



**DIAN FOSSEY
GORILLA FUND**

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Focusing on women Advancing conservation through gender equity



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

Empowering women, whether on our staff or in the communities we work with, is an important goal of the Fossey Fund. We were founded by a female scientist, yet more than 55 years later, the gender gap in science, conservation and related fields is still significant. For conservation to succeed long term, we believe this gap needs to be directly addressed.

Women, particularly African women, are greatly under-represented in science. So we have prioritized opportunities for women to advance their professional development. We are proud to now have many women scientists on our team (*see story on page 2*).

Women also made up 25% of the construction workforce and leadership in the building of our Ellen Campus, and our goal is to

have half of the beneficiaries of our food security and livelihood programs be women.

Women, especially in rural areas, are significantly affected by environmental degradation, as they struggle to provide food, water and other resources for their families. At the same time, they have been historically and unfairly disadvantaged in access to education, business and leadership opportunities. Thus we believe a commitment to female empowerment is a commitment to their future, as well as to the future of the planet.

As we celebrate International Women’s Day and Women’s History Month in March, I hope you enjoy learning more about our incredible women carrying on Dian’s legacy.

And we can’t forget the amazing female gorillas and the central role they play in gorilla family life, exemplified by our most successful gorilla mom, Gutangara. ■

“Becoming a tracker was difficult at first because of some people who had discouraged me, telling me that the field is not for women, that it requires more effort, and that I am not capable of hiking and working in remote areas. But because it was my passion, I persisted and achieved my goal of becoming a strong mountain gorilla conservationist.”

— Pelagie Mutuyimana, *one of the first female gorilla trackers, now a research assistant*



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Gutangara is known for her close family ties.



Advancing women in science and beyond

Dian Fossey's legacy of leadership continues

Dian Fossey's work was tragically cut short when she was killed in 1985, but her fame as a female scientist lives on.

At the Fossey Fund today, we are proud to have many women following in Dian Fossey's footsteps, especially in science. In fact, one-third of our research assistants are women. Many are now also working on advanced degrees, publishing scientific papers and receiving international recognition for their work.

This is important because African women are dramatically under-represented in science. So the Fossey Fund is taking on numerous initiatives to strengthen our programs for women in science, including the establishment in 2022 of a Women in Science and Education Scholarship Fund to provide financial support for career development.

Last year, we also started a women's empowerment group, began one-to-one professional development opportunities, and introduced gender-equity training. We can say that Dian's legacy as a female scientist and leader continues to grow and prosper.

Fossey Fund women pursue graduate studies

Here's a look at some of the up-and-coming Fossey Fund women who are currently pursuing graduate degrees and studying a range of topics, from gorilla health and nutrition to tree growth in the forest.



Marie Fidele Tuyisenge
*Fossey Fund research assistant,
Master's degree student*

Marie Fidele has been part of our capacity-building program since 2016, when she came to the Fossey Fund as a student to work on her bachelor's thesis. She also served as a professional intern en route to becoming an expert botanist.

For her thesis research, which was recently published in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, she developed a simple and environmentally friendly field method for fecal analysis of the diets of herbivores, like the gorillas. This makes studying their feeding habits much easier and quicker than other methods.

Marie Fidele then became a research assistant in our biodiversity program, working in our herbarium as well as monitoring tree growth in the nursery at our Ellen Campus.

For her graduate studies, Marie Fidele is now pursuing a master's degree in organismic and molecular biodiversity at the Technical University of Dresden with plans to graduate in 2024.

"Working with the Fossey Fund has been a great experience," says Marie Fidele.

"After my graduate studies, I hope to continue contributing to the conservation of mountain gorillas, using my new knowledge to improve biodiversity research in their habitat. I am excited to see my skills evolve throughout the program."



Carine Uwamahoro
*Fossey Fund research assistant,
Master's degree completed*

In 2016, after completing her bachelor's degree in botany and conservation at the University of Rwanda, Carine was accepted for a professional internship at the Fossey Fund, where she contributed to various conservation projects, including the long-term gorilla stress monitoring program, a project on mountain gorilla diets, and the long-term wetland monitoring program.

