

**Berggorilla & Regenwald
Direkthilfe e.V.**



© Christian Kaiser

Annual Report 2025

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Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe e.V.

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**Dear Members,
dear friends of the gorillas,
dear supporters,**

Can we still acknowledge and bear the many wars taking place right on our doorstep and further afield? The urge to click away from the news or keep channel-surfing is understandable. But sometimes the horror and brutality of war also ends up in our inboxes. In December 2025, our local project manager, Claude Sikubwabo, sent us the terrible news that one of the trackers in the Sarambwe Reserve had been brutally murdered. And while we were still trying to figure out how to deal with this horrific act, his



colleagues had already provided the answer. They went back on patrol, the day after the funeral, to continue to protect the reserve and the animals living there.

In this annual report, we aim to highlight the challenging circumstances under which local people carry out their work to protect gorillas and their habitats. Thanks to your wonderful support, we were once again able to allocate EUR 200,000 to our projects last year. This enabled us to cover the costs of patrols, equipment, and medical care for the guards and trackers, ensuring that the protection of the areas and their wildlife - with some limitations - was maintained through 2025. We have also carried out a number of projects aimed at improving the living conditions of the local population, which is suffering more from the civil war than ever before. The following pages provide a detailed overview of our activities, income, and expenses for the projects.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude for your support of our organization's work to date, and we hope that you will continue to help us work toward our vision for the future:
the rescue and conservation of the last remaining gorilla populations through the protection of their habitats.

**Dr. Laura Hagemann, Burkhard Bröcker
and Dr. Angela Meder**



© Manfred Hartwig

P.S. And our sincere gratitude for the translation to Bettina Grieser Johns !

2. Our goals and our mission statement

Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe e.V. is a charitable organisation based in Hoevelhof, Germany. It was founded in 1984 under the name of “Berggorilla Patenschaft e.V.”. In accordance with its constitution, the association’s primary objective is to save and preserve the remaining gorilla populations by protecting their habitats. Since the association was founded, we have helped to fund conservation and support projects for all four gorilla subspecies. In recent years, however, we have focused on the areas where eastern gorillas live.

Specifically, the association supports projects in the habitats of mountain and Grauer’s gorillas, particularly in the ‘Three Countries’ region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda and Ruanda, with the current focus on activities in the East of the DRC. This support is always delivered in cooperation with the relevant national nature conservation authorities or local national park authorities and, where appropriate, other international nature conservation organisations, as the association lacks the staff and resources to manage entire protected areas on its own.

The top priority is to take direct action to protect the gorillas and their habitats. We therefore provide financial and material support to guards and other staff so that patrols can be carried out to protect gorillas and other animals in their habitats. The specific assistance provided is described in the relevant sections on the protected areas.

This objective is also to be achieved indirectly through projects aimed at improving the living conditions of the population in the vicinity of the protected areas. Local people must be offered alternatives so that they no longer depend on the protected areas for their livelihood. Furthermore, we want to help ensure that the local people do what they can to protect these areas and the wildlife that lives there, which, in addition to gorillas, includes other rare and protected species. Such projects that were carried out during the reporting year are described in Section 4, ‘Community Projects’.

Our work is characterised by swift and unbureaucratic decisions taken by the Executive Board on the basis of project proposals or urgent requests for assistance from the gorilla habitats. In most cases, relief supplies and funds are paid or handed over directly to the recipients via our local project manager; in some projects, this is also done via local or international project partners with whom we have a long-standing working relationship.

Around 430 members from Germany, Austria and Switzerland, as well as other European countries, support our work, alongside numerous donors from civil society, zoos and wildlife parks, companies, associations and foundations.

The board members and treasurer serve in a voluntary capacity. In addition, numerous other members and supporters also volunteer their time, helping the association particularly with organisational tasks and public relations. Only our local project manager, Claude Sikubwabo, in the D.R. Congo receives a salary and reimbursement for expenses from the association's funds. This enables us to limit administrative costs to those that are unavoidable and therefore keep them relatively low.

A detailed overview of revenue and expenditures can be found from page 22.

3. Overview and activities in the protected areas

In the 2025 reporting year, we continued to provide financial support to four national parks and protected areas, as well as local communities in the surrounding areas in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. With the help of partners, projects in Uganda and Rwanda were also supported.

For decades, this region of East Africa has been home to a large number of national parks and reserves that provide (nominally) legally protected habitats for mountain gorillas and Grauer's gorillas. The situation in Rwanda and Uganda is relatively secure: the national parks are well protected, and gorilla tourism is possible. A new census to determine the current mountain gorilla population began in Bwindi National Park in April 2025.

In DRC, the protection of nature and habitats is the responsibility of the ICCN, the national nature conservation authority. However, the practical implementation of these measures in national parks and reserves has been hampered for years by various factors. In some regions, practical implementation is at a serious risk.

