



GORILLA GROUPS IN VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK – RWANDA

1. SUSA GROUP

Susa group is known to be among the largest group in Volcanoes National Park used for Tourism activities. Susa is one of those groups that were habituated and followed by Dr. Dian Fossey between 1968 –1985. The group is well known for its large size in the past (now 17 individuals) and being the family of the first surviving twins of mountain gorillas Byishimo and Impano. The group ranges on the slopes of Karisimbi dominated by the bamboo vegetation. However, the group is well used to mixing the bamboo zone during the bamboo shoot season and the upper level zone of hagenia and hypericum dominated by mixed herbaceous vegetation. The dominant Silverback and chief of the group is a gentle, tolerate living with other males. Today Kurira group is composed of 17 individuals including 3 silverbacks, 5 adult females, 3 blackbacks, 1 sub-adult male, 2 juveniles and 3 infants.

2. KARISIMBI GROUP

Karisimbi group was formed as a new group after splitting from the SUSA group in 2009. The separation process became permanent after August 20th 2009, following two months of several attempts of splits. The group was named “Karisimbi” in the 6th Kwita Izina ceremony held in 2010. The group is led by Nyagakangaga, who had been second in dominance in the SUSA group since 2007. Continuous conflicts and tensions among the silverbacks of the newly formed group especially Nyagakangaga, Kampande and Getty resulted in the formation of a new group from Karisimbi and that group was named Isimbi.

3. ISIMBI GROUP

Isimbi group is found in Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda and led by the dominant Silver Back-Mutarengere. Isimbi group is a result of Karisimbi group split which took place on 10th April 2012. Getty silverback took the lead of the new group of 7 individuals. Getty died on December 22nd 2013 due to abscess on air sac and pneumonia. After his death, the young blackback then, Muturengere took lead of the group with the help of Poppy, an adult female. Poppy is said to be the oldest living adult female among all gorilla groups. Muturengere fought other groups that sought to grab some members of his group. The group has since grown from 7 to 14 individuals who include 1 silverback, 6 adult females, 2 juveniles and 5 infants.

4. IGISHA GROUP

Igisha group is the last stable group of mountain gorillas formed in Volcanoes National Park in and is led by Igisha as the dominant Silverback. Igisha group originated from Susa group split that occurred on November 30th 2014. Igisha silverback moved with 23 individuals and formed the group that was later named Igisha after him. Igisha group is currently composed of 27 individuals which include 3 silverbacks, 7 adult females, 2 blackbacks, 3 sub-adult males, 1 sub adult female, 4 juveniles and 7 infants.

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5. AMAHORO GROUP

Amahoro means “peace”. This group ranges on the slopes of Bisoke volcanoes. His habituation by gorilla trackers started in 1995 and became fully habituated in 2001-2002. At the time of its habituation the group had 3 silverback lead by the dominant silverback called Amahoro. After his death in 2002, the group split into two groups: the one led by Ubumwe kept its original name Amahoro and the second led by the young silverback Charles took a new name “Umubano”. These two groups do interact regularly but the interactions are peaceful, they know each other show mutual respect. Today Amahoro group is made up of 18 individuals including 3 Silverbacks, 4 Adult females, 3 Sub-adults females, 1 Blackback, 2 Juveniles and 5 Infants.

6. UMUBANO GROUP

As mentioned above this is a brother group of Amahoro. Charles is the leader. The silverback Charles is recognized as the most handsome, most challenging and excellent fighter comparing to other males in the park. None of the dominant males has been able to face his attack so far. Charles never grab female from his brother group. Shortly after the separation, the 2 groups would meet, interact, and feed together for one or two days and then go separate ways. Umubano group is composed of 12 individuals including 3 Silverbacks, 2 Adult females, 3 blackbacks, 3 Juveniles and 1 infant