In 2018, Carine was selected to be a lab coordinator for a collaborative project investigating the epidemiology and pathological effects of gastrointestinal parasites in mountain gorillas. With this background, Carine was then able to start a master's degree program at the Czech University of Life Science in Prague, which she completed in 2022. Her research for the degree focused on gorilla health, specifically infections caused by protozoa.

"I advise young girls to be passionate and be open to new topics because you never know what will interest you the most. Through working hard, dedication and perseverance, you can reach what is unreachable," says Carine.

"With my master's degree, I will be able to contribute to different conservation projects related to wildlife management and conservation and to share my knowledge and skills with young conservationists in Rwanda and beyond."



Axelle Kamanzi
Ph.D. candidate

Axelle Kamanzi is a Ph.D. candidate at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She began her doctoral work in 2017, studying primate feeding ecology, nutrition and conservation, and conducting her field research in conjunction with the Fossey Fund.

Her dissertation research focuses on understanding the development of feeding behavior among the mountain gorillas in Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda.

Axelle says she is grateful for the opportunity to conduct her fieldwork in the park and for the incredible support and mentorship she gets from the Fossey Fund.

“Never give up,” advises Axelle. “You have to push on through in your education. I am happy to be among female conservationists and to have the opportunity to do research on the mountain gorillas and help contribute to their conservation.” ■

‘Science is for everyone
— including women. Girls,
you are no longer left
behind — just keep up
with your education.’

— **Axelle Kamanzi**,
researcher, doctoral student



Aline Uwera
helps lead
our women’s
empowerment
group in Rwanda:
“Empowered
women can
change society!”

Fossey Fund women lead empowerment group

Last year, our female staff in Africa group formed a women’s empowerment group, nominating three of their peers to be group leaders.

The group now holds regular meetings with the aim of providing opportunities that enable women to network, support each other, learn new skills and celebrate each other’s accomplishments.

The group’s leaders are:

Kadiara King’ai, who manages the Cindy Broder Conservation Gallery at our Ellen DeGeneres campus;

Nadia Nyionizeye, research assistant, who has been featured in the media as a young scientist following in Fossey’s footsteps; and

Aline Uwera, who is our finance and operations officer in Rwanda and has been with the Fossey Fund for 12 years.

“Once a woman is empowered, she can play a full role in all aspects of society. I always feel motivated and encouraged by my fellow women who work tirelessly to protect mountain gorillas,” says Aline. ■



‘I appreciate the efforts of women all over the world,
especially the ones working in the field to protect wildlife
and the work they do passionately regardless of how
difficult it is. All women should remember that we can
achieve anything we want; just believe and fight for it.’

— **Honorine Ihimbazwe**,
Fossey Fund research assistant



Women in Congo learn reading, writing, arithmetic and more in our adult literacy program.

“When I took part in a literacy program to teach Congolese women to read and write, I knew it would help me change my life. Unlike our children, most people my age cannot read or write. I had never been to school, so I was isolated from society.”

— Fezza Bahati, participant in the Fossey Fund’s literacy program for Congolese women

Empowering women in African communities

Helping women in Congo communities

Where we work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, women are the primary caregivers for their families. In addition they are usu-



ally responsible for growing and preparing food, securing water and maintaining the household. Few have had the opportunity to go to school and thus have been excluded from many economic opportunities.

The Fossey Fund recently established several programs here to help empower these

women, including literacy development and sewing training, in remote villages near our Nkuba Conservation Area base.

Our literacy efforts started in 2021 with 77 women from three villages, and our second phase includes 123 women from six villages. The women in this program study reading, writing, arithmetic and basic business management. We also provide learning materials and work with instructors from state schools to create lesson plans in accordance with the Congolese national school program and textbooks.

Our sewing training program started in 2022, and shows women how to make clothing using sewing machines. This is critical because the nearest village where they can buy clothes is a two-hour drive away. Now they are able to both provide clothes for their families and earn a livelihood.