The security situation in the protected areas and the living conditions of the population have changed since mid-2024, in some cases dramatically. The largest and most militarily powerful rebel group, M23 ("Mouvement du 23-Mars"), has brought large parts of North and South Kivu provinces under its control, together with allied groups and, according to United Nations' reports, with the support of the Rwandan army. During the capture of the provincial capitals Goma and Bukavu in January and February 2025, hundreds, if not thousands, of soldiers and civilians lost their lives.

While it was still possible, police officers, civil servants and soldiers of the Congolese army fled. Some of the militias allied with the two warring factions have gone into hiding or are active in the surrounding areas, as well as in national parks and reserves. Since then, they have posed a serious threat to staff working in the area, which is why guards and other staff have been withdrawn from the national parks or temporarily relocated to safer areas.

Although the immediate fighting has subsided significantly following the M23 occupation, local hostilities and rebel activities are having direct and indirect effects on the national parks and reserves, including the areas we support (see following pages). In addition to the hostilities, poaching, charcoal production and the illegal exploitation of mineral resources such as coltan, tin ore and gold continue to threaten all areas. In the sectors that are affected, patrols by guards are either not possible at all or only possible to a limited extent. Park authorities must act flexibly and adapt to the situation in order to implement a minimum level of protective measures, nonetheless.

Diplomatic efforts, including even meetings at presidential level, have so far failed to produce a solution accepted by all parties involved that would bring an end to the conflict.

The hostilities in eastern Congo have caused parts of the population to flee, a trend that continues in some areas. The economic hardship faced by the population has worsened further because jobs in the public sector and with international organisations have been lost, local trade has been restricted, and prices for almost all the everyday necessities have risen sharply.

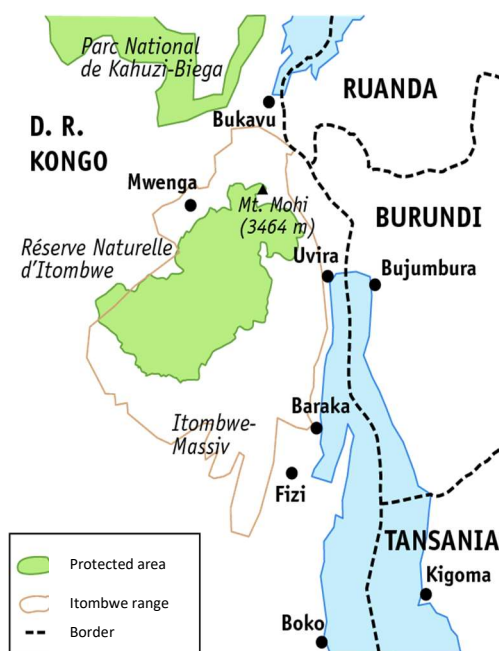
The pressure on food supplies and housing is also mounting in areas where there is no active fighting. As a result, people enter protected areas in search of food and firewood, or attempt to convert land into permanent arable land or pastures despite the ban.

The national park authorities remain chronically underfunded and understaffed, which means that patrols to protect the areas cannot be carried out to the extent required. State funding, and consequently the payments made, for example, to guards, do not provide guards with a sufficient and fair income for their dangerous work.

- As in previous years, in 2025 we supported four protected areas with various grants, which are described below. First and foremost, we help park authorities to carry out patrols to protect the areas.
- At the same time, we have implemented a wide range of community projects in the Mount Tshiaberimu area, the Sarambwe region and Bwindi National Park in Uganda to improve people's living conditions. (See section 4 for details.)

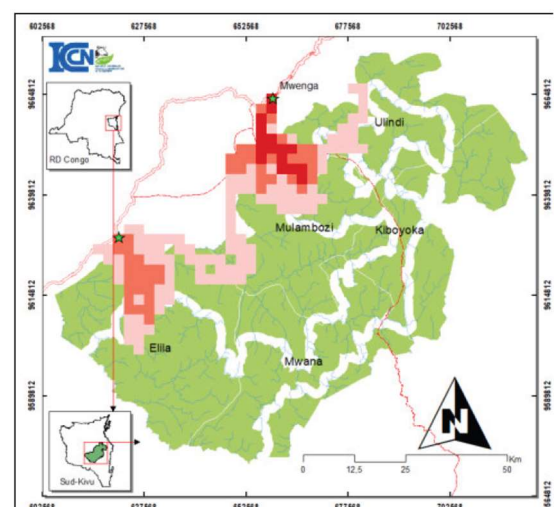
Activities in the gorilla conservation areas

Itombwe Reserve



The Itombwe Reserve was not established until 2006. It is home to a population of Grauer's gorillas. It is located in South Kivu province and forms part of the highly biodiverse Itombwe Massif. Covering an area of around 5,700 km², it is roughly twice the size of Saarland and is divided into five sectors. What makes it special is that there are over forty villages and settlements in the reserve, mostly situated along rivers. Zones were therefore designated for different types of use, and these were revised in 2016 with the involvement of the local residents. In addition to a 'mixed-use zone' for settlement, agriculture, and other activities, there is also a core zone in which human activity is (intended to be) kept to a minimum and where agriculture and settlement are prohibited. In between these two zones is a strip that serves as a buffer zone (see illustration). Forest clearing, the extraction of raw materials and poaching are generally prohibited in all zones.

