

The Rufford Foundation Final Report

Congratulations on the completion of your project that was supported by The Rufford Foundation.

We ask all grant recipients to complete a Final Report Form that helps us to gauge the success of our grant giving. The Final Report must be sent in **word format** and not PDF format or any other format. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work. Please be as honest as you can in answering the questions – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please complete the form in English and be as clear and concise as you can. Please note that the information may be edited for clarity. We will ask for further information if required. If you have any other materials produced by the project, particularly a few relevant photographs, please send these to us separately.

Please submit your final report to jane@rufford.org.

Thank you for your help.

Josh Cole, Grants Director

Grant Recipient Details	
Your name	Léonard Milenge EO
Project title	Conserving Gorilla beringei spp. graueri in the vulnerable unprotected Mwana forest southern to Itombwe massif
RSG reference	20639-1
Reporting period	Jan 2017 – Dec 2018
Amount of grant	£4989
Your email address	eomilenge2@gmail.com
Date of this report	January, 30, 2018

1. Please indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Recruit and enhance capacities of 9 local people on effective monitoring of gorillas, GPS tracking, and also law enforcement procedures, gorilla habitat conservation, and anti-poaching techniques.				<p>The training was held on site under a few simple tents given that there is no infrastructure in place.</p> <p>The training was run by Felix Mcinga from ICCN assisted by the project leader, Léonard Milenge EO from IGH. In total, nine local team members were trained, including three field assistants and six trackers.</p>
Conduct a comprehensive survey on gorilla population in Mwana forest				<p>Over 5 months (March- July 2017) we conducted fieldwork in Mwana forest to survey gorillas using sweep survey method. We divided the study area into three sectors based on McNeilage <i>et al.</i> (2006). From this fieldwork, we recorded a total of 138 gorilla nests, we found eight nest sites, we observed feeding sings and faecal matter of gorillas; and we heard gorilla sounds in three sectors of the Mwana forest. At each nest site, nests were counted and dung size measurements were made, along with noting the presence of silver hairs, to establish the age-sex composition of the group. We used Garmin eTrex Legend hand-held GPS units to locate gorilla spatial distribution.</p>
Conduct education and awareness-raising activities to improve understanding and ultimately to influence behaviour among local community about gorilla conservation.				<p>Three community conferences were organised in Epombo, Atala and Ngomiano villages near important gorilla sites. Local communities learnt which human activities had negative impact on the gorillas and many agreed that eating gorillas as bushmeat or destroying their habitat was wrong. The conferences were followed by the creation of community structures called "Local Natural Resource Management Committees (LNRMCs)" in these villages.</p>

2. Please explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled (if relevant).

We were able to survey 80% of the study area properly. However, 20% of the study area was logistically impossible to complete due to limited financial support and availability of field personnel; remoteness of the area; and poor infrastructure. This was absolutely worthwhile, and the experience has helped us to refine the approaches we wish to use to continue our conservation research effort for the species here in Mwana forest.

3. Briefly describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

The three exact outcomes of our project are as follows:

(a) Enhanced human resource capacity and commitment to manage and conserve gorilla populations in Mwana: Nine local team members, including three field assistants and six trackers, have gained training in gorilla monitoring, GPS tracking and law enforcement procedures, and have become highly motivated to assist with research in the remote forest area, and also serve as a link with the local community.

(b) Improved knowledge of gorilla presence and spatial distribution in the Mwana remote forest: We located a total of 138 gorilla nests from eight nest sites, and we recorded gorilla fresh feeding sings and faecal matters. Everywhere we stopped in nest sites we heard gorilla sounds. Gorillas were widely distributed across Mwana forest, including areas near human settlements. We found the majority of signs of gorilla presence within the three largest forest blocks: 1) in the south sector, spanning Mapungu, Mwana, Bionda and Ilambo areas; (2) in the north sector, including M'mongya, Nyasunge, Mbobole, and M'mbandakela areas; and 3) in the centre sector including Asala A Tubemba; Tubemba W'ilele, and Makembe areas. Such data are vital to help write a first realistic and successful local Gorillas Management Plan (GMP) for the Mwana forest to facilitate adaptive management practices.

(c) Enhanced community engagement in the conservation of the gorilla and its habitat in Mwana: Three conferences were organised in Epombo, Atala and Ngomiano villages near important gorilla sites to inspire positive change in the way local communities think, feel and act towards gorilla. More than 95 participants (representatives from a variety of local social groups) attended the conferences. Results from our conservation research efforts have been presented during these conferences. This presentation was followed by group discussions, where observations and recommendations were made to improve gorilla conservation status in Mwana forest. Community structures called "Local Natural Resource Management Committees (LNRMCs)" consisting of representatives from a variety of local social groups in each targeted village have been created.

4. Briefly describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project (if relevant).

One strategy for helping secure the long-lasting impact and benefit of the project has been the recruitment of nine local team members from the communities to assist with collection of vital data about gorillas in the remote forest area and also serve as a link with the community. These local team members were selected by their respective communities. Some are students, and the average age is 25. In addition to training in the field of wildlife conservation, the project offered them a temporary employment, which provided them with income. This method has the added advantage of including local people in conservation work in their area. Since then, these local team members work on a volunteer basis to permanently monitor gorilla population present in the nearby forests, and share information every Monday with other people in their community. They also investigate any suspicious activities whilst on the field and report to the Local Traditional Authorities, thus helping in deterring illegal activities.

