society and has conducted research on the interactions between the environment, people and development. As regional community engagement manager, Ivan will oversee the Fossey Fund’s community projects in both Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which include education, livelihood, and food/water- security initiatives. These programs help local people and reduce impact on the gorillas and their critical forests.



Ivan Amanigaruhanga now oversees our community programs.

Proponent of holistic programs

“They also create greater appreciation for gorilla conservation, improve household incomes and well-being, increase human health and directly increase the involvement of local people in gorilla conservation,” Ivan adds. “Our approach of working directly with people in determining the kinds of community projects that will change their lives is transformational, empowering and sustainable.”

Ivan holds a master’s degree in environmental and natural resources and a bachelor’s degree in environmental management, both from Makerere University in Uganda.

“The Fossey Fund is known to be the most impactful gorilla organization in Africa. I am proud to be one of the multi-cultural professionals who form such a competent workforce.” ■

Gorilla moms and dads: Being together

As we have all hunkered down together during these times, it is comforting to think about how gorillas live together all the time, spending their days traveling in search of the best plants to eat, resting all together at nap times, building their night nests together, and interacting with other members of the group all day long.

Gorilla mothers have strong and tight bonds with their youngsters, and silverbacks (who are generally the fathers of many of the youngsters in the group) are always there, leading the group, providing protection, and giving attention to all the group members.

In honor of Mother's Day, Father's Day and families everywhere, here is an inside look at gorilla moms and dads.

Gorilla moms are incredible

Gorilla mothers embody all that we know about great maternal care. The love they show for their youngsters is undeniably deep and evident to everyone lucky enough to observe it.

Fossey Fund scientists have studied the maternal-offspring journey through its various stages for more than five decades, documenting the lives of many individuals and whole generations.

We can now reconstruct entire lineages from one matriarch down through five generations! This multi-generational database allows us to answer important questions about gorilla mothers and general reproductive information.

Gorilla females give birth to their first offspring at around 10 years old, at which point they transform entirely into protective mothers who spend all of their time taking care of their newborns. Generally, they give birth to one infant, but a few cases of twins have been observed.



Gorilla mothers form deep bonds with their infants and protect them closely. *Above*, mothers Shishikara and Gutangara, who are themselves mother and daughter. *Left*, mother Isaro with her infant.



The weaning period lasts about 3½ years, during which they continue to nurse and share their night nest with the infant. It's not until after the weaning period that youngsters stop sharing the night nest with their mothers, and the mothers resume their normal reproductive cycles, allowing them to get pregnant again. These years of intense care maximize the chances of the youngsters' survival.

The first years of life

Gorilla infants spend their first five to eight months of life entirely dependent on the mother's breast milk. During this phase they are always carried by the mother. At

first, she carries the infant under her body, held close to her chest in what is called ventral transport, but when the infant reaches about 3 months of age, the mother transports the infant on her back, so she can be more agile and walk faster with her group. The infant is a bit stronger by this time and can grab onto the mother's hair for additional security.

At around 7 to 8 months of age, gorilla infants begin to try out solid foods, and a big role that the mother plays is to help infants learn what they need to eat. While formal "teaching," as we may think of it, has not been documented, infants spend a lot of time scrounging pieces of food dropped by the mother, which certainly helps them learn what is appropriate to eat. Infants also spend a lot of time manipulating leaves and figuring out how to eat them. This actually ends up turning into play most of the time!

By the time they reach 8 to 9 months of age, infants have improved their eating skills in terms of food-plant selections and manipulation, but they still depend on their mother's milk as well. It's not until

the infants are about 3 years old that mothers start to wean them, and this stage is not fun for any of them. As the mother begins to discourage nursing, it can be very stressful for her and the infant, with infants frequently throwing temper tantrums just like we can see in human infants. But it's a necessary step, so that the mother can resume her normal reproductive cycle.

Mother gorillas and infants certainly have an intense bond during the first years, but we also know that the relationship of mothers to their offspring lasts for a lifetime.

seen by Dian Fossey, who admired her strong and intelligent personality. Members of Effie's clan are now spread throughout the population, including 22 members of her matrilineal family in the groups that we follow, and that's without counting all the males related to her.

Over the years we have also observed some remarkable, unique and individual instances of motherly love and concern, including that of mother Pasika traveling alone for eight months to protect her infant; mother Maggie protecting her daughter Gasore after a

Males love their infants, too

It's all about family! This is possibly the best way to describe the role of a gorilla male as a father. But it's a bit harder to see this with gorilla fathers, since the role is only fully evident in a larger sense within the group's dynamics, as the father is generally also the dominant silverback, or leader of the group, and is responsible for protection of all its members.

Silverbacks do play a very important part in infant development, serving as important role models. It is not unusual to see silverbacks surrounded



Silverback Kubaha helps youngsters whose mothers left the group earlier than usual.

