

## World's rarest gorilla ready for its close-up (w/ Video)

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This is a still from the first professional video of wild Cross River gorillas.  
Credit: (c) NDR Naturfilm

The world's rarest -- and most camera shy -- great ape has finally been captured on professional video on a forested mountain in Cameroon, according to the Wildlife Conservation Society and Germany's NDR Naturfilm.

With the assistance of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Cameroon Program, a film crew from the Hamburg-based NDR Naturfilm managed to video the elusive Cross River gorilla earlier this year in a stand of montane trees after weeks of effort in the Kagwene Gorilla Sanctuary. The protected area was created in 2008, with the guidance of WCS, specifically to protect the world's rarest great ape.

"These gorillas are extremely wary of humans and are very difficult to photograph or film," said Dr. Roger Fotso, Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Cameroon Program. "Eventually, we identified and staked out some of the gorillas favorite fig trees, which is where we finally achieved our goal."

"It's unbelievable that one [great ape](#) subspecies has never been filmed for TV so far," said Jörn Röver, Head of NDR Naturfilm. "We hope that our international production helps to raise awareness for these magnificent creatures and the work of the WCS."

The only previous footage available of the rare apes was taken from a long distance with a shaky, hand-held camera in 2005 by a field researcher.

Due to the steep mountain terrain, tracking gorillas in Kagwene is time-consuming and sometimes treacherous. Through the years, WCS researchers have developed an effective non-invasive [monitoring system](#) aimed at keeping track of the gorillas without disturbing them or getting them used to human presence. After weeks with WCS's assistance, the crew finally filmed several minutes of two gorillas feeding on figs some 30-40 feet above the forest floor.

"These extraordinary images are vital for the fight to save the world's least known and rarest ape as well as the mountain rainforest on which they depend," said Dr. James Deutsch, Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Africa Program. "Over the past twenty years, local communities, the governments of Cameroon and Nigeria, funders, and committed conservationists have laid the foundation for a great conservation success story. We hope these pictures will introduce to the world the lead players in this story, the Cross River gorillas themselves."

Funders for efforts to conserve Cross River gorillas include: the US Fish

and Wildlife Service, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (the German Development Bank), the Arcus Foundation, WWF, the Margot Marsh Biodiversity Foundation, the Taronga Foundation, the Kolmarden Fundraising Foundation, and the North Carolina Zoo.

Classified as Critically Endangered by IUCN's Red List, the Cross River gorilla is the rarest of the four subspecies of gorilla, numbering fewer than 300 individuals across its entire range in Cameroon and Nigeria. It is one of two subspecies of western gorilla, the other being the western lowland gorilla. The eastern gorilla includes two subspecies: the eastern lowland gorilla, and the famous mountain gorillas of the Virunga Mountains and southern Uganda (the latter of which numbers approximately 700 individuals).

The Kagwene Gorilla Sanctuary is a small reserve, only 19.5 square kilometers in size. Nevertheless, it contains a genetically important segment of the entire Cross River gorilla population; it is estimated that the sanctuary currently contains approximately 16 individual animals.

While many populations of gorillas are threatened by poachers, the gorillas of Kagwene have been protected by the local belief that the apes are people and therefore cannot be hunted or consumed.

Elsewhere, hunting continues to be one of the biggest threats to Cross River gorillas in addition to habitat destruction. [Gorillas](#) are occasionally targeted by bushmeat hunters in the region, and genetic analysis of the population reveals a reduction in numbers over the last 200 years that is most likely due to hunting. The fragmentation of their forest habitat is caused by farming, road-building, and the burning of forests by pastoralists to encourage new grass for their herds.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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