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Mountain Gorilla Project: Progress Report 5

In January 1982 there was a change in fFPS-funded staff on the Mountain Gorilla Project (MGP) in Rwanda. Conrad and Rosalind Aveling completed their year's contract and Roger Wilson, assisted by Regine Dedonder, took over as field officer. Here he describes the project's substantial progress in its three main programmes, conservation education, park protection and park development, but concludes that there is still much to do before the future of the mountain gorilla is assured.

Conservation Education

In the long run it will be the education programme, Nature et Environnement au Rwanda (NATENRWA), which will most benefit the gorillas, the wildlife in general and the Rwandais. Recognition of NATENRWA's importance has resulted in an increased budget from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and a new full-time worker, Nicole Monfort, supported by the People's Trust for Endangered Species. The programme is co-ordinated by a Rwandan, François Minani from the Ministry of Education in Kigali and has national coverage. The education van is in constant use, visiting secondary schools during term-time and villages bordering the parks during the holidays. Thousands of children are being reached who, until now, had little idea of the wealth of their natural heritage. The wildlife clubs are also expanding. They have a club bulletin *Lichen* and the first primary school club is preparing to start up.

People in the National University are also becoming interested and at a UNESCO-sponsored seminar in Kigali in August not only teachers but representatives of a whole range of organisations involved in environmental affairs participated in a week of very spirited discussion with positive results. Environmental education has also been incorporated in the school curriculum. In the Parc National des Volcans we continue to encourage visits by local schools: so far

this year over 270 children and teachers have seen the park. Transport is the great limitation but it is heartening to see the efforts teachers make to come here. That the conservation message is really taking root has been shown by a detailed article in the national newspaper *Imvaho* and the production of a popular song demanding better protection for gorillas. Neither of these were directly stimulated by the MGP.

Park Protection

Although NATENRWA is gaining ground and most people respect the park, a few continue to despoil it and cause great harm. Park protection is vital and the guards, using a system established by the Rwanda Office of Tourism and National Parks with the assistance of the MGP, took no fewer than 1850 traps in the past ten months. More poachers and woodcutters are caught than ever before—it is rare for a month to pass without catching one—but this reflects an improvement in the frequency, efficiency and area effectively covered rather than an increase in poaching. The African Wildlife Leadership Foundation has helped by providing the MGP with a second-hand Toyota Land-cruiser and two new radios.

The results of the gorilla census of the entire Virungas, organised by the Karisoke Research Centre between May and October 1981, revealed the value of both the MGP and Karisoke in protecting the gorillas. The central third of the Parc National des Volcans where constant monitoring occurs, contains a far higher density than the rest and the proportion of young to adults is approximately 51 per cent compared to about 39 per cent in the rest of the Virungas where poaching is rife. The present population for the Virungas is about 255, a seven per cent decline since 1976; Rwanda's decrease is four per cent and Zaire's is 12 per cent. Young gorillas are the most frequent victims of snaring and the increase in the number of young in Rwanda may be attributed to better wardening and regular checks on the tourist and research groups. However, even here, three gorillas have been seen with snares on their hands of which one had to be removed with human assistance, and a buried skull, presumably awaiting a buyer, was found. There are also large areas of good gorilla habitat which lack gorillas, probably because of

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too much disturbance from illegal entry. There may be gains in the battle against poaching but it is not yet won and we must increase our efforts yet further.

Park Development

There is an added incentive to preserve the park if it contributes to the national economy. The most obvious source of income is tourism: hiking and gorilla visits are the mainstays here and numbers continue to rise. Over the past ten months the 3743 visitors included Princess Paola of Belgium, several representatives of diplomatic missions, and the Prefect of Ruhengeri. These visits underline the international recognition of Rwanda's conservation effort and the value the Rwanda authorities themselves place upon the gorillas. The demand to see the gorillas does have its negative side: saturation is reached in the high tourist seasons, leading to 'illegal' visits which must be stopped. Nevertheless the strictly controlled visiting system is working well and the guides know their job thoroughly. Guide training now concentrates on improving basic French and, in some cases, English. Expansion of tourism will depend upon developing other attractions, particularly hiking, in a manner compatible with good wildlife management but at present we are concentrating on improving the quality of a visit. A new house for MGP staff at Visoke, built with the help of WWF-US has released the original rondavel for visitor reception and, we hope, for an information display. Two of a series of interpretive booklets have been completed and a brochure, written by MGP staff with Alain and Nicole Monfort's collaboration, has been published with the assistance of the Lioness Club of Kigali.

