Kahuzi Biega National Park - D.R. Congo

With the onset of the civil war in 1996, the Congolese wildlife authority lost control of the park as armed groups settled within its boundaries. While the park is located in one of the most densely populated region of the continent this exacerbated natural resources extraction within the park including hunting of wildlife for subsistence and trade.

We started offering gorilla tours during the year of 2007 and in conjunction with other international organizations lowland gorilla census was conducted in the high altitude areas of Kahuzi Biega national park every 5 years to monitor the gorilla population to adapt conservation efforts and evaluate their impacts in this sector of the park. A total of 17 gorilla groups and 8 solitary males were found during the census. Together with the data from close monitoring of additional group by ICCN and by correcting the gorilla numbers obtained from the census with the number of infants missed, we estimated a minimum of 213 individuals to be present at Kahuzi Biega National Park. This represented an 18% increase since the previous census was conducted by ICCN and the drop of the civil war.

With all these little money was spared to for large scale conservation efforts for sustainability of the community development. Instead of basing our activities on wistful thinking profit driven motif, we changed the narrative by establishing partnerships with other ecotourism ventures charitable and NGO’s and volunteers to fulfil different programs under the Kahuzi Biega trust fund. These partnerships seems to be working better, and we continued to provide environmentally sensitive employment to the locals mostly youth and women and this led to economic and social development. We scaled a step further to engage conservation professional and community development organizations in their partnerships to provide valuable input and experience needed to operate truly mindful projects. Surplus income from ecotourism allows locals to start up small businesses or pass on the money to other community members by buying local goods and paying for child care and other services.

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