



**DIAN FOSSEY  
GORILLA FUND**

# Gorilla Journal

September 2023

## Looking back, looking forward

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



**This adorable infant** was born to mother Isaro on Jan. 16, the same day as Dian Fossey. Talk about history!

**For those of us** who love gorillas — especially gorilla conservation — September is probably our favorite month.

First, we get to remember and celebrate the founding of the Karisoke Research Center by Dian Fossey, which took place on Sept. 24, 1967.

This year, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of Fossey’s book *Gorillas in the Mist*, which introduced us to the inside lives of our favorite animals. It is also the 35th anniversary of the movie that was made based on her book, starring our long-time honorary chairperson — Sigourney Weaver — as Dian Fossey. Fossey’s work, the book and the movie changed all of our lives, and helped bring the plight of mountain gorillas to the world.

Sept. 24 has also become the day we celebrate World Gorilla Day, which we co-founded in 2017. This year’s World Gorilla Day will be extra special as a new gorilla documentary will be released on Discovery+. The film was produced by Ellen DeGeneres and features the story of her involvement in the building of our new Ellen Campus.

And in Rwanda, everyone celebrates together in September at the annual Kwita Izina ceremony and events, where all the infant mountain gorillas born in the past year get their new names. (See some of the infants on page 2).

### Scientific legacy expands

The scientific legacy Dian Fossey left us is now growing by leaps and bounds, with our scientists, students and interns publishing on topics ranging from gorilla behavior and physiology to biodiversity and community conservation.

We’re proud to announce the publication or acceptance of more than 20 studies in scientific journals in the past fiscal year, with 60% of them led by our African colleagues, and this year we expect even more.

We’ve also expanded our scientific reach in another important direction — studying an addi-

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**Mother Kurinda’s infant** in Ntambara’s group, page 2.



gorillafund.org

# Latest gorilla infants ready for naming

These infants are among those who are receiving their official names in Rwanda's annual ceremony



**Gorilla mother Muntu** is raising her newborn in the large Musilikale group.

By **Veronica Vecellio**  
*Gorilla Program Senior Advisor*

**Since 2005**, September has been the month when Rwandans and all of us here at the Fossey Fund celebrate the mountain gorillas born in the past year.

At Rwanda's annual Kwita Izina ceremony, the infants each receive their official names, which are chosen to reflect various aspects of gorilla life and conservation.

This year has been a wonderful one for the groups historically

monitored by the Fossey Fund, as we welcomed 12 new infants. They will be followed throughout their lives so be sure to check our website ([gorillafund.org](http://gorillafund.org)) and social media (@[savinggorillas](https://twitter.com/savinggorillas)) to learn about the new names they receive this month, including their special meanings.

## **Special births: Surprises and successes**

Perhaps the most unique births of the past year happened in Dushishoze's group, as mother-daughter duo Gutangara and Shishikara each

gave birth to male infants, only two months apart.

This would be special by itself, except that this mother-daughter duo did the same thing four years ago! Their 2-year-old family group is now thriving, with its nine gorillas.

In Musilikale's group, we are always impressed by the continued growth of what is now the largest group we monitor, at 24 gorillas. This year the group had two new infants, and one of them happened to be born on Jan. 16, the same day as Dian Fossey. The mother, named

Isaro, is very experienced at raising her infants, which bodes well for the new little one. The second infant in this group was born to mother Muntu, who has unfortunately experienced the loss of many of her earlier infants. So we hope this time she will be luckier and the infant will thrive.

With three newborns, Mutobo's group had the record for the most infants this year – two males and one female. Mothers Ishyaka and Mudakama gave birth within two weeks of each other, while the latest addition arrived on July 1, to mother Akaramata. The group has now reached 10 members.

### **From oldest group to newest and farthest**

In the historic Pablo group, which has been monitored since it formed in 1993, there was one birth, to mother Teta.

Teta spends a lot of time near silverback Gicurasi, even though he has been challenged for dominance by his cousin, Ubwuzu.

Pablo's group once reached a high of 65 gorillas, led by the late great silverback Cantsbee. It currently has 18 gorillas.

Segasira's group, which was formed just a year ago, achieved great success with the birth of two female infants this year. Mother Taraja gave birth on Feb. 22, and Ubuhamyia followed on May 29. The group now has eight gorillas, seven of whom are females. As the only silverback, Segasira has a lot of work to do protecting his group!

