



Environment: journeys through a changing world

The Uganda Wildlife Authority

Moses Mapesa, Executive Director, Uganda Wildlife Authority

The economic factors, the social factors, the output of factors, if you like, and then there is the scientific factors. We have taken all this into account in determining the numbers of groups who habituate and the numbers of people to visit. Our gorilla permit prices have been going up in the last five years from about 250 five years ago to now \$500 for the foreign and non-residents, roughly translating into about 40% of Uganda life authorities entirely general to the revenue. Now we generate entirely about ten billion Ugandan shillings, ten billion Ugandan shillings is roughly 5.5 million US dollars, so 40% of that comes from gorilla tourism, comes from Bwindi. We're keeping the groups of people visiting the habituated gorillas to the bare minimum to avoid stress because gorillas are social animals, they spend most of their time eating and drumming, and being in their privacy so to say. If we have too many people going to see these groups too often, then you begin to stress them, and it begins to impact on their social behaviour, in fact from the last census results we noted that the population increase was largely from the wild groups while the habituated ones had less and less influence. We mustn't stress the animals; we mustn't be driven by actions that could ultimately further endanger the existence of the mountain gorillas or their habitat.

Martin Musinguzi, Warden for Tourism

At the moment there are so many tourists who have been looking for gorilla permits and they have not been able to get them because of the other bookings. People have booked gorilla permits as far as three years to come, even now as I speak there are people already say why don't you increase the number of people on the habituated groups of gorillas but for us we are conservationists, we don't look at the money aspects.

Moses Mapesa, Executive Director, Uganda Wildlife Authority

Anybody out to make money, wouldn't want to habituate all the gorillas so that tomorrow they're a million tourists here coming to see the gorillas, but that could be counter-productive because if you have too many people coming into the same place you could end up with an environmental disaster. But also the willingness to pay will go down so those are the conservations and economic factors. We'd rather keep the numbers low and maintain a high demand, and charge more, and keep the people in the country longer, and they can spend more money on transport, they can spend more money on accommodation, they can spend more money on food, and we bust the whole tourism sector. Of course examples have been given, in some of our neighbouring countries, where up to 70% of the population is habituated but we need to be cautious of the fact that it can take one month to wipe out a population, and you may never rebuild it, so we who still have more than half of the mountain gorillas should pro-actively and judiciously ensure that we sustain the conservation of the gorillas, or else we lose out like other, more species are becoming extinct, and that message has been very clear to the Government of Uganda, and it is well understood. However that is a little bit superficial still because in any case, for any visitor travelling in this area, chances are you'll travel through all the three districts and from the transport services, from the hotel, from the beverages services, certainly if they are spread over benefit. Certainly the communities would appreciate any management intervention that increases prospects of improving on their economic livelihoods, so there's always that excitement about it never grew perpetrated because it means you could have more benefit coming in, and we think in this case there'll be more benefit coming in because we will have the increase of visitation and we'll have increased demand for the supportive services, and because the communities know and actually gain from their benefit they certainly would look forward to seeing another habituation happening. But through our awareness problems they are also conscious of the fact that it has to be good so it's not like we're excited and praying that more and more groups are habituated until the last one, no they are conscious of the fact that we must strike some optimum levels.

Other conservation issues are we are not driven by profits but rather by conservation, profits secondary, but we also are aware that by engaging into our conservation activities we make opportunities for development happen.