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TRIUMPH FOR CONSERVATIONISTS AS CONGO'S 2 BABY ORPHAN MOUNTAIN GORILLAS MOVED TO LUSH, FOREST SANCTUARY

The only two baby mountain gorillas in the world in captivity, orphaned in 2007 in DR Congo following the massacre of their mothers in the wild, moved yesterday to a new sanctuary in lush, forest habitat in Virunga National Park, eastern DRC, the [Congolese Wildlife Authority](#) announced. Ndeze & Ndakasi, the 2 1/2 year old female orphans, had been living in the city of Goma since mid 2007 due to the conflict in eastern DR Congo.

"The successful transfer of these orphaned mountain gorillas from unsuitable conditions in Goma to the Senkwekwe Centre here in Rumangabo is a big victory in the fight to ensure the survival of the subspecies," said [Emmanuel de Merode](#), Director of Virunga National Park. *"But we have not yet won the war to protect the gorillas or Virunga from the many threats that continue to endanger them both. We must not forget that Virunga remains arguably the most threatened park in Africa."*

The orphans were successfully transferred yesterday from Goma to Rumangabo park station. Soon after dawn the rangers and carers of the [Congolese Wildlife Authority](#), veterinarians from the [Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project](#), and a carer from the [Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund](#) met to escort the gorillas to their new home. Their 3-vehicle convoy completed the 45km (1h30m) journey along the dusty streets of Goma and the dirt road that forms the border between DR Congo and Rwanda. The carefully orchestrated and executed operation was filmed by the Digital Media Department of Virunga National Park.



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The orphans are now living in a 40 x 40 meter interior holding facility within the 2.5 acre Senkwekwe Centre, pending the completion of the larger perimeter wall. The wall, as well as visitation platforms, an education center and veterinary facilities, are slated for completion by March 2010.

"The Senkwekwe Centre will provide a cleaner and more hygienic environment, that will enable us, as vets, to keep the gorilla orphans healthier," said Mike Cranfield, Director of the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project. "Furthermore the psychological wellbeing of the orphans will be enhanced by living in their natural habitat."



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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.

The Congolese Wildlife Authority [launched a campaign](#) in mid-November 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.



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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.



*The truck transporting the gorillas, entering Virunga National Park yesterday.
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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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