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GORILLA AGREEMENT ACTION PLAN

EASTERN LOWLAND GORILLA *(Gorilla beringei graueri)*

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Eastern Lowland Gorilla *Gorilla beringei graueri*

Gorilla Agreement **Action Plan**

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the Conservation of Gorilla and their Habitats (Rome, Italy, 29 November 2008)*

English Action Plans include additional editing not included in French versions.

Action Plan

Eastern Lowland Gorilla (*Gorilla beringei graueri*)

Species Range

Endemic to eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Introduction

With an area of some 2,345,409 km², the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the second largest country in sub-Saharan Africa. An equatorial climate and low population density have allowed the DRC to preserve one of the largest tropical forest in the world - the basis of life for many threatened species such as the Bonobo, gorillas, okapis - and large savannahs inhabited by numerous large mammal species and many other emblematic groups. The DRC was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Five major sites of global significance are listed as World Heritage Sites: Virunga National Park - the first African national park, Garamba NP, Kahuzi-Biega NP, Salonga NP and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.

In the recent past, however, the DRC has had to endure several decades of poor economic policies, bad governance, and wars. In 1996, a civil war erupted in the country, driven both by internal conflicts as well as forces from outside the country.

It appears that the right policies are now being put in place to pave the way for a restoration of economic growth (Akitoby, B., Cinyabuguma, M., 2004).

The Eastern Lowland Gorilla, *Gorilla beringei graueri*, is endemic to DRC: it has a discontinuous distribution east of the Lualaba River and west of the Albertine Rift, from the northwest corner of Lake Edward in the north, to the northwest corner of Lake Tanganyika in the south.

The rate of habitat loss for the Eastern Lowland Gorilla is possibly the highest of any of the gorilla subspecies (The Rainforest Foundation, 2004). Its range went down from 21,000km² in 1959-1960, to 15,000km² in the 1990s. In 1998, the global population was estimated around 16,900 individuals. Most gorillas lived in Kahuzi-Biega NP, where gorilla populations suffered a severe decline in the late 1990s, and are now down to only a few thousands according to some sources (Caldecott and Miles, 2005).

Before the 1996-2002 conflict, eastern DRC already had some of the highest human densities in Central Africa. About a million refugees entered DRC from Rwanda in 1994, and settled in the vicinity of Virunga NP and near Kahuzi-Biega NP. Large areas of forest were cleared and the huge demand for fuelwood and food led to incursions into both PAs (Caldecott and Miles, 2005).

Many Eastern Lowland Gorillas in both Kahuzi-Biega and Maiko NPs were slaughtered by fighters or refugees. The high price given for coltan (columbium and tantalum) in 1998-2000 led to an increased invasion of Kahuzi-Biega NP and the Okapi Faunal Reserve by an estimated 10,000 people (Caldecott and Miles, 2005). Professional hunters accompanied these miners and their families.

Following these troubled times it is difficult to know how many Eastern Lowland Gorillas remain. Population surveys have only been carried out in a few sites. It is certain that by 1999, the highland sector of Kahuzi-Biega NP had lost about 50% of its gorilla population, including 88% of the gorillas habituated for tourism because they were particularly easy to shoot.

The rate of habitat loss for the Eastern Lowland Gorilla is frighteningly high. It has already lost more than 87% of its range, and the global population is now highly fragmented. The

small Masisi (28 individuals in 1998) and Mt Tshiaberimu (18 individuals in 2008) populations are particularly vulnerable. Extensive agricultural encroachment took place on the boundary of Mt Tshiaberimu during the refugee crisis (Butynski and Sarimento, 1995) and while much of that land was reclaimed, encroachment remains a major problem.

The country's poor infrastructure has so far limited extensive logging operations, which has effectively protected much of DRC forests. But this is likely to change rapidly and it is estimated that 5,320km² of forest are cleared each year (FAO, 2003).

