

MONITORING OF GORILLAS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN KAHUZI-BIEGA NATIONAL PARK, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

J. Kahekwa¹, A.K. Basabose², J. Yamagiwa³

¹*Pole Pole Foundation, Miti, South Kivu, DRC*, ²*International Gorilla Conservation Program, Goma, North Kivu, DRC*, ³*Kyoto University, Sakyo, Kyoto, Japan*

Presenter's Email: kahekwajohn@yahoo.fr

Gorilla tourism started in early 1970s just after the establishment of Kahuzi-Biega National Park. Habituation of gorillas was succeeded in attracting tourists, and naming of habituated gorillas facilitated monitoring of gorillas. Demography of gorillas in the habituated groups has been recorded to analyze their life history. This knowledge has been used for environmental education in the local schools. In 1992 we established Pole Pole Foundation (POPOF), a local NGO, to ease an increased tension between local people and the national park. Since the government of Zaire did not compensate the loss of land for the local people, the creation of the park caused many problems. People have still used the protected area for collecting fire woods and medicinal plants and for hunting wild animals. The influx of refugee people from the neighboring countries in 1994, and the subsequent civil wars accelerated such destructive activities. POPOF has constructed a tree nursery to promote reforestation in the villages surrounding the park and opened a school for children. Six classes for different ages have been opened, and more than 450 pupils are learning now. Pupils have learned the history of the park, demography and behavior of each habituated gorillas. They have also learned the characteristics of fauna and flora of Kahuzi and the concept of nature conservation. Individual identification may increase familiarity with gorillas and stimulate motivation of local people toward conservation. The promotion of gorilla tourism and environmental education are discussed for harmonious relationships between the park and local people.

Keywords: Monitoring, Gorilla, Education, Conservation