



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



PRESS RELEASE

UN Year of the Gorilla boosts conservation of the world's most endangered great apes

Bonn, 11 March 2010 - The plight of gorillas in danger was brought home to millions through hundreds of Year of the Gorilla articles, interviews, lectures, conferences and films last year - more than through any similar global species campaign. In addition, the UN Year of the Gorilla 2009, generated € 100,000 for field projects to prevent critically endangered gorilla species from going extinct. The educational and awareness raising campaign was led by the UNEP Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS). Member states to the Convention, members of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP), conservation bodies, individuals at grass root level and online donations helped to raise these funds.

Elizabeth Mrema, UNEP/CMS Executive Secretary said: "With the support of innovative gorilla projects the UN Year of the Gorilla has created a permanent legacy. Conserving gorillas not only helps safeguarding their habitat, which is shared by us, but it also addresses the major challenges of climate change and poverty."

Protection of gorilla species that face serious risks and their vulnerable ecosystems cannot be achieved without the active involvement of people on the ground. Therefore, the main focus is being placed on the participation of local communities that share gorilla habitat. Improving protection by involving communities and providing staff training, supporting the enforcement of wildlife law, preventing illegal logging and reducing the use of firewood and charcoal are vital to reduce threats to the remaining populations of gorillas in the wild.

Gorillas are threatened with extinction due to habitat destruction through agricultural expansion, mining activities and the exploitation of natural resources, armed conflicts and hunting.

UN Ambassador of the Year of the Gorilla Ian Redmond said: "We depend on gorillas, elephants and other fruit-eating animals to sustain the African rainforests by planting the next generation of trees. Sustainable management of wildlife and other natural resources not only preserves gorilla habitat, but it provides long term livelihoods for people and helps secure the future of the planet."

The ongoing civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has caused rural and urban communities to be highly dependent on firewood and charcoal, resulting in the continuous degradation of vegetation and gorilla habitat. As the situation has deteriorated, the more than 500,000 refugees in North Kivu rely heavily on firewood primarily removed from the Virunga National Park, a world heritage site home to the highly endangered mountain gorillas. Only 700 Mountain Gorillas remain in the world, roughly half of them in the Virunga Mountains on the border between Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. A mountain gorilla census is being conducted to obtain accurate data on the current population.

The use of fuel-efficient stoves, sustainably harvested timber and briquettes has helped to contain the damage to the environment. At the same time, tree nurseries have been developed and the trees are being planted in buffer zones around the parks to protect gorilla habitat. Funds raised during a lecture tour in the United States by the UN Ambassador of the Year of the Gorilla, Ian Redmond, will enable the project, run by the Gorilla Organization, to continue through 2010 to combat the loss of important gorilla habitat.

In addition, a campaign helped to reduce illegal charcoal trafficking significantly by use of aerial monitoring of camps for internally displaced people in the war torn Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Emergency aid enabled park rangers to continue daily monitoring of gorillas, ensure their

protection and remove snares in gorilla habitat. The project is being implemented by the Frankfurt Zoological Society and ICCN, the Congolese park authority.

The Cross River Gorilla, with only 250-300 individuals remaining in the Mbe Mountains, Cross River and Takamanda National Parks on the border between Nigeria and Cameroon, is critically endangered according to the IUCN Red List and one of the 25 most endangered primates on earth. Hunting for bushmeat, expanding infrastructure and demand for farmland have pushed this rarest gorilla sub-species to the brink of extinction.

A community-based anti-poaching project in this region led by the Wildlife Conservation Society has promoted training opportunities of government staff and biologists to help establish and successfully manage new protected areas for Cross River Gorillas. By enforcing existing regulations concerning wildlife management in the mountain range, the presence of park rangers also acts to deter poaching.

The UK based Aspinall Foundation runs two rehabilitation and reintroduction project for Western Lowland Gorillas that have been orphaned through illegal hunting for bushmeat and wildlife trafficking in the Republic of Congo and Gabon. In order to fight commercial poaching and trade in endangered species, government authorities in cooperation with the Aspinall Foundation will strive to increase effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement. The Year of the Gorilla supports the "Project to Apply the Law on Fauna" to reduce the overall level of illegal hunting and trade in the Republic of Congo.

During the Year of the Gorilla, governments, NGOs, zoos, wildlife agencies and individuals staged events in the African range states, Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australia to educate the wider public on gorillas and the threats they face.

As part of the awareness element of the campaign Ian Redmond visited 10 gorilla range states and reported on the status of the gorilla. A gorilla rapid assessment report, currently prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme, will look more closely into the threats to gorilla populations and will be launched at the CITES conference in Doha, Qatar, on 24 March.

The Convention on Migratory Species organizes annual campaigns to raise awareness of highly endangered flagship species and their habitats while promoting conservation projects at the same time. In 2010, CMS has joined the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as an official partner of the International Year of Biodiversity declared by the UN General Assembly, to highlight the importance of biodiversity on a global scale. CMS, which has been recognized as CBD's lead partner on issues regarding migratory species, continues to take steps to stress the importance of biodiversity for human well-being and enhance efforts to reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss.

Notes to Editors

About CMS

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, also known as the Bonn Convention works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. With currently 113 member countries, many of them in Africa, CMS is a fast-growing convention with special importance due to its expertise in the field of migratory species.

More information is available at: www.cms.int

About the Year of the Gorilla

The Convention declared 2009 the Year of the Gorilla. Partners in this campaign included the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP), in cooperation with UNEP and UNESCO, and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). 109 out of 116 gorilla keeping zoos world-wide participated in the campaign. The initiative was part of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Its main objective was to raise awareness and political will to implement the CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Gorillas and their Habitats, a legally binding treaty between gorilla range states.

More information and a selection of videos on this topic on the Year of the Gorilla are available at: www.yog2009.org and www.waza.org/en/site/conservation/2009-year-of-the-gorilla

About GRASP

The Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) is an innovative and ambitious project of the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) with an immediate challenge - to lift the threat of imminent extinction faced by gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans across their ranges in equatorial Africa and south-east Asia. Partners include great ape range state governments, donor governments, UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector.

www.unep.org/grasp

About WAZA

WAZA, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, has a mission to guide, encourage and support the zoos, aquariums, and like-minded organizations of the world in animal care and welfare, environmental education, wildlife conservation and environmental research.

The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums is the "unifying" organization for the world zoo and aquarium community. Its members include leading zoos and aquariums, and regional and national Associations of Zoos and Aquariums, as well as some affiliate organizations, such as zoo veterinarians or zoo educators, from all around the world. Together they are 'United for Conservation'.

www.waza.org

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