Kuryama's group currently ranges most of the time over the border in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where our trackers cannot go. However, when they sometimes cross back into Rwanda, we are able to monitor them and see what has changed in their group. This year we were happy to see a newborn in the group, from mother Keza, bringing the group's total to 18 members

And, finally, in Ntambara's group, Kurinda gave birth to a female, exactly four years after her previous infant, Bisoke. This group now consists of 14 gorillas.

We are incredibly excited about these births and the continued growth of the mountain gorilla population, as it gives us hope for their future and shows that the conservation work carried out every day by the Fossey Fund and its partners is succeeding.

*Visit our website ([gorillafund.org](http://gorillafund.org)) and social media (@savinggorillas) to follow up regularly as we report on the progress of these infants and their groups. ■*



**Above, Mother Ubuhamyia** had her latest infant on May 29.

**Below, Mother Akaramata's** newborn arrived on July 1.



## Grauer's gorilla forests in DR Congo

# Where community & wildlife co-exist



**These traditional Congolese landowners** have officially dedicated their forests to conservation, helping to save gorillas and other wildlife, while bringing significant benefits to their own communities.

**The Fossey Fund's work** in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was initiated in 2002 to help save the critically endangered Grauer's gorillas living there, most of which are outside of protected areas. Because these are forests that have been used by people for centuries to help meet their basic needs for survival, our work has focused on finding the best ways for humans and wildlife to co-exist in a mutually beneficial way, and has now become a successful model for conservation.

Unlike the model used in national parks, where human activities are prohibited, our goal in Congo is to help both gorillas and human populations thrive together. This means helping to empower the local communities, which are among the world's poorest, to safeguard the forest while at the same time gaining other resources to support them, thus helping them benefit from participating in conservation.

"We work in full collaboration with communities because we believe that the future of these gorillas — and these forests — is in their hands," says Fossey Fund Congo Program Director Urbain Ngobobo.



**Most Grauer's gorillas live in extremely remote forests within the critical Congo Basin.**

"Through this work, they can see that participating in conservation has benefits for them, while also protecting these important forests for nature and the planet. This is a long-term sustainable approach that benefits everyone — people, gorillas, other wildlife, even the climate."

### **Community forests**

Our work in Congo is based in the Nkuba Conservation Area (NCA), which is located in the core of the Grauer's gorilla range, between two national parks. In 2012, Ngobobo began meeting with traditional landowning families in the area, who agreed to set aside 700 square kilometers of forest for protection and conservation. By 2016 more families joined and 1,300 square kilometers were included. In 2020, other families joined and currently this area has been expanded to include more than 2,457 square kilometers (1,000 square miles), with more on the horizon.

"Our hope is to create an important corridor for Grauer's gorillas between Maiko and Kahuzi-Biega national parks," says Tara Stoinski, Ph.D.,

Fossey Fund President and CEO/ Chief Scientific Officer. “We also hope this work creates a model for community-centered conservation in the region.”

To secure long-term governance and protection of these lands, the Fossey Fund then helped the families involved to gain formal legal status from provincial governments, protecting the forest from mining and other industries. These are called “community-managed forest concessions” (CFCLs) and give the local communities official ownership and management rights over their forests.

We also created a 25-year renewable contract with the communities to enable management of the forests. While the core areas are set aside for gorilla habitat, there are zones that are identified for mixed use, so that communities can still access some of the forest resources they have depended on for decades. This management is conducted in collaboration with the communities and all other stakeholders. In addition, the Fossey Fund participated in an agreement with the Congolese Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, to further ensure best practices and legal management of the Nkuba Conservation Area.

### Community benefits

Communities in the NCA are also receiving direct benefits in return for forest conservation, which help

compensate for the ways they are supporting and changing the use of the forest. This includes such benefits as monthly stipends for families, payment of fees for children’s schooling, and the many livelihood, food security and education initiatives we have undertaken — fish farming, literacy training, kitchen gardens, bee keeping, soap making, oil pressing, adult education, and supporting a sewing cooperative and local development committees.

A crucial key to the success of such a program is long-term financial security that is not solely dependent on philanthropy. That is why we are also pursuing carbon credits as a mechanism for bringing direct income to the communities for this protection and engagement work, enabling these amazing forests to receive monetary value as they are,

credits for sale by mid 2024.

“This work is crucial in terms of saving the Grauer’s gorillas but offers great hope for the communities as well, with a model of conservation that benefits everyone,” says Dr. Stoinski. “People can actually see the positive impact of these initiatives on the well-being of their villages and households as well as the restoration of the key wildlife that once filled this forest.”

The village of Nkuba is one of the most remote in the area, but now is a key player in the conservation of forests and an inspiring model for other communities, who are now visiting us and considering the replication of it elsewhere, says Ngobobo.

