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PRESS RELEASE

Australian conservationist appointed as Regional Ambassador for the Year of the Gorilla

Canberra, 9 April 2009 - Guy Williams, Sydney-based ecologist and primate conservationist has been appointed Australasian Regional Ambassador for the Year of the Gorilla (YoG; www.yog2009.org). He joins the company of Jane Goodall, the campaign's Patron, and Ian Redmond, former student of Dian Fossey and Ambassador for the YoG, in helping this global campaign make 2009 the year when the gorilla's trajectory is reversed. The Year of the Gorilla aims to support conservation of these close relatives of humankind and their habitats by boosting the livelihoods and incomes of local people.

"We have a great responsibility as stewards of a global community, as humans and as great apes to ensure the survival of the gorilla. We must not allow ourselves to entertain a vision of a world that does not include our great ape cousins", Guy Williams said.

The Year of the Gorilla in Australia has been significantly boosted by the appointment of Guy, which provides a significant opportunity for Australian communities, businesses and government to pledge their support to help ensure the survival of this awe-inspiring and ecologically vital great ape. Guy Williams will work closely with the Year of the Gorilla partner organizations to implement the YoG objectives for conservation, education and capacity building, whilst at the same time encouraging Australians to contribute through both fundraising and education.

"There is a significant potential in educating communities and businesses about how their purchasing and spending decisions can be both sustainable, satisfying and also contribute directly to the survival of the world's natural environments and the amazing diversity of plants and animals that occupy them", Guy Williams added.

The Year of the Gorilla in Australia

Now four months into the Year of the Gorilla, the programme is quickly moving along. Guy Williams in his role as Regional Ambassador for the Year of the Gorilla is working closely with a group of conservation organizations and zoological institutions to develop a local programme to support gorilla conservation. The Taronga Conservation Society, Zoos Victoria, and the Jane Goodall Institute are all collaborating with a range of other environmental organizations and businesses to raise the awareness of gorilla conservation and the impacts an unsustainable lifestyle has on the survival of all great apes.

The Australian Year of the Gorilla programme will seek to raise funds for selected projects, thereby helping on-the-ground gorilla conservation and the development of affected human populations where help is needed most and where resources can be used most efficiently. It will lobby businesses, government and the wider community to commit to the conservation and preservation of these amazing great apes.

This year also presents unique opportunities to raise awareness regarding the relationship between gorilla conservation and efforts to halt a changing global climate. Tropical forests are the world's lungs and deforestation is a direct threat to their health. The conservation of tropical forests as a carbon store and as habitat for a diversity of species is becoming a clear focus of December's Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Copenhagen.

Notes to Editors

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, declared 2009 the Year of the Gorilla (YoG). Partners in this campaign include the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP), in cooperation with UNEP and UNESCO, and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA).

The main threats to gorillas are hunting for food and traditional medicine, destruction of habitat through logging, mining and unsustainable production of charcoal, as well as the effects of armed conflicts and diseases like Ebola. Australian businesses and governments are now advocating carbon trading schemes which reward forest stewardship and protect and encourage sustainable forest practices. Guy Williams will be working in his role as YOG Ambassador, to ensure that these positive steps not only benefit Australian businesses, but also the local forest communities in Africa and most importantly the survival of the gorillas themselves.

The closest most Australians may ever get to a gorilla will come from a visit to either the zoo or through their Animal Planet TV subscription. Nonetheless, nearly all Australians either own or use mobile phones, which contain a mineral in their transistors called coltan. A large part of the world's coltan is mined in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Kahuzi-Biega National Park, which is in turn the home of the Eastern Lowland Gorilla. The Kahuzi-Biega gorilla population has probably been reduced by more than half. The poverty and penury caused by the displacement of the local population by miners and affiliated rebel armies has led to gorillas being killed and their meat being sold as "bush meat". The Jane Goodall Institute Australia will run a large campaign aimed at recycling mobile phones and raising awareness as well as funds for gorilla conservation in Kahuzi-Biega.

Guy Williams has worked in primate conservation for the past decade, in many regions of the world. His honours research took him to North India, to understand the impact of a changing climate and human pressures affecting behaviour and survival of a number of species of langur monkey. Guy's recent primate conservation efforts have seen him work in North India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia developing community systems of species conservation and resource development that consider the needs of both human and non-human primates.

More Information

www.yog2009.org

For more information about the Australian Year of the Gorilla campaign, contact Guy Williams on 0421 970 076 or email guy@tdaconsulting.com

For general information on the campaign, please contact Veronika Lenarz (UNEP/CMS Secretariat, Coordinator Year of the Gorilla) on +49 228 8152409 or email: rlenarz@cms.int or Daniel Karr (dkarr@cms.int)