



# Gorilla Journal

March 2022

## Our new home in Rwanda is now open *A dream becomes reality*



**The future of gorilla conservation is here:** Our multi-acre Ellen Campus in Rwanda opened in January, right next to Volcanoes National Park. This is the first permanent center for all of our programs and activities.

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

**We have now arrived** at one of the most special times in our nearly 55-year history, as we take another major step into the future of gorilla conservation – opening the Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

After decades of working in rented facilities, without appropriate spaces for all of our programs, people or the public, we finally have a magnificent, mission-aligned, purpose-built home for our work, right next to the home of the gorillas in Rwanda’s Volcanoes National Park.

Our new Ellen Campus is designed to support and enhance

gorilla protection, conservation, science, education and public awareness for generations to come. We have certainly come a long way since Dian Fossey set up her two tents in the mountains in 1967!

### **Dreaming, planning and building**

Our organization has grown significantly over the years, from one person in the forest to a staff of more than 250. Yet, since the mid-1990s we have been working out of rented buildings with inadequate space, far from the gorilla habitat and the nearby communities.

So, in 2017, on our 50th anniversary, our board of directors made the decision to move forward on our  
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**‘Dian Fossey has always been a hero of mine, and so it’s been the honor of a lifetime to support this project. To see my name alongside hers on the walls of this beautiful Campus, and to know I’m doing my part to protect endangered mountain gorillas, is simply amazing.’**

— Ellen DeGeneres

## *Inside*

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**The Cindy Broder Conservation Gallery** at the Ellen Campus is open to the public and offers a unique opportunity for visitors to learn about Dian Fossey, gorilla conservation, the Fossey Fund’s work and the biodiversity of the region.

**‘The new Ellen Campus will enable us to serve as a regional hub for cutting-edge conservation, science and education. It increases our capacity to fulfill our mission: Helping People, Saving Gorillas.’**

**— Tara Stoinski, Ph.D.  
Fossey Fund President/CEO**

## Ellen Campus

*Continued from page 1*

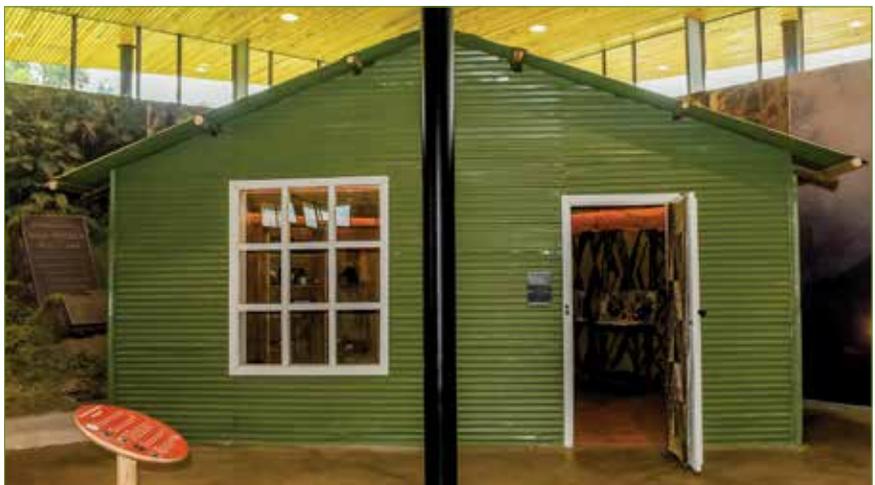
ambitious 20-year dream to create our own, specially designed facility closer to the gorillas, where we could properly house and expand our many programs in science, conservation and education.

Within a few months of this decision, we were fortunate to receive a lead gift from television personality Ellen DeGeneres and

her wife, Portia de Rossi, and work on the Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund began. Since then, thousands of donors have come forward to support this project and starting in 2019 our dream began to arise from the ground.