A failure to observe zoning regulations and high population density are the causes of problems and a lack of

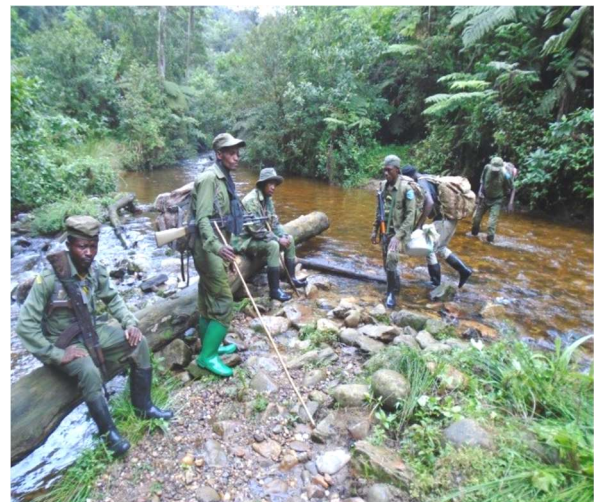


Patrols carried out in 2025 in the Itombwe Reserve (dark red/red/pink: frequency) 7 to 16 patrols have been carried out in the dark red segments.

compliance with conservation measures within the reserve. Although no actual fighting took place here in 2025, the population has been indirectly affected by food shortages and rising prices. Poverty and a lack of alternatives for obtaining food and generating income led to poaching and unauthorised land use, such as logging or the creation of fishponds.

In 2025, the park authority carried out a total of 29 patrols, which, with a combined duration of 192 days, covered more than half a year. However, these patrols focused on just three of the five sectors in the north and west of the reserve (see figure on page 6). The fact that a total of 30 poachers have been apprehended and over 700 traps have been discovered and destroyed demonstrates that the patrols are effective. A further 300 signs of poaching, such as abandoned camps or huts, were discovered. Eight instances of illegal farming and fishing activities were also identified in protected areas. Nevertheless, in 2025, only around 22% of the total area was covered by patrols due to a lack of staff and equipment. This means that patrol coverage has actually deteriorated compared with last year. It is reasonable to assume that illegal activities on a similar scale are taking place in the areas not covered, posing a threat to biodiversity and habitats.

Several groups of gorilla and a few silverback males are roaming the Itombwe Reserve.



Eco Guards on patrol in the Itombwe Reserve ©RNI



Grauer's gorilla in the Itombwe Reserve, photo taken with a camera trap © RNI

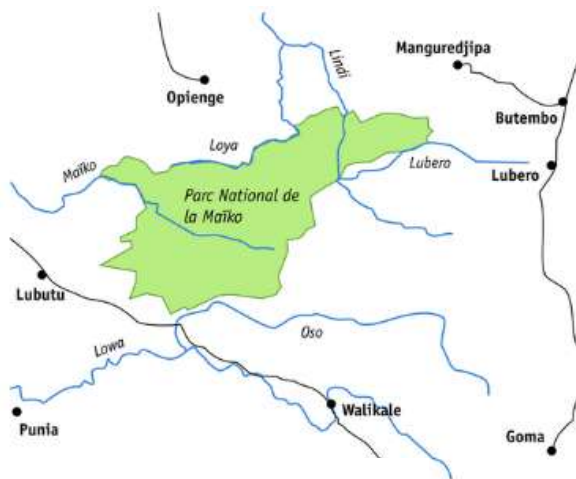
However, the total number of Grauer's gorillas in Itombwe is unknown, as it has not been possible to carry out a survey for years. During the patrols, gorilla tracks are found and the animals themselves are also spotted. Since more camera traps have been set up, another photo of a Grauer's gorilla has been taken.

The park administration regularly sends reports on patrols, activities and any notable events. The security situation in the

Itombwe region is fragile because two rebel groups allied with the M23 are present to the east of the reserve, and there is sporadic fighting with government troops. The areas to the west, including the town of Mwenga, are under the control of the Congolese army. For these reasons, patrols were carried out in the western sectors (see the figure on page 6).

We have been supporting the Itombwe region since 1996. As in the previous year, we have again funded a salary top-up for the reserve staff in 2025, so that employees and their families are paid a fair wage and can make ends meet. We have covered the cost of renting office space for the park administration. In 2025, we paid a total of EUR 39,815 to the Itombwe Reserve.