Although no firm figures are available, the Eastern Lowland Gorilla seems to have been very badly affected towards the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, following the spread of warfare throughout its range. Many gorillas may have been killed to provide bushmeat for armed factions, miners, displaced people, and it is possible that the population may have collapsed as a result (S.Ferris et al., 2005).

1. Existing Legislation

a. National

The Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism is the government body in charge of nature conservation. The Nature Conservation Act Ordinance-Law 69.041, 1969 defines national parks. Law 82.002, 1982, defines faunal and game reserves and lists species for which hunting and trapping are prohibited.

There are 4 main categories of PA in DRC:

- National parks (9)
- Game reserves (1)
- Forest reserves (7)
- Faunal reserves (2)

There are also areas set aside for hunting purposes and for scientific purposes. All these are managed by the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN). A Forest Code was established in 2003, under which the state owns all forests and defines legitimate uses for them. Legal mechanisms and zoning system are to follow. There is concern as to the fact that forest people's rights are recognised, and there has been little civil society involvement in the formulation of this code. Forest exploitation taxes are very low, US\$ 0.06/ha; the World Bank estimates that 600,000km² will be zoned as production forests. Timber extraction will be facilitated by more than 270 million dollars promised donors funds, equivalent to more than 5,000km of unpaved roads, or more than 1,000km of paved roads.

In 2008, the ICCN published a National Strategy for Community Conservation to facilitate the legal and institutional framework for innovative community reserves such as those in Walikale and Tayna which protect important populations of Eastern Lowland Gorillas.

b. International

- CMS, 1990
- CBD, 1994
- WHC, 1974
- ACCNR, 1976
- CITES, 1976
- COMIFAC Treaty, 2005
- Kinshasa Declaration on Great Apes, 2005
- CMS Gorilla Agreement, 2008

As a result of the wars and conflicts, all five World Heritage sites were progressively put back on the List of World Heritage in Danger (Virunga National Park in 1994, Garamba National Park in 1996, Kahuzi-Biega National Park and Okapi Faunal Reserve in 1997 and Salonga National Park in 1999).

2. Conservation actions undertaken

Areas of importance to Eastern Lowland Gorilla conservation:

By the mid-1990s, the total population was estimated at around 17,000 individuals, in at least 11 sub-populations.

- **Kahuzi-Biega National Park (KBNP):** designated as a National Park in 1970, the park was created primarily to preserve the Eastern Lowland Gorilla and its habitats. It covers around 6,000 km², and is located in South Kivu, one of the most densely populated areas throughout Africa (300-600 people/km²). The Park is divided in two sectors, linked by a narrow but important ecological corridor: the first sector is an area of mountain forest, between altitudes of 1,800m and 3,300m, and the second sector is a lowland forest area between 600m and 1,200m. The corridor links the two sectors with contiguous habitat.

The Park has been severely affected during recent periods of armed conflict, with thousands of refugees from Rwanda camped on its borders in the mid 1990s.

The Park is still of the highest importance for the conservation and preservation of the Eastern Lowland Gorilla, and for many other forest species now threatened in many other areas.

Around the mid 1990s, it was generally recognised that the Kahuzi-Biega NP and the adjacent Kasese region were home to an estimated 86% of Eastern Lowland Gorillas. However, with the recent events in the surrounding of the park, it appears that the sub-species has undergone a substantial decline in numbers.

Access to much of the gorilla's range has been very limited in recent years, and whilst it is now just becoming possible again, access remains difficult for security reasons. Even though the available information remains very limited, there is consensus among field workers that a drastic decline in total population has almost certainly occurred. This is attributed to the severe civil war, which has engulfed the whole of the Eastern Lowland Gorilla range for the past 15 years, with its associated rising demands for natural resources, including minerals, wood for charcoal, bushmeat - coupled with the difficulties of law enforcement in a war zone.