“The sewing training will give us the skills and knowledge we need to start our own businesses and

In addition to supporting women in science (see pages 2-3), the Fossey Fund also strives to have equal representation of women in our people programs for local communities, which includes our livelihoods and food security work. We are investing in programs that help empower women within their communities, where many have been marginalized or face extreme poverty. This enables them to seek employment opportunities, including with the Fossey Fund.

We believe that thriving communities are essential for sustainable conservation, and that when they have alternative ways of living it lessens their reliance on the forest for food and resources.

be financially independent. We are excited about this new opportunity,” says Furaha Ruseke, a woman who lives in Nkuba village and attends our sewing training.

Improving nutrition in Rwanda

Beatrice Nyirampfikije is a mother of three who lives in Kinigi, Rwanda, near Volcanoes National Park, home to the mountain gorillas. As part of our ongoing program, last year the Fossey Fund supported Beatrice and 109 other low-income families to install kitchen gardens at their homes and plant seeds for growing a variety of vegetables. We also provided the training and materials needed to care for these gardens. In addition to helping these women and their families have new food sources, this program also lessens their reliance on the forest for food.

“We used to eat the same foods all the time because that's what we could grow in this area — potatoes, beans and sweet potatoes. Having a kitchen garden changed our lives. We are now using vegetables from our kitchen gardens to combat malnutrition as well as to provide a diverse



diet for our families,” says Beatrice.

“These kitchen gardens have the potential to create a positive impact beyond the production and consumption of vegetables. Now, the families harvesting vegetables are food secure. Some even sell a portion of the harvest earning money to address other basic needs,” says Ildephonse Munyarugero, the Fossey Fund's community development officer.

“Also, the women participating now have higher levels of control, both in decision-making and in financial independence.”

Promoting women's leadership

Another aspect of our gender equity focus includes empowering women to be leaders in community development.

For example, last year we hosted a workshop for women from the National Women's Council located near Volcanoes National Park. By collaborating and consulting with women leaders, the Fossey Fund aims to determine the best ways to involve women in conservation activities at the same level as men, and to support women's conservation-related projects.

“We see the unique impact that women can have in conservation of the area and protection of the mountain gorillas. Their involvement can double the number of people who are working to protect this environment,” says Hilary Hilsabeck, Fossey Fund community development manager in Rwanda.

“We aim to address the specific challenges and barriers that women face in getting involved in conservation and effectively collaborate and partner with them to enhance their livelihoods as well.” ■



Rwandan women leaders gather for a women's empowerment workshop at our new campus.

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800 Cherokee Ave., SE
Atlanta, GA 30315-1440
1-800-851-0203
info@gorillafund.org
gorillafund.org

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Editor Erika Archibald, Ph.D.
Designer Robin Sherman

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Gutangara

A record-setting female gorilla



Mountain gorilla mother Gutangara, 39, is a special female who has strong bonds with her family members. She continues to amaze us with her strength and decisions.

By Veronica Vecellio

Fossey Fund gorilla program senior advisor

When considering the family roles and the personalities of gorilla females, Gutangara always comes up as a great example of success, as measured by family bonds and number of offspring. Gorillas develop relationships at a very young age and these bonds last a lifetime, as Gutangara has shown.

At age 39, Gutangara is the matriarch of a large family. She holds the record in our 55+ year database for the most surviving offspring — eight individuals, ranging in age from 26 years old to just 3 months old.

Gutangara was born in the large Susa group but transferred out in 1995, when she was still young and before she had any offspring. She then lived most of her life in Pablo's group, which was led by legendary silverback Cantsbee and has been monitored by the Fossey Fund since the group formed in 1993.

An unexpected move

Surprisingly, at age 38, Gutangara made a bold move and followed subordinate silverback Dushishoze when he left Pablo's group in 2021. She was joined by her daughter, Shishikara, and each had a 1-year-old infant born in Pablo's group. The only other female who joined Dushishoze's new group was the elderly Mukecuru.

Since Gutangara and Shishikara were still nursing their young infants, silverback

Find unique items at our E-store

We partner with **Azizi Life artisans in Rwanda** to bring you unique woven bowls featuring the noseprint patterns of gorillas we monitor, plus other items from this fair-trade organization.