Our second major advancement was to assist local communities in promoting sustainable management of their natural resources through the establishment of Local Natural Resource Management Committees (LNRMCs)" in three targeted villages. Women had actively participated in the process, to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in conservation activities while also preserving and maintaining the culture and traditions of the local people. The LNRMCs' creation was part of broader effort to strengthen local capacity for autonomous management of their areas and natural resource use. These local structures are dedicated to bringing local communities together, strengthening information flows regarding improvement of environmentally friendly behaviour and the promotion of education for sustainable development in Mwana. Hence, after participating in the LNRMC programme, communities now met regularly to discuss how to link local development and sustainable use of biological resources. As much, gorillas were stable in 2017 when the LNRMCs were established in the nearby villages.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

It is to be noted that gorillas in Mwana forest are left uncared for. Hunting, small scale mining, and agriculture were the most frequently encountered anthropogenic threats along the majority of areas surveyed. Therefore, this work will continue, since these pressures led to the extirpation of several gorilla families in the Mwana remote forest. Our intervention will involve the continuous monitoring of gorilla populations and habitats, which has been shown to reduce poaching and other illegal activities. Another component for the protection of gorilla in this forest will involve new methods of conservation education in schools and villages to educate the wider public about the need to protect gorillas and their habitat. As in Mwana forest social conditions are poor, education will also include sustainable development alternatives to better the gorilla conservation and the livelihoods of local communities through training in mushroom cultivation and honeybee keeping.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

In preceding pages, we have mentioned that the results from our conservation research efforts were first brought to the attention of the local community (95 representatives from a variety of local social groups) during conferences in Epombo, Atala and Ngomiano villages, where observations and recommendations were made to improve gorilla conservation status in Mwana forest. These results have also been included in the 2017 Itombwe Nature Reserve Warden’s Report, and presented at an annual meeting of the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) in December 2017. Moreover, this work has already been shared on social media on the Facebook page (<https://facebook.com/igh.itombwe>) of our organisation Itombwe Génération Humanaire (IGH). Since then, we continue to disseminate results to private landowners, stakeholders, wardens, NGOs, law enforcement, and staff operating within Itombwe massif. It is our hope that our research program and associated findings serve to convince local, national and international communities of the value of the Mwana forest and the necessity for action to protect what is left of Mwana forest’s gorilla heritage. Hence, a publication (a database on gorilla distribution and abundance in Mwana forest) will result from this work after its completion, expected by 2021.

7. Timescale: Over what period was The Rufford Foundation grant used? How does this compare to the anticipated or actual length of the project?

The project was started in the beginning of 2017 and continued for 1 year (i.e. between January-December 2017). Accordingly, the project activities were accomplished and objectives met in the planned and expected timescale.

8. Budget: Please provide a breakdown of budgeted versus actual expenditure and the reasons for any differences. All figures should be in £ sterling, indicating the local exchange rate used. 1£ sterling = CDF 2, 2 25.58

Item	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Subsistence payments for 9 local team members	2520	0	0	
Purchase of field equipment and material	729	0	0	Purchase of field equipment was important component of the project. However, budgeted amount was not adequate to purchase all the equipment required, so we had to borrow some equipment from other research organisations.
Training local team members	721	0	0	
Local community meetings	761	0	0	(Conferences)
Communication and Miscellaneous	258	0	0	

9. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

Based on the experience of our first pilot implementation, we are keen to continue our work over this year 2018 to give greater protection to the remaining gorilla populations found in Mwana remote forest. As already mentioned, the important next step will then be to conduct the continuous monitoring of gorilla populations and habitats by researchers who are permanently based on site. This intervention is intended to inform us about fluctuation of gorilla presence/absence throughout the year, group size, presence of young and juvenile gorillas, and understanding of human disturbances related to hunting, logging, mining and agriculture to facilitate adaptive management practices. It will also help in preventing illegal activities as the visible presence of research teams in the forest acts as a strong deterrent to those involved. At the same time, another important step for the future is to conduct an educational programme in schools and villages to increase public awareness and knowledge about gorilla and natural habitat conservation in Mwana forest, and thus contribute to the prevention of extinction of this Critically Endangered animal in the wild. All these activities will be done under the auspice of our organisation IGH (Itombwe Génération Humanaire) in collaboration with the ICCN, and LNRMCs created in nearby villages. So, to achieve these plans, we are applying for a second Rufford Small Grant and will seek matching funding from other funding sources.

10. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the RSGF receive any publicity during the course of your work?

The Rufford Foundation logo was put on each educational material and other documents produced in relation to the project. We have also publicly acknowledged the Rufford Foundation for the grant support during the conferences held in Epombo, Atala and Ngomiano villages.

11. Any other comments?

We wanted to acknowledge the Rufford Foundation for their role in the success of this conservation effort. Their financial support has yielded many discoveries and conservation outcomes that would have been impossible. A dedicated team of tracking assistants from the village of Epombo, Atala and Ngomiano provided invaluable assistance in the field. We at IGH feel that this first pilot project could be a major step forward in conserving gorilla in Mwana forest. We also believe lessons can be learned from such small-scale conservation project that may be applicable to larger areas.



Left to right: A research assistant assisting with dung measurement at nest site within Mwana forest; Demonstrations and practical training on GIS tracking and GPS application & LNRMC members gathered in Ngomiano village to discuss about local development and sustainable use of biological resources.