“We, as landowners, are so happy to be officially recognized as participants and beneficiaries of the nature conservation process,” says Lupao Alimgi, a landowner who has participated in this work.

“Thanks to the Fossey Fund’s help, animals are thriving in our forests. We find more monkeys, buffaloes, antelopes and, of course, gorillas,” adds landowner Abegendo Matambo.

And other landowners point out additional benefits of this conservation effort, such as being able to pay the fees necessary to send their children to school.

“We are very grateful for that,” says Tabu Kamukaye, president of the Union of Landowners for the Development and Protection of the

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**Bread making** is one of our community food security and livelihood initiatives in the Congo.

rather than being converted for timber or destroyed through mining. This process is a long one: We have been working to complete all the required steps for the last three years and hope that we will have

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Environment – UTDPE).

Indeed, before this work began, most girls in Nkuba did not receive any schooling and married at a young age, while boys rarely were able to finish secondary school. Now school enrollment has increased, says Wasso Kitwanda, a local high school principal. “We are very happy that the schooling education program initiated by the Fossey Fund has made a significant difference,” he says.

### Community heroes

Amid all this work, our efforts to protect and study the gorillas here continue to grow as well. More than 110 trackers – all hired from the surrounding communities – provide daily monitoring of about 90% of the enormous area (as a comparison, it is 45 times the size of the island of Manhattan, and more than five times larger than the volcanoes massif where mountain gorillas live). They camp for weeks at a time in the forest and collect critical information about the gorillas. Our surveillance field teams focus on protecting

## The Nkuba Anthem

**Children in Nkuba**, who participate in our nature club programs in local schools, wrote these lyrics to a song they call “The Nkuba Anthem.”

*We, the community of Nkuba,  
We now grow our fields to fight hunger,  
Which made us hunt animals,  
But now the gorilla is our friend.  
Dian Fossey, our hero, our reference  
Our hope is born in 1967  
And today, we change our ways.*

additional areas, removing snares and recording human activities in the forest. And our biodiversity team continues to expand the study of other important wildlife as well as the dynamics of the forest, ranging from other large mammals to endangered grey parrots.

In addition to being on the front-line protecting these forests, our trackers have become role models in the local community, helping everyone to learn about conservation and its potential benefits. For their bravery and their dedication to this challenging and demanding

work, they recently were named Disney Conservation Heroes by the Disney Conservation Fund. Indeed, they epitomize the goal of community and wildlife co-existing and benefitting from each other.

“I am grateful that the Fossey Fund has come to help us protect this forest,” says tracker Bokongo Akilimari, who formerly hunted in the forest for food. “We – the community around the forest – know its value and now we can stop harming the wildlife there and

instead take the lead in protecting them. In my job as a tracker, I can contribute to conservation while also being able to support my family, pay school fees for my children and receive health services.”

“Everyone feels the importance of this work,” says Emma Impink, Fossey Fund community engagement consultant, who has been based in Nkuba to help us expand our efforts there. “Everyone is so dedicated despite all the challenges. The commitment and the vision are incredibly inspiring. Everyone is in this for the long haul.” ■

## Give gifts with meaning

### Adopt a gorilla and you will help save a species

**Our symbolic mountain gorilla adoption program** offers a unique and significant way to help save gorillas and their critical forests.

**Every adoption directly supports our daily gorilla protection work in the wild**, monitoring endangered gorilla families and helping save their critical forest homes.

#### Each adoption comes with

- 1) an adoption certificate,
- 2) a detailed profile of your gorilla with photos,
- 3) a special video of your gorilla,
- 4) regular updates and more. *You'll definitely feel like you have a new family member!*

Choose a silverback, infant, juvenile or even a golden monkey to adopt at our website: [gorillafund.org/adopt](http://gorillafund.org/adopt)



**The feisty little Nshunguye** is one of the current Adopt options and she has some very historic ancestors!

## Donor spotlight: George Pierce

# Visiting the gorillas after decades of support

**Long-time** Fossey Fund supporter George Pierce has been interested in the mountain gorillas since the late 1980s, when he saw a magazine article about them being on the verge of extinction. He was so moved by what he read that he offered to help support their conservation and soon became a symbolic adopter of a young gorilla named Inshuti.

“As the years went by, I received frequent updates and photos of Inshuti’s progress and was encouraged by the increasing awareness of the mountain gorillas’ plight,” he says. “I marveled at reading about the dedication of Dian Fossey as well as the scientists who followed her and the people of Rwanda. Without their passion and commitment, there would never have been the results we see today, where they are the only ape whose numbers are increasing.”

