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**WORLD'S ONLY 2 BABY ORPHAN MOUNTAIN GORILLAS TO GET UNIQUE CUSTOM-BUILT SANCTUARY IN DR CONGO BY MARCH 2010**

The only two baby mountain gorillas in the world in captivity, orphaned in 2007 following the massacre of their mothers in the wild, are to get a new custom-built sanctuary in Virunga National Park, eastern DR Congo, the [Congolese Wildlife Authority](#) announced today. Ndeze & Ndakasi, the 2 1/2 year old female orphans, have been living in the city of Goma since mid 2007 due to the ongoing conflict in eastern DR Congo, but will move by March 2010 to their lush forest habitat in Virunga.

The Congolese Wildlife Authority started building the Senkwekwe Centre, named after the majestic Silverback that was murdered by unknown assailants in July 2007, a year ago, but work was stopped following a rebel invasion of the park. Construction of the centre, a 2.5 acre (1 hectare) plot of forest 3 miles from the gorilla habitat in Virunga, re-started in September.



*The orphans are now 2 1/2 years old; 4 carers are responsible for their welfare, in conjunction with veterinarians from the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project.*

***"The Senkwekwe Centre is not just a new home for the only 2 baby mountain gorillas in captivity in the world." said [Emmanuel de Merode](#), Director of Virunga National Park. "It also represents a unique opportunity to enable the local population to see gorillas, and provides a launchpad for the veterinary activities that are conducted throughout Virunga, the oldest park in Africa."***

The centre includes a 40 x 40 meter interior holding facility which is complete. The larger perimeter wall, in addition to visitation platforms, an education center and veterinary facilities, is slated for completion by March 2010.



*Ndeze, pictured here with Andre Bauma, chief carer, weighs 20 kilos (44 pounds)*

The Congolese Wildlife Authority [launched a campaign](#) on Monday to raise \$100,000 for the completion of the Senwkekwe Centre. All funds raised by 24 December will be matched, dollar for dollar, by the United Nations Foundation.

Some 1,100 Park Rangers protect the National Parks of eastern DR Congo, a region affected by a 12-year civil war and current political instability. These parks are home to mountain gorillas, lowland gorillas, chimpanzees, forest elephants and rhinos, among other wildlife. The Rangers have remained active in protecting these parks, 4 of which have been classified as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Poaching, wildlife trafficking and habitat destruction remain the key threats to the survival of the wildlife in these parks.

#### **Editor's Notes:**

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 DRC, and Rangers worked throughout the civil war, rarely receiving a salary.

**Gorillas** are the largest of the living primates. The Mountain Gorilla (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) is one of the two subspecies of Eastern Gorilla and is found in the Virunga volcanoes region of Central Africa and in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda. The Lowland Eastern Gorilla (*Gorilla beringei graueri*), also known as the Grauer's Gorilla, is a subspecies of Eastern Gorilla and is only found in the forests of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

**Virunga National Park**, Africa's oldest national park (established in 1925) and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979, is home to 200 of the world's mountain gorillas and a small population of eastern lowland 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).

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