In gorilla groups, members of the same matrilineal clan are often seen gathering together. In fact, during her initial years of observation, Dian Fossey used this natural instinct to help figure out which adults might actually be mother and offspring. We have also found that teenage males are much more likely to remain in the group rather than strike out on their own if the mother is still present in the group.

In the five decades of Fossey Fund research, we have identified many matrilineal clans. The largest is the one of matriarch Effie, first

You can celebrate great mothers and fathers everywhere, while supporting our daily gorilla protection, by joining our adopt-a-gorilla program at gorillafund.org/adopt.

You'll receive an adoption certificate, profile of your gorilla, a video and more (all online).

snare incident; and the mourning by Segasira and brother Urwibutso after their mother, Tuck, died.

by all infants in the group and even to see silverbacks play, entertain and help care for individual infants. It's hilarious to see how gentle these giants become while playing with tiny infants. Silverback Isabukuru was a great example of this, as is his brother Mafunzo, now leader of his own group and often surrounded closely by all the infants.

We also know that silverbacks play

an incredibly important role in caring for youngsters who became separated from their mothers at early ages. Infants will travel near the silverback and also sleep in his night nest, which is extremely important for maintaining warmth.

This happened with silverback Isabukuru, who had three infants to watch over, and Bwenge, who had two. Remarkably, silverback Kubaha took over this role when Isabukuru died suddenly, continuing to be surrounded by infants day and night.

Find stories about all of these gorillas on our website, gorillafund.org. ■



All things gorilla!

As so many of us shelter at home, it's a great opportunity to learn and have some fun at the same time. Our

website (gorillafund.org) has great stories and many learning materials, including this new word jumble.

Find the words below embedded among the letters to the right

Conservation

Mountain

Congo

Golden monkey

Research

Rwanda

Community

Bamboo

Dian

Endangered

Gorilla

Digit

D S R D I A N Q E A S G R M E O U W K Y
W G T E S C O I L G O R I L L A V C M J
R B A M B O O C T O M M W R K V W X O X
B B A F G N M D Z E N K U K D U O I U V
S E D L V S L B E N D A N G E R E D N Y
B A V E A E G G P S B B K N X P T M T J
Q G L H L R L K O W X F W Z A A B Y A F
I A O J X V E U C L S F F K T H X E I H
Z V J A G A P S X G D V G Q U Q M K N V
B C V F E T E D E V V E U T S R D V V F
U R O G N I K M F A Q W N U Q Q P P W M
D I W M G O G S O Q R U C M O Z R B S O
I C E A M N E G A G A C T H O K I Z Z X
G L V T N U G A C Z N D H U P N N R I O
I U T T U D N E T H T U X O K N K I C E
T T Q U C Z A I F O V Q D U D X S E A N
W B M I N D Y Q T J W Q L L B S N U Y A
O G L H A H R J E Y N Q R R B G U M C I
U O Y B A E O X C O N G O H R Q L Q U O
U T W A J Y M C R Q M I B E T V E L J M



Gorilla drawing contest

We recently held a “draw a gorilla” contest on our social media platforms and are happy to present the winners here, as chosen by our friends at the Ellen Fund. Drawings by Guillaume M., left, and Josephine B., right.

To see a tutorial on how to draw a gorilla, please visit our website at gorillafund.org/learning-material/how-to-draw-a-gorilla/. Check out other learning materials at the “Learning & Fun” tab.





Donor Spotlight: Board member Diane Brierley

Reflecting on what's really important

Major donor and board member Diane Brierley was once a travel agent and had the opportunity to travel all around the world. But it was her first trip to Africa many years ago that was really life-changing.

Although that trip was to see the wildlife of Kenya, she later made her first trip to Rwanda to visit the mountain gorillas, and that experience was one that really changed her world.

Her first gorilla visit

The most vivid memory, says Brierley, occurred when they approached one of the gorilla groups with their guide and heard a commotion among the gorillas, with the silverback screaming and pounding his chest.

It turned out that a young gorilla in the group had caught his wrist in a poacher's snare and the silverback was warning everyone to stay away.

