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CONGO MOUNTAIN GORILLA POPULATION UP BY 12.5% IN LAST 16 MONTHS

DR Congo's habituated Mountain Gorilla population in Virunga National Park increased by 12.5 percent from 72 to 81 gorillas between August 2007 and January 2009, according to the results of an 8-week census conducted by the [Congolese Wildlife Authority](#) (ICCN) released today. Based on a previous 2003 census, Park Rangers also estimate 120 non-habituated Mountain Gorillas in the 250 sq km Mikeno Sector of the park, the only area in DR Congo that is home to Mountain Gorillas, bringing the country's Mountain Gorilla population total to circa 200. The worldwide population of Mountain Gorillas is believed to be 720, all of them living in the conflict-affected area between DR Congo, Uganda and Rwanda.

"The status of Virunga's Mountain Gorillas is a triumph for conservation, and is the product of 15 years' effort and sacrifice on the part of Congo's Rangers, of the consistent support from international organisations and individuals, and of the sustained determination of 3 African nations to protect this globally important species," said Virunga National Park Director [Emmanuel de Merode](#).

Over 50 Park Rangers conducted over 128 patrols during the census, and identified 6 gorilla families in Mikeno and 3 solitary Silverbacks. The largest family is the Kabirizi Family, with 33 individuals including 5 newborns. The Rugendo family - victim of the July 2007 massacre - now has 9 members, up from 5, including 2 Silverbacks vying for control of the group.

"Mountain Gorilla family structures change with each birth, death, interaction and migration. The Kabirizi family, our largest gorilla group with 33 individuals, has 5 newborns which is wonderful news. But we are still hoping to locate the 2 gorillas from this same family that we have not yet seen," said ICCN Gorilla Monitoring Head [Innocent Mburanumwe](#).

During the 16-month period from August 2007 to late January 2009 10 baby gorillas were born into 4 of the habituated families - the Kabirizi, Mapuwa, Lulengo and Mapuwa families - and 2 adult female gorillas previously non-identified (from non-habituated groups) have joined habituated gorilla families. Three gorillas that had been previously identified in the August 2007 census have not been found and are listed as missing.

Significantly no evidence of gorilla mortality was reported by Rangers, although 536 snares laid by poachers were found and removed by Park Rangers, representing a significant increase as compared to previous findings. Snares are laid to catch small antelope and other forest animals, but gorillas, especially infants, are sometimes caught in the snare and can suffer loss of limb or life.



Matembela and Mahindure, 2 gorillas in the Humba group, copyright Gorilla.cd

The east of DR Congo has seen intense conflict and civil war in recent years that has been widely reported in the international media. The Mountain Gorillas of Virunga have been severely threatened by the lack of security and stability in the region, and from poaching, deforestation, and the illegal charcoal trade. In 2007 10 Mountain Gorillas were killed in 4 separate incidents.

Some 1,100 Park Rangers protect the National Parks of Eastern Congo, a region affected by a 10-year civil war and current political instability. These parks are home to Mountain Gorillas, chimpanzees, forest elephants and rhinos. The Rangers have remained active in protecting these parks, 4 of which have been classified as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

To read the full Mountain Gorilla Survey Report please go to:
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Rangers conducting the Gorilla Census, Jan 2009, copyright Gorilla.cd

Editor's Notes:

Mountain Gorillas are critically endangered, with only 720 remaining in the world, about 380 in the Virunga Volcanoes Conservation Area (shared by DRC, Rwanda and Uganda) and 320 in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Uganda.

The [Congolese Wildlife Authority](#) (ICCN) and its Rangers work throughout the country to protect the National Parks of Congo and their wildlife from poachers, rebel groups, illegal miners and land invasions. Over 150 Rangers have been killed in the last 10 years protecting the 5 parks of eastern DR Congo, and Rangers worked throughout the civil war without receiving a salary.

Virunga National Park, Africa's oldest national park (established in 1925) and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979, is home to some 200 of the world's mountain gorillas. Formerly known as Albert National Park, Virunga lies in eastern DR Congo and covers 7,800 square kilometers. The park is managed by the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature, the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN).

The 2003 Virunga Volcanoes Range Mountain Gorilla Census was conducted by the wildlife authorities of DR Congo, Rwanda and Uganda in conjunction with

international organizations.



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