Maiko National Park



Parc National de la Maïko (© Angela Meder)

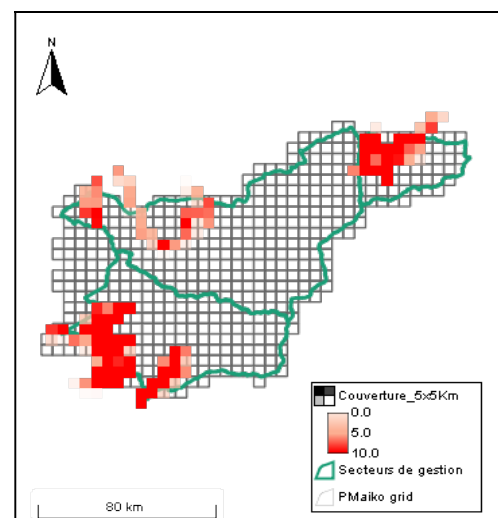
Maiko National Park was established as early as 1970. Covering an area of approximately 10,800 km², it is a relatively large, protected area (roughly half the size of Saxony-Anhalt or Rhineland-Palatinate). Its four sectors are at an altitude of between 550 and 1,300 metres. In addition to a population of Grauer's gorillas, the exact number of which is unknown, it is home for a variety of other endangered endemic species such as chimpanzees, forest elephants and okapis.

The main ongoing problem facing the national park is that Simba rebel groups have long claimed a part of the area and continue to occupy it. They maintain that the national park should never have been established in this form and on this scale. Consequently, patrols in the northern and central sectors are only possible to a limited extent. In addition to poaching and habitat destruction caused by the rebels, natural resources are being illegally exploited there as well. The park administration has tried to persuade the rebel groups to leave the park – so far without success. Despite the negotiations, a lasting solution is not in sight.

We usually receive regular reports from the conservation areas we support. For 2025, this has only been partially achieved for Maiko National Park, although we have repeatedly requested the reports. It is therefore impossible to give a complete picture of the activities performed.

In the first six months of 2025, patrols were carried out in the western sectors and at the edge of the northern sectors – despite the threat from the rebels (see map). 19 patrols were carried out during this period, with the guards covering approx. 3,000 km. As a result of intensive monitoring in the south-west, that is also where the most gorilla tracks were found. In contrast, only a single gorilla track was found in the north-east. In addition to the more common ground nests, around 20% of the gorillas' nests were found to be 'structured' tree nests at heights of up to 10 metres.

As expected, the guards have once again uncovered a number of illegal human activities. In addition to



Patrol coverage in the first six months
(© PNM)

rifles, cartridges and traps, which point to poaching, 71 camps were discovered, most of them still actively used. Evidence of logging and fishing was also found, as well as a site where gold prospectors had been mining. This shows that, in 2025, rebels and/or sections of the local population were still carrying out similar illegal activities to those seen in previous years. It is clear that patrols need to be carried out regularly, covering as wide an area as possible, in order to prevent or at least reduce the extent of illegal activities.



Illegal gold mining in Maiko National Park under the most primitive conditions © PNM

The park administration, in collaboration with universities in the region, has launched several studies aimed at investigating indigenous knowledge of wildlife within local communities, the risk of disease transmission through bushmeat, and the habitat of the red colobus monkey. Together with the eco-guards, the local population is to be involved so that their knowledge of these issues can be deepened, and, at the same time, the importance of species conservation measures can be conveyed. In addition, a comprehensive biomonitoring programme was planned for 2025, but unfortunately we do not yet have the results.

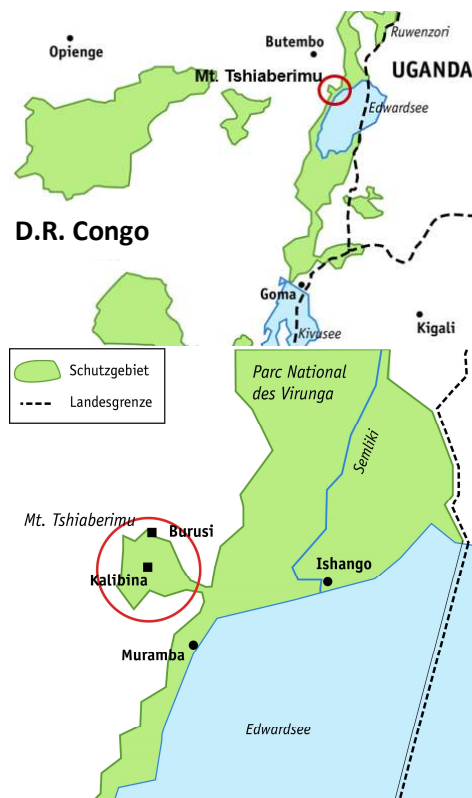
In July, another meeting was held between the park administration and representatives of the surrounding local authorities, the nature conservation authorities and supporting organisations. Current issues and problems within the protected area were discussed and possible solutions explored. This dialogue is considered crucial to ensuring that the measures are accepted by those involved and those affected. An action plan is being developed. This will form the basis for the park administration team's future work.