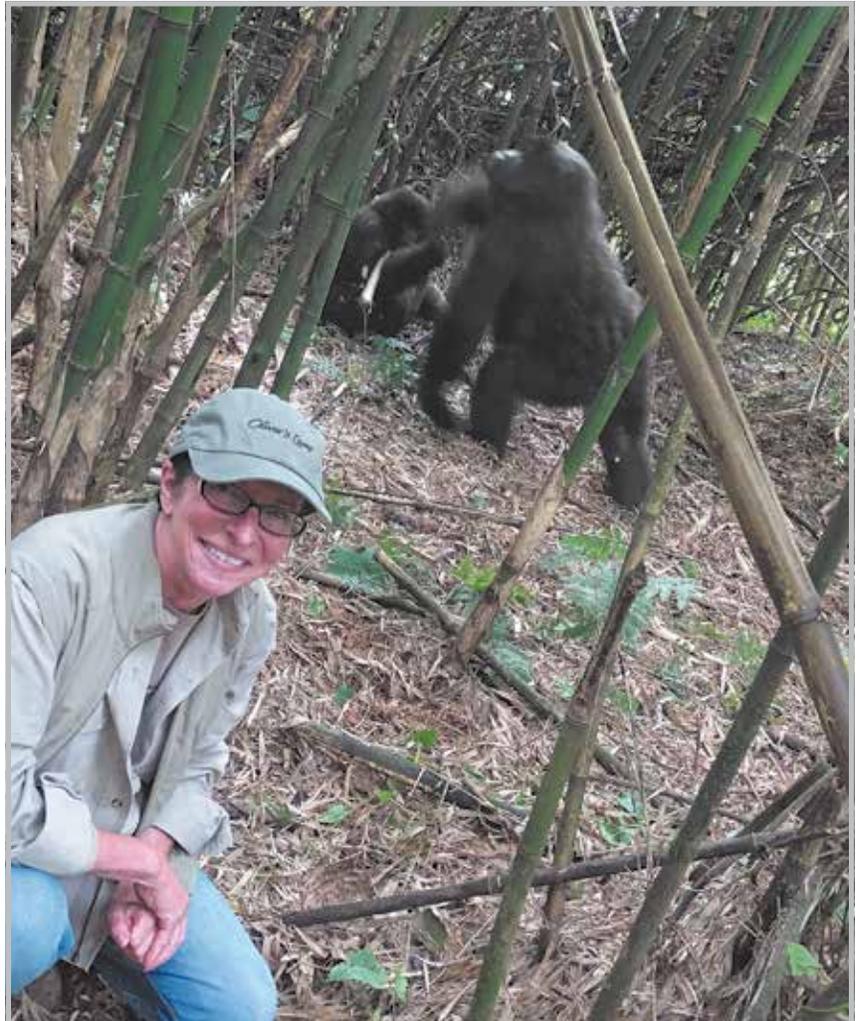
Luckily the youngster was rescued safely later that day, and Brierley was able to visit the group again the next day.

"That youngster was sticking really close to his mother the next day," she says, "almost as if saying 'I'm never going to leave you again'.... Their obvious gentleness and love for each other is a memory that will always stay with me."

On that same visit to Rwanda, Brierley had the chance to meet Dr. Tara Stoinski, then a Fossey Fund scientist and now the Fund's president and CEO.

Inspired by staff passion

Brierley also met a number of our field staff, other scientists and trackers, and says she was immediately inspired by their dedication,



Donor Diane Brierley: Going to Rwanda, meeting the people and seeing the gorillas changed her world. "We are all in this together," she says.

knowledge and passion for what they are doing, whether directly protecting the gorillas, studying other important species, or working with local community members.

"I learned that it really is all about what you see on our logo," says Brierley: "Helping people. Saving gorillas."

Becoming a conservationist

Shortly after that first visit, Brierley was asked to join the Fossey Fund

board. Since joining, Brierley has made several more trips to Rwanda and is especially excited about the construction of our new Ellen DeGeneres Campus, since it will help secure the future of conservation in this region. "Bit by bit, conservation has become a part of who I am," she says.

Brierley and her husband Hal are major supporters of the Fossey Fund because they believe in its

See **Donor Diane Brierley**, page 8

Donor Diane Brierley

Continued from page 7



mission, even more so in these challenging and uncertain times.

Brierley says that she is especially grateful to everyone who supports the Fossey Fund's work and our incredible 52-year legacy.

"We are all in this together — that is the most important part.

Diane Brierley, left, at a Fossey Fund event in Rwanda: "Our logo says it all: Helping People, Saving Gorillas."

And if we each do what we can to help, our support will save these magnificent creatures and the people who surround them," Brierley says. ■

Donor-advised funds

When you give, you want your charitable donations to be as effective as possible.

Donor-advised funds are the fastest-growing charitable giving vehicle in the United States because they are one of the easiest and most tax-advantageous ways to give to charity.

If you have a donor-advised fund you can take advantage of the opportunity and make your annual distribution toward supporting the important work of the Fossey Fund.

How to build your own conservation legacy

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

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

Also consider qualified charitable IRA distributions

Qualified charitable distributions allow people ages 70½ or older to instruct IRA trustees to make transfers to charity without incurring taxable income on those amounts, up to \$100K per year.

To learn more, please contact Shari Henning: shenning@gorillafund.org

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