Our Ellen Campus, which opened to our staff and the public early this year, was designed by the acclaimed, award-winning MASS Design Group, which has extensive experience building groundbreaking,

**Visitors can see this replica of Dian’s original cabin, filled with artifacts from her life and work.**



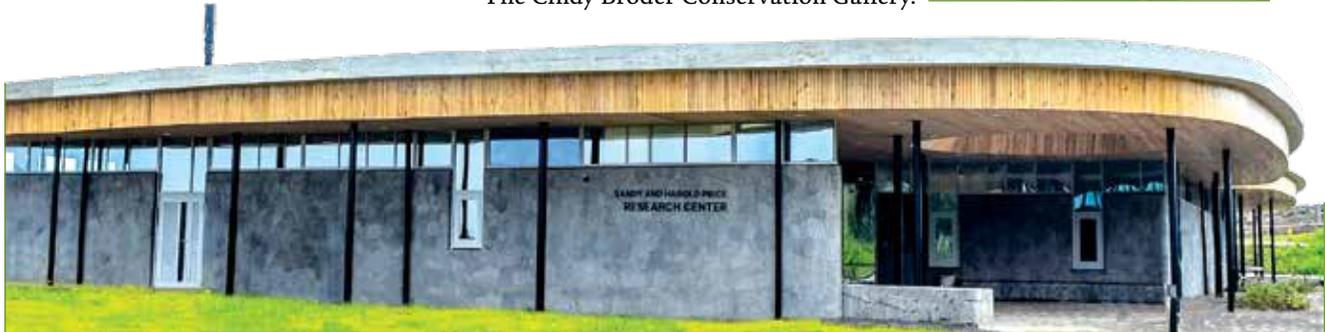
mission-driven facilities in Africa and elsewhere.

Built by more than 2,300 community members, using locally sourced materials and supplies, the Ellen Campus was carefully designed to embody our mission. This includes conserving and limiting impact on the environment, such as harvesting rainwater, growing green roofs, and planting more than 250,000 native

us each year. The main buildings are:

■ **The Cindy Broder Conservation Gallery.** Visitors can explore the exhibits in the Cindy Broder Conservation Gallery to learn more about the day-to-day work of protecting endangered gorillas, or watch a virtual-reality film in the Irmelin DiCaprio Theater, a 360-degree immersive theater,

**Interactive exhibits** are a feature of The Cindy Broder Conservation Gallery.



**The Sandy and Harold Price Research Center** is where we will continue and expand our more than five decades of gorilla studies. From purpose-built laboratories to space for our special collections, this will be the hub of gorilla research.

plants as well as a constructed wetland to treat wastewater and promote biodiversity. The entire facility is actually a living laboratory, where scientists can study local plants and animals in addition to the gorillas.

At the heart of the Ellen Campus are three beautiful main buildings that will house our work and programs, as well as exhibits and other areas for the public. We've even built housing for visiting scientists and for the college students who study with

designed and built by our partners at Habitat XR. Visitors can also walk along the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo Interpretative Trail, to learn about the critically important biodiversity of the region, visit a replica of Dian Fossey's cabin and lots more.

■ **The Sandy and Harold Price Research Center.** Science is at the core of what we do at the Fossey Fund, so this center is a state-of-the-art facility aimed at advancing our  
*See Ellen Campus, page 8*

**'Our philosophy — and thus our hope for this new facility — was not only to provide an incredible center for gorilla conservation, but to involve and improve the whole community in the process of construction. It is to us the physical manifestation of an ideal.'**

**— Michael Murphy**  
*MASS Design Group*  
*founding principal and*  
*executive director*



**The Sandy and Harold Price Research Center building includes** special labs such as this one, where our scientists are able to use gorilla feces to learn about a number of topics, including paternity patterns, stress physiology and dietary habits.

# Gorilla group leadership *comes in many forms*



**Throughout our** nearly 55 years of observing mountain gorillas, we have had the opportunity to study many family groups, and have been especially interested in noticing how group dynamics differ based on the personalities of the dominant silverbacks.

Right now, we are monitoring quite a variety of groups, with different kinds of leadership. For example, Titus group is led by two silverbacks who inherited the group and are still unable to resolve their own hierarchy, while the newer Mutobo group is led by a single young and determined silverback who formed the group himself. Yet both groups are thriving, each in their own way.

## **Titus group Sons lead but without father's style**

One of the gorilla groups we follow every day is named after the historic silverback Titus, who was first studied by Dian Fossey and is now featured in the Gorilla Hall of Fame in the Cindy Broder Conservation Gallery at our new Ellen Campus.

Fossey Fund staff observed Titus throughout his entire life, as he did



a magnificent job authoritatively leading his group from the age of 17 until his death at age 35 in 2009. This group has had several other dominant silverbacks since then.

The leadership of current silverbacks Pato and Urwibutso, who have been in charge since the death of former dominant silverback Turakora in 2016, is very differ-

ent from the clear dominance of father Titus, and perhaps can be described as immature.