Entrance to the Maiko National Park © Claude Sikubwabo

Due to its size, Maiko National Park receives support from several international organisations. As in the previous year, we topped up the salaries of rangers (eco-guards) and other staff in 2025 to ensure their remuneration is fair and they can support their families. We have also covered the costs of medical care for the eco-guards.

Last year, Rostock Zoo supported us with donations for Maiko. As a result, we were able to transfer a total of EUR 33,900 in aid to Maiko National Park in 2025.



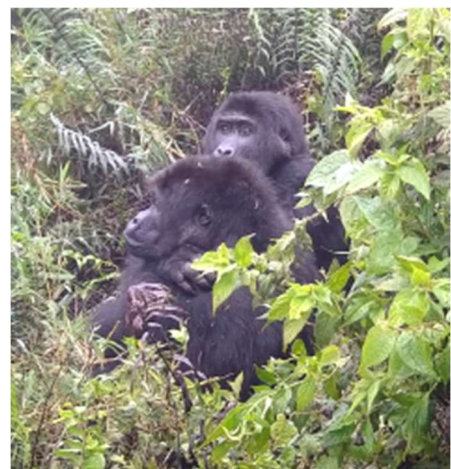
Mount Tshiaberimu (part of Virunga National Park)

Mt. Tshiaberimu is 3,100 m high and forms part of the Virunga National Park. Due to the altitude, the area boasts a unique mountain forest, which is home not only to gorillas but also to a wide variety of other animals in need of protection. The area only covers approx. 60 km². Despite its high protection status, it is extremely vulnerable due to its position as a “forest island”. The density of the surrounding human population is very high.

The gorillas of Mt. Tshiaberimu are classified as Grauer’s gorillas both for morphological and genetic reasons. However, their habitat is more like the habitat of the mountain gorillas. They have formed two separate groups that move between the bamboo forest and the mixed forest areas depending on the availability of food. Following a dramatic decline in the population in previous decades, efforts had suc-

ceeded in stabilising the number of the Mt. Tshiaberimu gorillas at a low level.

Following the birth of a baby at the end of 2024, four female gorillas – who had previously lived at a GRACE (Gorilla Rehabilitation and Conservation Education Centre) sanctuary – were released into the wild for the first time in history. Initially, these females were given time to get used to their new environment in a separate enclosure. After their release from the enclosure they joined the Mwasa group fairly quickly. The released females have settled in very well and are being closely monitored by teams of observers. Unfortunately, one of the originally resident female gorillas was found dead in the middle of the year; the cause of death is unknown. Hence, the Mt. Tshiaberimu population consisted of 11 animals by the end of 2025, and there is good reason to hope that more young gorillas will be born.



Two of the released gorillas:
Lulingo and Ndjingala © ICCN

As this is a small population living in complete isolation, the situation of the Mount Tshiaberimu gorillas is still considered critical. However, the outlook has improved significantly since the release of the four female gorillas, offering hope for further positive developments.

The gorillas are used to having people nearby, which is why teams of game guards and trackers are able to monitor them (and other wildlife) very closely and frequently, and thus keep a close eye on their development.



Claude Sikubwabo (centre) with trackers on Mt. Tshiaberimu

The area in the vicinity of Mt. Tshiaberimu has not (so far) been directly affected by the civil war, presumably because it is quite remote. However, groups of Mai-Mai rebels are in the area and pose a latent threat. Nevertheless, the rangers of Virunga National Park were able to carry out their duties in the area throughout 2025.

The population density in the area surrounding the mountain is very high, and the natural vegetation there has been largely destroyed. For this reason, efforts to ease the pressure on this unique mountain forest have

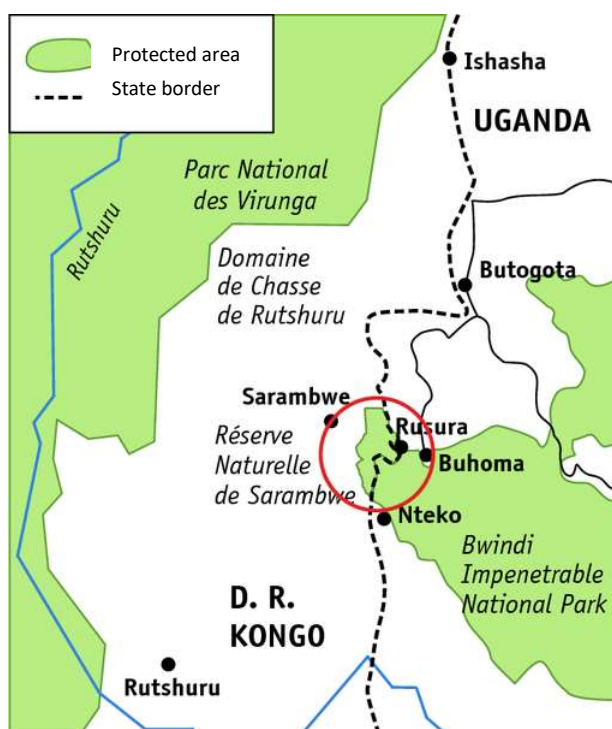
been ongoing for some time, with the support of the local community. This seems to be working well, as no illegal activities were observed in the park in 2025. However, the reason could also be that there have been more patrols since the GRACE gorillas were released, and more monitoring is now carried out.