One of the best-documented examples of the decline of the Eastern Lowland Gorilla is in the mountain sector of Kahuzi-Biega NP, where the sub-population lost almost 50% of its members in only 3 years (245 individuals in 1996, 130 in 1999). According to the wardens, the population probably suffered even more in the lowland sector of the park.

Armed conflicts in the region have ravaged local communities, and have threatened their livelihoods. As a result, human pressure on the natural resources is higher than ever before. The presence of armed militia groups in and around the Park also serves not only to put further pressure on natural resources, but also to destabilize efforts to rehabilitate KBNP.

The Park is also threatened by the rapid spread of an invasive highland liana species (*Sericostachys scandens*), which causes the decline of local plant species important for the nutrition of gorillas.

Since 2004, the situation has somewhat improved but the easy access from Bukavu which once allowed steady tourism to support and protect the park has not returned to anything like a normal situation.

• **Maiko National Park:** The Maiko National Park (MNP) was officially created in 1970, to protect the critical populations of Grauer's gorilla, chimpanzees, okapis, bongos, forest elephants and Congo peacocks found within its boundaries, but financial and technical support for the management of the Park has always been insufficient. The Park also suffered during the civil wars when armed militia sought refuge in Maiko, exploiting not only its rich fauna, for the fast return from poached ivory and bushmeat, but also its mineral resources from mining of precious minerals in and around the Park (gold, coltan, diamonds, etc.). The national conservation institute, Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), was not in a position to hire or equip the personnel necessary to monitor the Park's borders. The Park is still threatened by these militia groups today.

In 1996 the gorilla populations were estimated to be around 826 individuals in the north, and 33 in the south, with the northern population remaining relatively stable and offering the best hope for conservation. Since then, very little data have been available.

• **Tayna Gorilla Reserve :** (700km²) The Tayna Gorilla Reserve (Réserve des Gorilles de Tayna) is a community-based conservation area created on April 1998, in order to safeguard an important population of the endangered Grauer's gorillas and to provide for local communities. Preliminary surveys suggest that between of 225-360 Eastern Lowland Gorillas occur in the reserve.

There are several community reserves (8). An estimate of the gorilla population in the early 2000s gave a figure of around a thousand individuals in all the reserves together.

• **Mount Tshiaberimu :** In 1996 a tiny population of just 16-18 rare gorillas were found at Mount Tshiaberimu and the ICCN believed that they would soon be extinct if no conservation action was taken. The gorillas are currently classified as Eastern Lowland Gorillas, but are morphologically different to those elsewhere and may yet be reclassified as a distinct sub-species.

Current projects/activities with direct or indirect implications for Gorillas conservation:

- In Kahuzi-Biega, a long-term community based conservation project was established in 1985 with the support of the German overseas development agency **GTZ**, with the main objective of community-focused economic development. GTZ has helped with the infrastructure support for the park, the training of staff, and in providing surveys and surveillance equipment; it has helped funding gorilla population censuses over the entire range. Among other things, an emergency plan was developed for collecting and distributing fuelwood in response to the refugee crisis that started in 1994. Ecotourism and gorilla viewing have generated important revenues between 1986 and 1991 in Kahuzi-Biega NP (2000 visitors, US\$ 200,000). For the last decade, wars have considerably slowed things down, and the slaughter of habituated gorilla group in the park is a major setback (Caldecott and Miles, 2005).
- **WCS** is still active in assessing and monitoring the impacts of war on gorilla populations and habitats in Kahuzi-Biega National Park. WCS assists ICCN in collecting baseline data on key mammals, habitats, and human activities, throughout KBNP. It helps develop capacity through training of National Park staff to improve park management. In collaboration with the WCS Field Vet Program and the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary

Program, work is being done on testing and treatment of park staff who come in regular contact with gorillas for diseases that could possibly be spread from humans to apes.

