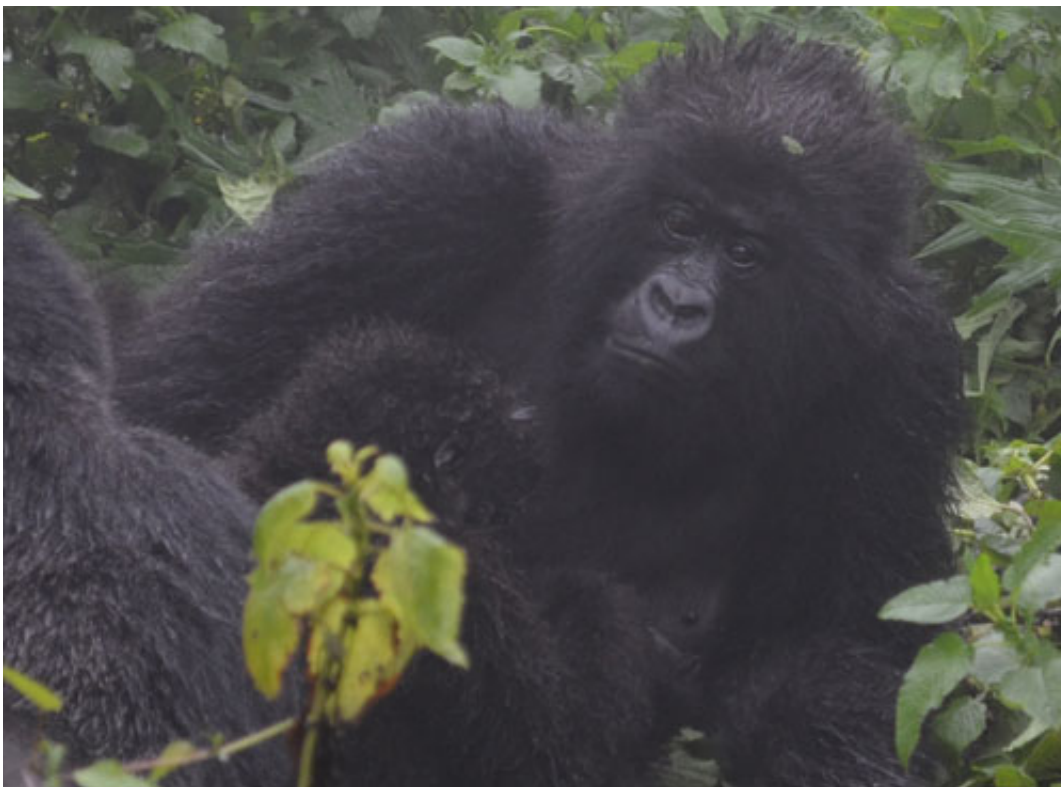


Mountain gorillas now the only great ape with clear signs of increasing population despite continued pressure on habitat

November 14 2012, by Ally Catterick



Positive signs of a growing mountain gorilla population. Credit: Ally Catterick/FFI

A census of [mountain gorillas](#) released today has confirmed an increase in the population of the species.

Conducted in 2011 in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda, the survey confirms a minimum population of 400 gorillas, raising the world population of [mountain gorillas](#) to 880. The official result was released by the Uganda Minister for [Tourism](#), Wildlife, and [Antiquities](#) Hon. Maria Mutagamba alongside representatives of the Uganda Wildlife Authority.

[Fauna](#) & Flora International (FFI), a coalition partner (with the African Wildlife Foundation and WWF) of the [International Gorilla Conservation Programme](#) (IGCP), has been working to conserve the species for more than two decades.

Katie Frohardt, FFI United States Executive Director, and current IGCP board member, said of the report, "This news is so heartening. These [census](#) numbers reflect the success of the conservation journey so many partners have worked together to achieve. The capacity and leadership that so clearly now exists within each range state, to effectively protect mountain gorillas and their habitat is what we've all been – and continue – working toward. Warm congratulations to Uganda Wildlife Authority and their many partners regionally – a moment for global celebration."

The increase in the Bwindi population since the last census, from 302 in 2006 to 400 in 2011, is attributed to improved techniques in capturing data on these rare and elusive apes, as well as real population growth.

For this survey, teams systematically moved through Bwindi not once, but twice, looking for and documenting mountain gorilla night nests and faeces, and collecting faecal samples for genetic analysis. The first sweep was conducted by a small team from February 28 to September 2, 2011, while the second sweep was conducted with multiple teams from September 10 to November 3, 2011. Through genetic analysis, in what is referred to as a modified mark recapture method, scientists were able to determine how many unique groups and individuals were found by the

field census teams in both sweeps.

The two sweeps of Bwindi allowed the teams to find more gorillas than a single sweep would have. Although it is likely that some gorillas were missed by in the previous field census in the 2006 census of Bwindi's mountain gorillas, all signs show that that this population of mountain gorillas is indeed growing.

"This method gives us the clearest picture of the status of mountain gorillas in Bwindi that we have yet had," states Maryke Gray, Technical Advisor to IGCP. "Even with evolving census methods, the results indicate that this population has indeed increased over the last five years, and that is very encouraging for this Critically Endangered species."

Mountain gorillas live in social groups and the census results indicate that the 400 mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park form 36 distinct social groups and 16 solitary males. Ten of these social groups are habituated to human presence for either tourism or research and included, at the time of the census, 168 mountain gorillas or 42% of the Bwindi population.

The Census initially planned to include Sarambwe Nature Reserve in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a protected area continuous with Bwindi and therefore potential habitat for mountain gorillas. However it was not possible to do so due to insecurity in the Sarambwe area throughout the time of the census.

The total [world population](#) of mountain gorillas now stands at a minimum of 880, representing the 400 individuals in Bwindi confirmed in this 2011 census and 480 mountain gorillas in the Virunga Massif confirmed by a census in 2010. Both populations of mountain gorillas have had positive population growth trends over the last decade.

"In fact, the mountain gorilla is the only great ape whose [population](#) is increasing despite continuous pressure on its habitat. This positive trend is due to the strong collaboration among the three countries where mountain gorillas live and the collective efforts on the ground by park staff, surrounding communities and local government, and non-governmental organisations," adds Dr Augustin Basabose, Interim Director of IGCP.

Provided by Fauna & Flora International

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