In addition to his own support, Pierce says he was also privileged to be able to support the Fossey Fund’s work through a foundation he helps manage. That led to a special opportunity this year — a trip to see the gorillas first-hand, led by Fossey Fund President and CEO/Chief Scientific Officer, Tara Stoinski, Ph.D.

### Seeing the gorillas

While in Rwanda, Pierce went on two gorilla treks and was surprised by how powerful the experience was seeing the gorillas in their natural habitat.

“The infants seemed surprisingly more fragile than I expected but incredibly curious about the world around them, wandering off under the watchful eyes of their mothers,” says Pierce, who notes that his favorite



**George Pierce** began his support by adopting gorilla Inshuti, *below*, many years ago.



memory, among many, was an infant gorilla using his enormous silverback father as a ladder to reach and climb up a bamboo stalk.

“After climbing seven or eight feet up, the expression on the youngster’s face suggested that he felt he may have gotten in a little over his head. It was priceless! Fortunately, his mother came to the rescue and pulled him down, taking him on her back to a nearby tree to continue enjoying her lunch.

“Watching youngsters playing, rolling, climbing and falling in the background while the adults were resting was so reassuring. It shows that the protection of the Fossey Fund is working and allowing the gorillas to thrive,” he adds.

“This was the trip of a lifetime but I hope to go back soon. For anyone interested or fascinated to observe these rare, magnificent creatures in their natural habitat, I strongly encourage a visit.”

Pierce also reports enjoying our new Ellen campus. “It was fantastic — with world-class architecture — sustainable, educational and beautiful. You won’t be disappointed!”

### And as for Inshuti

Since Pierce first adopted him, Inshuti has led a fascinating life. Now 35 years old, he lives as a solitary silverback. However, he did have a group of his own at one time, which he led for seven years. Now he is the

oldest silverback we monitor and it is unlikely he will form a group again due to his age. However, our trackers still see him in the forest from time to time, and he appears to be calm and well, without the stress of leading a group. ■

## Forward

*Continued from page 1*

tional eight families of gorillas living in Volcanoes National Park. While these groups are protected by the Rwandan government, they have not been part of long-term research. And we are finding amazing differences between the two populations, even though they live only a few kilometers apart. *(Details coming in the next edition of the Gorilla Journal).*

I'm incredibly proud that we supported more than 30 of our team members in Africa to attend the

world's largest international conference on conservation science — the 31st International Congress for Conservation Biology, which was held this summer in Kigali, Rwanda. I was honored to be one of the plenary speakers there as well, providing conservationists from around the world an in-depth look at our work.

### **New models for the future**

Finally, I'm especially encouraged to report that our efforts to save the rapidly declining Grauer's gorillas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are succeeding. Here we have

built a community-based conservation program, which is being held up as a model for conservation success in the region. Our trackers there were even chosen as "Conservation Heroes" by the Disney Conservation Fund. *(See story about our latest Congo work on page 4).*

All of this work is possible thanks to YOUR support — your investment in us has enabled us to grow to meet the increasing conservation demands of the future. I hope you enjoy reading about the impact of your support and all that we have been able to accomplish together! ■

## **Your legacy matters**

### **Ensure a lasting impact with the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund**

**Creating a legacy is about more than just leaving a mark on the world — it's about preserving your values and making a lasting impact.**

By including the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund in your estate plans, you can create a powerful testament to your belief in conservation and the protection of endangered gorillas.

**When you choose to make a gift to the Fossey Fund in your will, trust or retirement plan, you go beyond simply supporting our ongoing efforts to expand protection, research and education initiatives. You demonstrate your deep care and commitment to a cause that truly matters to you.**

**Conservation is a collective effort.** It's built upon the foundation of countless acts of service, study, giving and partnership, both during your lifetime and beyond.

By including the Fossey Fund in your estate plans, you **become an essential part of this interconnected web of support.**

**To discover more about planned giving opportunities and how you can leave a lasting legacy, visit us at [gorillafund.org/plannedgiving](http://gorillafund.org/plannedgiving).**

**If you have any questions or would like to discuss your legacy intentions, please contact Beth A. Warner, our Chief Philanthropy Officer, at [bwarners@gorillafund.org](mailto:bwarners@gorillafund.org).**

**Your legacy matters to us, and together, we can ensure a brighter future for the magnificent gorillas we strive to protect.**



### **Thank you to our Corporate Sponsors for their extraordinary support in 2023**



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