We supported Mt. Tshiaberimu for the first time in 1996. In addition to game guards, trackers are needed to monitor the gorilla groups in the extremely rugged mountainous area. In 2025, we paid for top-ups of the trackers' salaries and for the equipment needed to carry out patrols (e. g. raincoats, boots). The primary objective remains the stabilisation of the situation, which is essential for the gorilla population to continue to recover.

In 2025, we allocated a total of EUR 18,230 towards the protection of the Mount Tshiaberimu area, with support from donations made by the Gaia Nature Fund in Kerkrade.

Fortunately, in 2025 we were also able to fund five community projects in the Mount Tshiaberimu area (see section 4).

Sarambwe Reserve



The Sarambwe Reserve complements the range of the "Bwindi" mountain gorillas in the DRC. Although this protected area only covers ca. 9 km², it is important and worthy of protection because it is characterised by a high biodiversity. Some of the groups of mountain gorillas that normally live in Bwindi National Park at times extend their range to Sarambwe, although this happened more rarely in 2025 than in earlier years.

The region around Sarambwe has been affected by the civil war for years. The situation has changed significantly once again following the occupation of large parts of North Kivu province by the M23 and allied rebel groups since mid-2024. The Wazalendo rebels, who are allied with government forces

and who for a time controlled the Sarambwe patrol post and the surrounding villages, have fled and are hiding for some time in the surrounding countryside. Government-aligned military forces, police officers and the rangers of Virunga National Park, who are also responsible for protecting Sarambwe, had already left the area by the end of 2023. Since then, the reserve is only protected by the trackers who are paid by us. They, however, go into the forest unarmed and without police authority.

Following the capture of Goma, M23 representatives have called on the population to remain calm; there has been no further direct fighting. In October 2025, the FDLR militia (Force Démocratique pour la Libération du Rwanda – Hutu, who fled to the Congo following the Rwandan genocide and represents one of the M23's main opponents), established a presence on the edge of the Sarambwe Reserve. The rebels had already been raiding villages in the area surrounding the reserve and terrorising the local population. Since then, the security situation for the population has been very tense and unstable as the rebels do not shy away from committing brutal crimes.

In December 2025, one of the trackers was taken away by several men whilst working in the fields with his wife. The next day, his horribly disfigured body was found. Although there is no evidence, the local population assumes that the perpetrators are FDLR fighters. Tracker Muhindo Musa had been working for the reserve since 2008. We have sent his family a donation that will cover their living expenses for a few months.



Group photo of the trackers including the subsequently murdered Muhindo Musa (RIP) © Augustin-Katsiribindi

The trackers carried out regular patrols throughout the year but only used the patrol post intermittently because FDLR forces were in the vicinity. In addition to the patrols, the trackers monitor the forest tracks and the border with Uganda.

Even under the difficult conditions of 2025, the trackers spent more than half of each month out and about in the reserve. Traps are discovered and dismantled time and again. In March, Ugandan and Congolese poachers attacked the trackers in the forest and chased them with sticks, machetes and spears. Other poachers started a bush fire that destroyed around 4 hectares of forest.



Traps collected during patrols
© Maniriho Kanyonyi

In 2025, a problem resurfaced that was thought to have been solved already. On several occasions, Ugandan farmers drove their cattle into Sarambwe to graze. At the same time, timber was also being felled. This happens despite the border being clearly marked – partly thanks to targeted project funding from us – so that, in fact, no one crosses the border by mistake or out of ignorance. Overall, however, the number of illegal interventions has remained low since the border with Uganda was clearly marked and regular patrols carried out in the reserve.

However, it does show that monitoring the area is absolutely essential, as there is a risk that the number of incidents of damage and destruction would increase without the numerous patrols.

During patrols, sightings of animals and their tracks are regularly recorded. Mountain gorillas or their tracks were observed much less frequently than in previous years, whereas chimpanzees, forest elephants, various bird species and other rare species were seen on a regular basis. This confirms that biodiversity is high in this relatively small area and that conservation measures are effective.

It is not yet clear when the rangers and other security personnel will return to the region to resume their duties in securing the reserve. The Board therefore considers it essential to continue supporting the trackers.



Mountain gorilla silverback in the Sarambwe Reserve, taken on 12th June 2025 © Augustin Katsiribindi

In addition to the trackers' salary costs, in 2025 we once again covered the costs of food during patrols, new kitchen equipment, medical care and transport costs. We have purchased equipment required for patrols (e.g. rain jackets, dungarees, boots, warm T-shirts, machetes), as well as a camera for documentation purposes and solar panels to provide an independent power supply, at a total cost of EUR 2,125. In addition, the patrol post damaged by rebels has been repaired.