Although we consider 22-year-old Pato to be the group's leader, he and Urwibutso, who are both sons of Titus, inherited the group from Turakora and have never developed a clearly defined hierarchy between them.

This can be seen in their ongoing struggles for access to females. Still, the group is thriving

and shows us that gorillas can adjust to various leadership styles, even with two silverbacks who never really showed strong interest in taking over a group.

From 2017 until this January, Titus group had only one female, Kurudi. When she gave birth to a daughter — Macibiri — in 2016, Pato and Urwibutso calmed down a bit,



**Left top, Pato, who is a son of Titus, inherited the group from a previous silverback. He shares leadership with Urwibutso, left bottom.** These two silverbacks have never developed a clearly defined hierarchy between themselves.

**Right, silverback Mutobo, who is a son of Cantsbee, is a strong leader who formed his own group from scratch.**

**Below, Mutobo's group includes mother Igitangaza with her new infant, born last September.**



since the mother was then unavailable for mating. The two silverbacks restarted their conflicts as soon as Macibiri turned 3 years old and mother Kurudi was ready to reproduce again. And indeed, she gave birth in April of last year.

In January of this year, another adult female – Agaseke – joined the group, causing the two silverbacks to ramp up their conflicts yet again. We don't know which of them will succeed in mating, but hopefully there will be another birth in the group some time later this year.

The group also includes silverback Segasira, who is a younger half-brother of Pato and full brother of Urwibutso, as well as 9-year-old male Ndizeye.

### **Mutobo group Son of Cantsbee becomes powerful new leader**

In contrast to the history of Titus group, 17-year-old silverback Mutobo formed his group from scratch in 2019, after leaving his natal group and spending two years as a solitary silverback. During an interaction with another group, he was able to attract three females to join him.



And now, just a few years later, the group contains 11 gorillas – with six adult females and four infants – and Mutobo as its only silverback.

Mutobo also comes from a strong background of leadership, as the son of famed Cantsbee, who was the longest-reigning silverback we've ever recorded. Cantsbee and his many

achievements are also featured in the Gorilla Hall of Fame.

It is impressive to see how mature Mutobo has become since his days as a joyful infant under Cantsbee's leadership.

Mutobo is still a young silverback but has proven to be quite ambitious, so we are hopeful his group will continue to prosper and grow. As the only silverback in his group, Mutobo has shown himself to be a determined and strong leader so far. He does well attracting females to the group and is a good protector from outside intrusions. Perhaps he will grow to emulate the incredible leadership of his historic father.

Interestingly, most of Mutobo's childhood playmates are now rival silverbacks, having formed their own groups. These groups often interact as they compete for females to join them. Sometimes they succeed, and sometimes they lose and become solitary males again. But all observers agree that silverbacks who originated under Cantsbee are determined to be leaders. ■

# Learning about Grauer's gorillas

## Ranging patterns and diets



**While we have** more than 50 years of research on the life history and ecology of mountain gorillas, studies of their critically endangered cousins — the Grauer's gorillas — are much newer and scarcer, especially for those living outside of national parks.

However, since we established the Nkuba Conservation Area in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2013, our scientists and other staff track several Grauer's groups there every day, trying to gather as much basic information about their lives as possible.

Such data is important for understanding the needs of these highly threatened gorillas as well as their requirements for long-term survival. And now this research is being disseminated in scientific publications, including two important baseline studies published recently in the journal *Folia Primatologica*.

**Critically endangered Grauer's gorillas** are found only in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unlike their close cousins — the mountain gorillas — very little is known about them.

### **What do they eat?**

One recent study recorded the food items that these lowland Grauer's gorillas eat, based on six years of tracking. We found that they feed on at least 100 plant species, as well as occasional ants, termites and fungi. But plant parts (stems, leaves, bark, pith and roots) make up nearly 90% of their diet, with fruit accounting for most of the remainder.

We found that their diets are more like those of gorilla subspecies living in similar lowland forests in western-central Africa than to their very nearby cousins, the mountain gorillas. It is critical for us to document this, so we can understand their habitat needs and guide the management and conservation of their forests.

### **Feeding patterns**

Another critical issue for species survival is knowing how much habitat space they need.

Yet again, little was known about the movement patterns of the Grauer's gorillas living in lowland forests. So our scientists at Nkuba recorded the movements of several Grauer's groups for two years, measuring basic data such as daily travel distances.

