

Project Update: January 2012

I conducted 65 semi-formal interviews which included 160 gorilla tourists. I conducted a further 30 interviews amongst project stakeholders, donors, researchers, photographers etc, in order to collect data for objectives 1 & 2. Key questions to be answered as part of objective one will be addressed during the impending analysis phase. Data collection for this objective was successful.

218 questionnaires have been completed by people engaged with gorillas/gorilla tourism. Additionally, I conducted ~90 health/attitudinal interviews with local staff/villagers in order to collect data for objective 2. Data from this objective will be analysed in conjunction with data for objective 1. Data collection for this objective was successful.

Behavioural data over the two focal gorilla groups were collected on 439 days (over 14 months). This is a total of 1580 hours scan data during gorilla tracking, with and without tourism/journalism/film crews/research.

In total, 1607 faecal samples were collected for the purposes of stress and parasitic analyses. These samples were fixed/extracted in the field and were sent to either Germany/Czech Republic for their respective analyses. These are under way and the results are expected by mid-2012.

These results will be used to assess the impact of different human pressures on the gorillas in relation to both behavioural and physiological measures.

In relation to the completed field work period, unforeseen difficulties were mostly in relation to the uncontrollable movements of gorilla groups. I had to extend my stay in the project site in order to collect a full year of samples, as in the beginning we lost the gorilla groups for 3 weeks, which meant no behavioural/faecal sampling, could happen. I also experienced a great deal of difficulty in the country regarding my visa but this was a case of corrupt officials looking for more money from foreigners. Sickness did not delay/disrupt my data collection but caused me a great deal of difficulties and continues to do so. Tropical forests surrounded by people living in poverty are hard places to stay well in, and although this was not unforeseen, it was finally more of a problem than expected.

In general the project's (gorilla tourism) presence provides benefits to locals in the form of employment and health benefits. On a more local level I also employed two local research assistants who were trained in my methods of research. I hope that finally the results of the study will contribute towards a more sustainable tourism programme so that the local populations can continue to benefit from the conservation of their country's nature.

The work continues into 2013 until completion. It is possible/hopeful that post-project implementation work will evolve from this initial study.

I plan to present the results of this work at conferences and in peer reviewed scientific journals after the completion of my doctoral write-up.

The timeframe for this project was in relation to a 3.5 year PhD study. So far this remains the case. The funds from the RSG are to be put largely towards the analytical costs of the faecal samples, and remaining funds will be used to cover the expenses for my local research assistants.

At this stage my next steps are to finalise all the biological analyses, interpret all social-anthropological data and start the analyses.