See these and more at store.gorillafund.org

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Special note to donors

As we aim to reduce our carbon footprint and to direct donations toward making the greatest impact, we have decided to discontinue offering our annual printed calendar.

We hope you will continue to learn more about the gorillas and all our work on our website, social channels and in this *Gorilla Journal*. Thank you!



Gutangara's growing family

The latest addition to Gutangara's family was born in 2022. He will get his name later this year in Rwanda's gorilla-naming ceremony – Kwita Izina. Gutangara's seven other offspring include:

Tamu (female) born in 1996. Since reaching reproductive age she has changed groups three times and now lives in Susa's group. She has had four offspring.

Urugwiro (male) born in 2001. He attempted to form his own group a few times after becoming a mature silverback, but is now a solitary male. Our field teams often see him in the forest.

Mutobo (male) born in 2004. When he became a silverback, Mutobo left Pablo's group and formed his own group. That was in 2019 and the group now has 10 gorillas.

Shishikara (female) born in 2008. She has always been close to her mother and now has two offspring of her own.

Gwira (female) born in 2011. She lives in Pablo's group and has one infant.

Gasizi (male) born in 2015. He is a very active young male who lives in Pablo's group.

Inararibonye (female) born in 2019. She is still very young and lives with her mother in Dushishoze's group. ■

Top, Gutangara with some of her closest family. She and her daughter, Shishikara, bottom, are even raising their infants together again!



Dushishoze did not have any mating opportunities at that time. However, the group, which also included two additional adult males, remained very cohesive and that was mainly because of the strong presence of Gutangara.

Raising infants together – twice!

When Gutangara and daughter Shishikara gave birth within a few months of each other in 2019, it was an opportunity to observe how this mother and daughter helped each other raise their infants. The two mothers were always close and so these infants grew up together from their earliest days and have a very strong bond.

Amazingly, in late 2022, both Gutangara and Shishikara again gave birth within a few weeks of each other. This means that Dushishoze's group now has 11 members and that we can again watch – with great excitement – as the mother and daughter raise another pair of infants. ■

Infant born on Dian's birthday



Just in time to help us celebrate Dian Fossey's birthday on Jan. 16, another great gorilla mother – Isaro – gave birth in a large group led by silverback Musilikale. Isaro already has a 3-year-old daughter living in this group, as well as two adult offspring in other groups. ■

Welcome to our new female trackers!

We are excited that four amazing women have just joined our tracker teams in Rwanda and are busy learning about the gorillas, biodiversity and our conservation activities in the field. All of them have diplomas in wildlife management and are ready to follow their dreams of helping to protect the gorillas.

“I am thrilled to be a part of this team of dedicated individuals who are working to protect gorillas. I have always been fascinated by these intelligent and gentle crea-



New trackers, from left: Claudine Niyigena, Jacqueline Ntakirutimana, Pelorine Umudahogora and Aline Dufitumukiza.

tures, and as a woman, I am ready to be in the field every day, learning more about them and doing my part to help ensure their survival,” says new tracker Claudine Niyigena.

Please check our website — gorillafund.org — for stories on each of these new Fossey trackers as they dedicate themselves to ensuring the future of the mountain gorillas. ■

Help continue Dian Fossey's legacy

Dian Fossey's legacy is one of perseverance and determination despite many challenges as a woman scientist. Her passion for saving mountain gorillas from extinction and for forging a path for all women scientists who followed continues to inspire us today.

Like Dian's, your legacy can have a lasting impact and create a brighter future for the next generation.

Please consider including the Fossey Fund in your estate plan, no matter the amount. Your gift will convey and pass on your values, create positive generational change and secure the future of the Fossey Fund's efforts in conservation, education, scientific research and helping communities thrive.

Please contact Beth A. Warner, Chief Philanthropy Officer, at bwarner@gorillafund.org to learn more and let us know about your legacy intentions.

Or visit us at gorillafund.org/plannedgiving.



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