Since these groups are not habituated to humans, direct observation is difficult. Instead, we rely on indirect observations, such as the locations of nest sites, signs of feeding, and fecal matter, to re-create their travel paths.

Our tentative conclusions so far are that these lowland Grauer's gorillas travel greater distances



**Studying these remote Grauer's gorillas** is a big effort. More than 50 trackers, field assistants, scientists and community members worked for years to collect the data for this research on the gorillas' diets and travel patterns.

than those found in higher regions, such as Kahuzi-Biega National Park, or mountain gorillas. This is likely because of the increased fruit available in lowland forests, which requires the gorillas to travel distances to find ripe fruiting trees. The study provides baseline data to estimate their current and future space needs, the carrying capacity

of their forests, and how we understand the ecological role of these gorillas within their ecosystem.

**It takes a community to study gorillas**

Studying remote gorillas like the Grauer's is a big effort that goes way beyond our incredible scientists. These two studies alone involved

more than 50 field assistants, gorilla trackers and local community members. We are also grateful to *L'Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature* (ICCN), local landowners and the local community for permitting us to work in the Nkuba Conservation Area.

*Authors of these two studies included Fossey Fund staff Yntze van der Hoek, Tara Stoinski, Urbain Ngobobo, Wadika Pazo, Escobar Binyinyi and former Fossey scientist Damien Caillaud. ■*

**Gorilla 'adoptions' help save the species**

The Fossey Fund's symbolic gorilla adoption program is a wonderful way you can develop a personal connection with the gorillas we protect and study every day.

**Adopters or their gift recipients receive** online adoption certificates, photos, profiles, a video of their gorilla, and regular updates.



**Silverback Agahebuzo** is one of the gorillas currently available for adoption.

Adopting a gorilla helps ensure the species' future by supporting our gorilla protection work in Africa, protecting endangered gorilla families, and helping to save their critical forest homes.

**When you visit [gorillafund.org/adopt](http://gorillafund.org/adopt)**, you'll be able to choose the gorilla you want to adopt. Gorilla adoptions also make unique and meaningful gifts for your friends and family.

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# Ellen Campus

*Continued from page 3*



**The Ellen Campus includes three main buildings** — the Sandy and Harold Price Research Center (front), the Rob and Melani Walton Education Center (middle), and the Cindy Broder Conservation Gallery (rear) — as well as housing for visiting students and researchers. Photo by MASS Design Group.

research in areas like genetics, physiology and paleontology. The five-fold increase in lab space will provide new opportunities to work with scientific collaborators and students and provide more training opportunities for young African conservationists, says Felix Ndagijimana, the Fossey Fund’s director of Rwanda programs.

“This space will allow us to train more students and introduce new disciplines like hormonal and genetic analyses. These labs will also help us attract new collaborators to both expand our science and provide increased academic mentorship. This facility really pushes us to the next level,” says Ndagijimana.

■ **The Rob and Melani Walton Education Center.** Another building at the heart of the facility is a 9,000-square-foot-space that will serve as a hub for our many education activities. This new building boasts a science and conservation library, computer laboratory, classrooms and spaces for hosting public lectures, educational programming

for schools, community leaders, scientific conferences and more. It triples our available classroom space and allows us to expand our outreach programs significantly.

### **A brighter future**

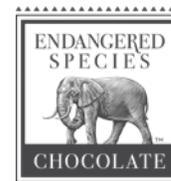
All of us at the Fossey Fund are excited and grateful to reach this major step in our organization’s history. The challenges of the COVID pandemic arising just a month after we started construction was truly daunting, involving multiple construction shut downs and many accommodations to keep the staff safe from COVID while on site. But now we have arrived at the culmination of our dream and believe the future of gorilla conservation looks brighter, from our view at our new Ellen Campus. We hope you will visit us there some day soon!

*Stay tuned to future issues of the Gorilla Journal, when we will take a close-up look at different parts of the Ellen Campus. And visit <https://gorillafund.org/ellencampus/>*

**‘I am still checking in a dictionary to see whether I can find a word to express how excited I was to visit the Ellen Campus for my first time. It was impressive to see various innovative facilities which will support biodiversity conservation, especially gorillas. I can’t wait to start working from there!’**

— **Laban Kayitete**  
*Fossey Fund*  
*research assistant*

**Thank you to our Platinum Corporate Sponsors for their extraordinary support in 2022**



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