- **WCS** conducted two surveys (late 1980s and 2005) to assess the state of the natural resources in Maiko NP. It focused on biological inventories to discover and map where the key wildlife is located and to identify human activities that threaten the resources of the Park; it conducted anthropological and economic assessments around and within the Park to map human movements, economic opportunities, and alternative livelihoods. WCS also trained ICCN personnel to improve surveillance, and support for eco-guards to ensure adequate patrols in the Park. WCS is committed to helping build technical capacity and infrastructure to assure the long-term protection of MNP. WCS also worked with local ethnic groups to clarify land tenure claims that reinforce the rights of local people.
- **UNESCO and the United Nations Foundation (UNF)**, launched in 2000 a 4-year project "*Biodiversity Conservation in Regions of Armed Conflict: Conserving World Heritage sites in the Democratic Republic of Congo*", for the conservation of natural heritage during conflict was launched for the initial period of four years. UNESCO, ICCN, and international NGOs as well as the GTZ jointly executed the project with a budget of some \$3 million. A second phase (2004-2008) was made possible through the support of the European Union, the World Bank, several European governments and NGOs.
- The **Gorilla Organization** is partnered with national organisations (POPOF, AFECOD, PAIDEK) that are focusing on community projects and alternative livelihoods around Kahuzi-Biega NP, and also runs an extensive education campaign that includes airing environmental radio broadcasts, screening wildlife documentaries to wide audiences and sponsoring an environmental magazine (Kivu Safari). It facilitated the Durban Process to engage the mining and coltan trading sector and develop a model mine to promote legal, safe mining with minimal environmental impact outside of protected areas.
- **Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund (DFGFI)** started working in Maiko NP in 2003. At the time, there was only one park warden and a handful of unpaid, ill-equipped park guards. The Park now has 140 staff, including 40 guards in each of the three sectors, who have received equipment, uniforms and training in security and biodiversity. DFGFI provides salaries and basic health care. Patrolling has resumed over a significant portion of the park, and a number of patrol stations have been reopened. DFGFI also sponsored biological inventories of large mammals in the park.
- **The Mount Tshiaberimu Conservation Project** is a collaborative initiative between **The Gorilla Organization** and ICCN that began in 1996. The project operated on a grant from the European Union in conjunction with the United Nations Great Apes Survival Project, from 2005 to 2009. Operating costs, rangers' salaries and field rations, education campaign and community support activities around the area have been supported by the project.
- The **Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGFI)** supports the **Tayna Gorilla Reserve community** project, and is working with other local communities on seven other proposed reserves in the vicinity (Bakumbule Reserve, Usala Reserve, Bakano Reserve, Ngira'Yitu Reserve, Punia Reserve): there might be between 700 and 1,400 gorillas in Tayna and these adjacent areas (Caldecott and Miles, 2005). The eight communities have formed the **Union of Associations for Gorilla Conservation and Community Development in Eastern DRC (UGADEC)**. CI also provides support to the project. Surveys of gorilla/elephant/chimpanzee in Tayna Nature Reserve (2001, 2006), supported by DFGFI, suggest that the conservation and protection efforts within the Tayna Reserve are meeting with significant success.