The Wilhelma, the Zoological-Botanical Garden of Stuttgart, Jörges Coffee Roasters and the Bonhoeffer community of Heidelberg supported us in 2025 with donations earmarked for Sarambwe. In total, we transferred EUR 36,697 towards the conservation of the Sarambwe Reserve in 2025.

In addition, four further projects benefitting the local population in the Sarambwe area were implemented in 2025 (see section 4)

4. Community projects

Thanks to a large number of generous donations, it was once again possible to fund a range of community projects in 2025. The aim of these projects is to achieve a lasting improvement in the economic situation of the region's population, thereby reducing the use of forest areas. Furthermore, we firmly believe in a holistic approach: namely, that measures to protect gorillas and their habitats will be more readily accepted by the local population if we support not only the national parks but also the people living in the surrounding areas.

All suggestions for these projects come from the people in the region. Claude Sikubwabo, our local project manager, coordinates the projects with the respective park administration and representatives from the village communities and potential project partners. The selection of

local project partners and the beneficiary groups within the population is crucial. The ultimate objective is for the 'results' of the projects to be continued on a self-managed basis. It is therefore important that the beneficiary groups show commitment and self-motivation in carrying out the necessary work carefully and in a coordinated manner, and in maintaining the 'project results' in good condition and in working order. Local project managers must delegate responsibility, and the beneficiaries must take it on.

The Mount Tshiaberimu region

A storm severely damaged a building of the Mt. Tshiaberimu school in Kisanga (see photo on the right), which had been enlarged by a newly built building only the previous year. Thanks to a donation of EUR 2,000 from the proceeds of the mobile phone collection organised by Wilhelma in Stuttgart, we were able to finance the repair of the roof and exterior walls quickly and directly; the work was completed in September 2025.



A building of the Mt. Tshiaberimu school, badly damaged by a storm
© Kasereka Gervais

Thanks to a donation from the Gaia Nature Fund in Kerkrade, we were able to fund several new projects in the region in 2025:



Everybody is lending a hand!
© Claude Sikubwabo

- Trees were planted along the road from Vurusi to Ngitse to reduce erosion and thus ensure the road remains passable; this road is vital for the local population's access to various markets, medical and educational facilities and the transport of goods
- Maracuja (passion fruit) seedlings were procured to meet the population's needs
- Classrooms in five schools were renovated in the towns of Kisanga, Kasimbi and Kyuna, mainly involving the installation of new metal sheeting and roof trusses for the roofs of the buildings
- The trackers' families were supported by providing them with chickens for their own use
- Ten students from various universities in the region were trained in on-site environmental education and management, using the example of Grauer's gorillas and its habitat

A total of EUR 17,965 was allocated to these projects, which was fully covered by donations from the Gaia Nature Fund.

Sarambwe region

Thanks to a donation from the Joerges Coffee Roasters, we were again able to fund several projects in the Sarambwe region in 2025:

- Support for the construction of 3 classrooms of Nyarubungu School. Three new classrooms were built and fitted with 10 school desks. The school covered the remaining costs and provided the labour.
- Support for the Dumez Primary School in the village of Sarambwe through the provision of corrugated roofing sheets and school desks; the village community provided the remaining materials and labour
- Support for the regionally significant health centre in Kisharu, the region's main town, through the procurement of mattresses for patient care, as well as solar panels, batteries and masts for public lighting (including transport and installation)
- Support for the water committee responsible for managing local water resources, through the procurement of pipes, taps and fittings for the use of a water source



Nyarubungu School: Every construction project begins with the laying of the foundations © Claude Sikubwabo

The costs incurred for this project, amounting to EUR 8,569, were covered in full by the donation.

5. Other projects involving partners

Mondberge projects

The three editors of MONDBERGE magazine – Andreas Klotz, Michael Matschuck and Dirk Wahlscheidt – donate a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the magazine, books, calendars, articles and lectures, to environmental, nature and species conservation. The aim is to provide journalistic information and raise awareness, but also to collect donations for various projects and inspire people to help protect the last mountain gorillas. (For further information, please go to mondberge.de.) In addition, the MONDBERGE team draw on their professional contacts to raise awareness of the issues involved and the importance of aid projects, thereby attracting further donations.

Tree Network Bwindi

The Tree Network project, which began in 2022, continued in 2025. In the locally owned nursery, seedlings of pines, fruit trees and local tree species are raised, which are then distributed to the residents of the Ruhija region near Bwindi National Park. In addition to permanent staff, residents from the surrounding villages are also employed on a temporary basis to carry out seasonal work.



