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Media Release

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Mountain gorilla numbers surpass 1,000 despite challenges

Authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Rwanda, and Republic of Uganda release new results.

Rubavu, Rwanda, 31 May 2018 - Numbers of critically endangered mountain gorillas are on the up, following conservation efforts in the transboundary Virunga Massif, one of the two remaining areas where the great ape is still found.

Survey results released today reveal that numbers have increased to 604 from an estimated 480 in 2010, including 41 social groups, along with 14 solitary males in the transboundary area. This brings the global wild population of mountain gorillas to an estimated 1,004 when combined with published figures from Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (where the rest of the subspecies is found) and makes it the only great ape in the world that is considered to be increasing in population.

The findings are the result of intensive surveying coordinated by the **Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration** and supported by the **International Gorilla Conservation Programme** (IGCP – a coalition programme of **Fauna & Flora International** and **WWF**) along with other partners.

Despite this good news, the survey found that direct threats from wire or rope snares persist. During the surveys, the teams found and destroyed more than 380 snares, which were set for antelope but can also kill or harm gorillas. One of the snares discovered by the teams contained a dead mountain gorilla. There are also new threats looming large on the horizon, including climate change, infrastructure development and the ever-present spectre of disease, which has the potential to devastate the remaining populations.

Ongoing conflict and civil unrest also present an ongoing risk, impacting people and wildlife. A number of rangers have been killed in recent weeks in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Virunga National Park.

Margaret Kinnaird, Wildlife Practice Leader, WWF (World Wide Fund For Nature) said:

"This is fabulous news for mountain gorillas and shows what we can do for wildlife when NGOs, governments and their communities work together. However, the high number of snares encountered and the numerous other threats they face including climate change indicate that the battle is far from won. The three gorilla range countries and their partners must continue to work together to safeguard the Virunga Massif - not



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only for the protection of these incredible creatures but also for the welfare of the local people with whom they share the landscape. The mountain gorilla story can be a model for how to restore and maintain our earth's precious biodiversity."

Alison Mollon, Director of Operations for Africa at Fauna & Flora International (FFI), said:

"Since FFI first began working to protect mountain gorillas in the 1970s, we have seen a remarkable transformation in the fortunes of this great ape, which at that time was on the very precipice of extinction. This turnaround is thanks to the extraordinary efforts of all those who have persisted through immense challenges – sometimes even risking their own lives – to protect these great apes. Today, mountain gorilla numbers are looking much healthier, but this is no time for complacency. We need to remain extremely vigilant, particularly in light of the ever-present and growing threat posed by the transmission of human-borne diseases that are relatively innocuous for us, but potentially fatal to other primates."

The census involved twelve teams - comprising people from more than 10 institutions – which covered over 2,000 km of difficult, forested terrain systematically searching the mountain gorilla habitat for signs of the animals, recording nest sites and collecting faeces samples for genetic analysis. The teams also looked for evidence of threats to gorillas and other wildlife.

Reacting to the news, Fauna & Flora International vice-president and WWF UK ambassador, Sir David Attenborough said:

"When I first visited the mountain gorillas in 1979, the situation was dire; the number of these remarkable animals was dreadfully small. It is incredibly heartening therefore to see how the efforts of so many different groups – communities, governments, NGOs – have paid off. The threats to mountain gorillas haven't disappeared entirely, of course, so now the challenge must be to ensure that these achievements are sustained long into the future."

The survey results underscore the need for continued attention and action by government agencies, protected area staff, tourism operators, tourists and communities alike, to ward off these threats and keep mountain gorillas safe in the long term.

- Ends -

For further information:

Marsden Momanyi | WWF | tel: +254 798 484 940 | email: mmomanyi@wwfint.org

Sarah Rakowski | Fauna & Flora International | tel: 01223 747659 | email: sarah.rakowski@fauna-flora.org

Notes to editors:

1. The Virunga Massif is a 451 km² area spanning the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda - including Mikeno Sector of Virunga National Park in DRC, Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, and Mgahinga Gorilla



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National Park in Uganda - and is just one of just two places on earth where mountain gorillas can still be found. The other is Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda, contiguous with Sarambwe Nature Reserve in DRC.

2. The previous mountain gorilla census in the Virunga Massif took place in 2010 resulting in an estimate of 480 individuals in 36 social groups and 14 solitary males. The data and samples for this more recent survey were collected between October 7 – December 6, 2015 and March 22 – May 23, 2016.
3. The mountain gorilla is currently classified by IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ as Critically Endangered. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/39999/0>
4. The 2015/2016 Virunga Massif mountain gorilla census was conducted by the Protected Area Authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda (l'Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature, the Rwanda Development Board and the Uganda Wildlife Authority) under the transboundary framework of the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration. The census was supported by the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (a coalition programme of Fauna & Flora International and WWF), the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, the Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation, Gorilla Doctors, and the North Carolina Zoo. The census was funded through generous contributions from Fauna & Flora International, WWF, and Partners in Conservation at the Columbus Zoo & Aquarium. Additional financial support to the census science committee provided by Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe.

About WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) (<http://www.panda.org>)

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and that take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity.

About the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) (www.igcp.org)

IGCP is a coalition programme of Fauna & Flora International and WWF with a mission to secure the future for mountain gorillas. IGCP achieves this through working in partnership with State and non-State actors in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda. Its Directorate is located in Kigali, Rwanda.