- The **Walikale Community Gorilla Reserve** was established in 2001 by a local committee, and has been supported by the Gorilla Organization since 2003. Not yet a legally protected area, the reserve borders the UGADEC reserves and preliminary surveys suggest the presence of a population of about 750 Grauer's gorillas.
- The “**Initiative Locale pour la Sauvegarde de la Nature (ILSN)**” is active over the Masisi territory;
- The “**Action Communautaire pour la Protection de la Nature Itombwe Mwenga (ACPN-IM)**” is involved in the Itombwe area (prior to 1998, Itombwe forest gorilla population was estimated around 1,150 individuals, with a moderate hunting pressure at the time). Two nature reserves are proposed, the Monts Itombwe NR and the Mont Kabobol NR, as well as a forest reserve (Maniema) and a game reserve (Luama).
- National organisations active in ape conservation are focusing on community projects and alternative livelihoods (**PoPoF, AFECOD, PAIDEK**).
- The **Tayna Center for Conservation Biology (TCCB)**, which was created by the local community and is now a government-recognized university. Located near the Tayna Nature Reserve, TCCB's curriculum is focused on conservation biology. The first set of 40 students completed coursework and final exams in 2006, with graduation ceremonies in 2007. Students who receive degrees in exchange for scholarships will work in community-based reserves (as part of UGADEC) for two years upon graduation
- The **Durban Process** is a Congolese-led, multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to mitigate the effects of illegal mining in the Kahuzi-Biega National Park, by raising awareness, providing alternative livelihoods, reinforcing ICCN's capacity, and developing a pilot project to demonstrate the safe and ethical mining of minerals outside the park. It is currently facilitated by the Gorilla Organization.
- **Woods Hole Research Center** is occupied with the mapping and monitoring of central African forests.
- **Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe** conducts research projects and provides assistance, mainly in Kahuzi-Biega N.P.

3. Needs and recommended priority actions

Policies and legislation

- Maintain ecological corridor between lowland and montane populations in KBNP
- Reclaim parts of Kahuzi-Biega NP still outside ICCN control
- Rehabilitate Maiko NP
- Reclaim parts of Maiko NP still outside ICCN control
- Support development of community conservation initiatives in line with ICCN's National Strategy for Community Conservation 2008.
- Strengthen existing laws to protect gorillas
- Improve wildlife law awareness and enforcement.

Important steps to be taken in the main protected areas

Kahuzi-Biega NP :

- Support and equip the park wardens
- Conduct biological surveys in the lowland sectors of Lulingu, Itebero and Nzovu, to collect information on large mammals, gorilla habitats and populations
- Reinforce wardens' capacities in monitoring and conducting biological surveys
- Reinforce gorilla conservation through a vast environmental education program around KBNP
- Identify current major threats and their impacts on the biodiversity of the park.
- Monitor important botanical modifications to gorilla habitat, particularly on invasive species such as *Sericostachys scandens*; develop methods to control this problem.
- Discourage gorilla and chimpanzee traffic, through confiscation and dismantlement of traffickers network.
- Maintain database of key species, poaching signs and activities of park staff.
- Support law enforcement activities and monitoring of anti-poaching activities by park guards.
- Build personnel capacity through training
- Establish sustainable financing mechanisms to support the site in the long term.

Maiko NP:

- Support and equip the park wardens.
- When possible, conduct surveys on large mammals, gorilla habitats and populations
- Support law enforcement activities and monitoring of anti-poaching activities by park guards.
- Establish sustainable financing mechanisms to support the site in the long term

Other important areas:

- Support community reserves (Itombwe, covering Mwenga, Fizi, Walungu areas; Tayna, Sarambwe...)
- Support Walikale community reserve: the Walikale Community Gorilla Reserve should be legally recognised as an ecological corridor between Maïko and Kahuzi Biega National Parks
- Support conservation of Mount Tshiaberimu, on the north-west edge of Virunga National Park (and resolve the taxonomy issue).
- Evacuate miners and rebels from Kahuzi-Biega NP.

Outreach, education and awareness

- Encourage new awareness initiatives for the preservation of forest biodiversity and gorillas.

Community-based development

- Reinforce efforts to reconstruct infrastructure and re-start projects hampered by war and insecurity.
- Due to years of political instability, agricultural expansion, mining, poor economic conditions and other factors, conservation in South Kivu has become critical.
- Armed conflicts in the region have ravaged local communities, and have threatened their livelihoods. People in the areas live now in wretched conditions. If gorillas are to survive in this terrible context, long-term poverty alleviation programmes, identification of long-term solutions and support, and environmental education projects must be developed. For most of the local population, everything is missing, from drinking water to basic safety.
- Encourage support of international aid agencies and private sector for basic needs such as enhancing local standards of living, providing alternative sources of livelihood around protected areas and educational activities.