7. SABYINYO GROUP

This group is lead by the silverback Guhonda recognized as the biggest compared to other males of the habituated groups in the park. After the death of the silverback Murthi of Group 13, Guhonda alone silverback took advantage of Murthi’s death and grabbed 3 females from Group 13 (Gukunda, Kampanga and Ijisho) and a number of others from Group 11. These are the individuals that Guhonda used to form his group with. The habituation of the Sabyinyo group was conducted by a British conservationist Mark Condiotti in 1987. At its habituation the group was named Amavubi (wasps) due to their aggressive character which gave hard time to the habituation field teams. The name was later changed to Sabyinyo, after the mountain where the group was first seen. Sabyinyo is a peaceful group, but the strong silverback Guhonda had manifested less tolerance towards other males in the group. He chased away his subordinate Ryango in 2006 as he was challenging his leadership. Sabyinyo group currently consists of 16 individuals including 2 silverback, 6 adult females, 2 blackbacks, 1 juveniles and 5 infants.

8. AGASHYA GROUP

This group was habituated in 1980s. It is lead by the dominant silverback Agashya who took over this group in 2002 following the death of the old silverback Munani. Originally known as Group 13 and headed by the dominant silverback Murthi who died in 1992 leaving behind 3 young males (Munane, Nyakarima and Kwirinda) faced with the challenge of leading the group. The 3 males stayed together until Munane turned into a silverback and led the group. Kwirinda died from injuries sustained through a fight with another group, while Nyakarima left the group. In his quest to expand the group, Munane interacted with other groups and acquired females. He unfortunately died on May 18th 2002 due to natural causes leaving behind a blackback to lead the group. Due to his young age, the blackback associated with the adult female Safari who helped him in managing the group. However, a Silverback (Agashya) from an unknown group then came and took over leadership from the young blackback. The group was later named Agashya in 2010 at Kwita Izina ceremony. Currently, Agashya group is composed of 20 individuals; including 2 silverbacks, 5 adult females, 5 blackbacks, 1 sub-adult male, 1 sub-adult female, 3 juveniles and 3 infants.

9. HIRWA GROUP

Hirwa group was first located in the park on 25th June 2005 by a park guide. The group had 8 members all well habituated. The dominant male called Munyinya came from Susa group, he had to travel a long distance looking for females to form his own group, but now he has settled his group is stable. Munyinya silverback came from the main Susa group in 2002 and somewhat disappeared for about 4 years, until June 17th 2006 when he showed up again with a couple of other individuals. The group was opened for tourism in July 2006 and named as Hirwa in the same year. Since his return, Munyinya increased the size of his group by grabbing individuals from surrounding groups such as Sabyinyo, Agashya and Kwitonda. Despite being the newest group on the block, Hirwa kept exhibiting its strength and maintained its status and respect from other gorilla groups in the area. Hirwa group is composed of 20 individuals including 1 silverback, 5 adult females, 1 blackback, 1 sub-adult female, 6 juveniles and 6 infants. This group is known to have the second ever surviving twins (Isango Gakuru and Isango Gato born to Kabatwa) after the main Susa group.

10. KWITONDA GROUP

Kwitonda group is found in Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda and is led by Akarevuro. Originally formed in 1995 in Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kwitonda group migrated to Rwanda in 2004 to escape pressure from other groups. Kwitonda Silverback is thought to have been a solitary male before joining Rugabo group in the DRC. After the death of Rugabo Silverback, Kwitonda grabbed some individuals of the group to form his own group. After this, he moved to Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda and established its home range between Mount Sabyinyo and Mount Gahinga. Unfortunately, Kwitonda died in 2012 due to old age and left Akarevuro and Kigoma both subordinate silverbacks fighting for leadership of the group. Somehow Akarevuro won the respect of the group members and took full leadership of group. Kwitonda group is made of 28 individuals including 2 silverbacks, 9 adult females, 2 blackbacks, 1 sub-adult male, 7 juveniles and 7 infants.