The Future

The MGP has made great progress but there are many improvements still to make and the effort must be continued to ensure permanent gains. Furthermore the situation in the Ugandan and Zairois Virungas is grave whilst the long-term future of the Parc National des Volcans remains in doubt as pressures mount from population growth, land-hunger and the need to increase local agricultural output. Mountain gorillas are still endangered and we must intensify the work of

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conserving them but many of the jobs needed, such as defining and permanently marking the park boundary, require large sums of money. We urgently need your support and are again seeking donations. You can be certain that anything you give will go directly to the protection of these superb animals.

Stop Press

At the end of 1982 a male gorilla was killed and a month-old orphan found which is now in care. Funds are urgently needed to continue our protection work. The MGP also needs a sturdy projector and screen—any offers?



The plaque commemorating the Monk Seal Appeal, in place outside the offices of the Fishermen's Cooperative of Alonissos. To the right of the plaque is Mr Pavlos Drosakis, President of the Cooperative, together with some of the staff and fishermen.

ffPS Cambridge Group

The Cambridge Group was launched on 12 November with a very successful meeting held jointly with the Cambridge Natural History Society. Sir Peter Scott addressed a 400-strong audience with a talk, 'Conservation—where do we go from here?' Proceeds from a wine and cheese supper, attended by 116 people, were divided between the two societies. ffPS will use its share to establish the Cambridge group, with £60 going to the 100% Fund. An additional £59 was raised by a door collection for the Mountain Gorilla Project. Future proceeds will go directly to the 100% Fund. It is hoped that this will be the first of several local groups.

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RAF Lends a Hand

One of the problems of sending books and other items abroad is that the cost of transport can exceed their value. The RAF recently solved this problem for ffPS when it kindly gave space in a *Hercules* transport plane. Two boxes of books, one bound for Sudan, the other for Uganda, and posters to advertise the mountain gorilla campaign in Rwanda, were flown to Nairobi for onward distribution. The same flight also carried 40 'army-surplus' blankets, a donation to the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation to enable youngsters to go camping.

Oryx and the ffPS

Only twice in the last 30 years has the Society's journal seen a major change. In 1950, the new editor, Colonel Leofric Boyle, changed its name—from the *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the Empire to Oryx*—at the same time as the Society changed its own name. In 1964, Maisie Fitter took over as Editor and gave the cover and presentation a face-lift, and now, in 1983, yet another new Editor, Jacqui Morris, is carrying on the tradition. That the content of *Oryx* is good is abundantly testified by the many laudatory comments received when the Society surveyed its membership 18 months ago: 'A first-class publication; it will be difficult to improve' was only one of many similar comments.

Many members of the Society will be interested to know what sort of membership profile emerged from the survey. As might have been guessed, members proved to belong very largely to the professional classes, what the social scientist calls ABs or potential ABs in the case of the younger members. Approximately half the members belong to a professional association and no fewer than two-thirds hold a university degree or equivalent qualification. Like many other membership organisations, ffPS proved to have a high proportion in the older age-groups. The period when people are raising young families is a notoriously difficult one for maintaining outside interests, so it is not surprising to find that nearly two-fifths of our members are aged over 55 and one-fifth actually retired, i.e. mostly aged over 65. However, at the time of the survey we had only

recently introduced a student membership and since then the proportion has risen. It is always dangerous to be in a position where a substantial proportion of your readers are likely to leave you willy nilly in the next ten or 20 years, so it is urgent for us to recruit more members, especially in the younger age brackets.

If we do, we can be confident that a future membership survey will still produce such glowing comments as 'I open *Oryx* immediately it arrives, whatever else is happening.'

Richard Fitter

Digging for Bats

The Society and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) are collaborating in a project to dig a cave for bats at Whipsnade Zoo this summer. The reason—bat populations are declining and one of the causes is probably the loss of sites suitable for hibernation. Although bats will adopt disused railway tunnels if conditions are right, no-one has yet attempted to provide a purpose-built cave.

The site for the artificial cave has been selected and trial holes are about to be dug to examine the substrate. The cave will be created by digging a trench in the chalk and covering it with concrete and soil. The public will not be allowed access to the cave itself but in its vicinity there will eventually be a display providing information about bats and the work of the ffPS.

Stop Press

IUCN *Red Data Books* available from ffPS Part 1 of the *Mammal Red Data Book* covers 155 threatened taxa in North and South America and Australasia, including representatives from all 13 orders (excluding Cetacea) which inhabit these regions.

Part 1 of the *Amphibia-Reptilia Red Data Book* covers 83 threatened taxa in the orders Rhynchocephalia, Crocodylia and Testudines, from all zoogeographic regions. Both are fully revised 1982 editions and each costs £12.50 including 2nd class mail/overseas surface mail (airmail postage can be invoiced at cost—it would be about £10).

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London Meetings

London meetings are held in the Zoo Meeting Rooms, in the Outer Circle, Regent's Park. Each includes a wine and cheese buffet supper, tickets £3.50, available from the ffPS office (an SAE would be appreciated). For catering purposes please ensure that you book your ticket at least one week in advance of the meeting date.

Tuesday, 29 March, 6 pm Dr Norman Myers, author of *The Sinking Ark* and many other books on controversial conservation issues, will talk on Expanded Strategies for Endangered Species. The Survival film *Last Kingdom of the Elephants* (50 mins), featuring the Luangwa Valley in Zambia, will be shown.

Summer Meeting

We are organising a Members' evening jointly with the Kew Club to be held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey. This is to be on 26 July and we will have guest speakers and a film, with the focus on rare plant conservation. Full details in the next *Oryx*.

ffPS Bookstall

At the forthcoming meetings we will continue to sell new and secondhand natural history books. Members are invited to bring any books they wish to donate.

Gifts and Grants to ffPS

ffPS is most grateful for the gifts of £25 and over listed below, and also for many smaller donations, between 1st August and 31st October 1982

Mountain Gorilla Project	£
Mirror Group Newspapers Ltd	1000.00
E. Nash	55.00
M. Smith	50.00
G.J. Sendall	25.00
Raised by S.L. Williams	31.90
I. Redmond	103.50
Various, from <i>Daily Mirror</i> readers	872.00

Bat Projects

H. Arnold and Dr R.E. Stebbings	258.00
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Scimitar-horned Oryx

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland 50.00

Bird Projects

Executive Travel (Holidays) Ltd 76.00

Gifts and Legacies

Alan Hutchison 250.00

The Late Dr M.C. Dawbarn 1108.51

R.B. Priest (earmarked for The Otter Haven Project) 6000.00

100% Fund

At the Council meetings on the 28th October and 18th January 1983 the following projects were approved for funding:

£700 to the Society for the Study and Conservation of Nature (SSCN) in Malta for their popular educational campaign on the indigenous flora.

£500 to Jack Frazier for a survey of marine turtles in the entire East Pacific. This will provide the information essential for the conservation and cooperative management of these animals.

£437 to Dr J. I. Pollock for a population study of the lemur *Indri indri* in Madagascar, the results of which will be used as a base for a conservation strategy.

£250 to Peter Dutton for his project on the sex ratio, hatching success and fertility of leatherback turtle eggs in Suriname.

£250 to Stephen Pruett-Jones for a study of birds of paradise in Papua New Guinea.

£250 to Dr Harald Roth for the Gola Forest Elephant Survey in Sierra Leone.

£100 to Nelly Menard for a study of the ecological and behavioural adaptations in three contrasting habitats of the Barbary macaque in Algeria.

Donations towards these and future projects would be gratefully received.

The Society may choose its 1983 Christmas card from entries in *Wildlife's* card design competition. The prize for the winning entry is a holiday for two in Luangwa Game Reserve, Zambia. Details: *Wildlife*, 100 Great Portland Street, London W1N 5PD.