Seedlings in the Tree Network nursery near Bwindi National Park

© Martha Robbins

The experience gained during the first few years of the project led to significant improvements in the quality of seedling cultivation. In 2025, nearly 28,000 seedlings, mainly pine trees, were distributed to 653 households across six communities in the Bwindi region, representing an increase on the previous year in both figures. A further 43,000 or so seedlings are currently growing in the nursery and will be ready for distribution in 2026.

Since the project began, more than 65,000 seedlings have been distributed to 1,400 households in 15 vil-

lages. The seedlings are planted in the private gardens of local residents, meaning that people take responsibility for their continued growth. Later, the trees will be used as timber, for example in construction projects, or – in the case of fruit trees – for their fruit (lemons are a popular choice), without causing any harm to the forest in the national park or, as a consequence, to the mountain gorillas. It is notable that native tree seedlings, which also grow in Bwindi National Park, are not very popular because they grow very slowly and are more likely to die in residential areas than other trees.

The wooden support structure and sunshades are now in need of repair. We will continue to support this project by channelling earmarked donations from the proceeds of the Mondberge initiative to project leader Martha Robbins (MPI Leipzig). In 2025, EUR 10,400 was transferred for this purpose.

The school project Bwindi Ape Conservation Partnership (BACEP)

This project, which has been running for several years, teaches primary school classes in four schools in the Ruhija area, on the edge of Bwindi National Park, about the importance of conservation for mountain gorillas and their habitat. The young students can actively participate in a range of activities. The topics covered in 2025 included threats to gorillas and conservation activities, what the lives of the gorillas and of other wildlife in Bwindi National Park look like, and information about gorilla tourism. Competitions and cultural activities such as traditional dances are also part of the programme.



A lesson about mountain gorillas and their way of life

© Arleta Asingizwe

The lessons and other activities are organised and run by a small local project team led by Martha Robbins (MPI Leipzig) in collaboration with school management and local community representatives. The costs are covered in full by earmarked donations from the proceeds of the Mondberge initiative. In 2025, a total of EUR 8,400 was provided to this project. Due to a teachers' strike, the lessons for the project could not be held to the extent that was originally planned. Any unused funds will be carried over to 2026.

Gorilla Identification and Demography

Launched in 2025, the project works closely with the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to enable rangers to support gorilla research in Bwindi National Park. The main focus is on accurately identifying the gorillas in the 28 habituated gorilla groups in Bwindi and recording demographic changes within the groups. Currently, 285 animals in 28 habituated groups have been identified. The project will run until 2026. The project also produces posters and leaflets on how to identify gorillas. The project costs are covered in full by MONDBERGE donations earmarked for this purpose. In 2025, EUR 9,000 was transferred for this purpose.

Further support projects

Renovation of Kitaba Primary School



Students and parents outside the new classrooms © Martha Robbins

Following a visit to the site, Birgit Spinelli and Thomas Hagenauer made a donation to fund the renovation of Kitaba Primary School. This school in the village of Mburameizi, near Ruhija, had become far too small for its 300 students; up to 70 students had to share a single classroom. The construction of four new classrooms, hygienic new toilets and a water tank now provides suitable learning conditions within a safe and healthier environment. The initial donation encouraged the local community and local

authorities to contribute towards the total cost and to purchase 72 school desks themselves. The new buildings were opened in August 2025, an occasion that was celebrated in style with a party featuring singing and dancing by the students.

Gorilla Doctors

Gorilla Doctors is a US-based organisation that has been sending teams of vets to the gorilla habitats in Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC. The teams treat wild gorillas for illnesses or injuries caused by accidents or by the animals becoming caught in traps set to catch other wildlife. To support this important work for animal welfare, we received a designated donation from Schwaben Park in Kaisersbach in 2025 and transferred EUR 2,000 to the Gorilla Doctors in Rwanda.

6. BRD's activities

Annual General Meeting

On 24 May 2025, the annual general meeting was held for the first time in the Allwetterzoo Münster. With 55 participants, including several guests, it was very well attended.

Following a welcome address by the zoo director, Dr Simone Schehka, and board member Angela Meder, the meeting began as usual with presentations on specialist topics given by Camille Cozzarolo (University of Mainz), Andreas Klotz (Mondberge) and Martha Robbins (Max Planck Institute, Leipzig). Closing the session, Elisa Jakob presented her biographical novel **Die Mutter der Berggorillas* [The Mother of the Mountain Gorillas], which tells the story of the gorilla researcher Dian Fossey.



The board members at the welcome reception
© Jens Heinlein

During the formal part of the meeting, board member Angela Meder began by providing an overview of the extremely tense situation in East Africa. In her detailed board report she outlined the projects that the association had supported and funded in 2023 and 2024. Anja Klotz presented the report on the audit of the accounts for the years 2023 and 2024. On behalf of Rolf Brunner, who was unable to attend due to sudden illness, she recommended that the treasurer be granted discharge.

Following the unanimous discharge of liability by the voting members, treasurer Karl-Heinz Kohnen and the board members Dr Angela Meder, Dr Laura Hagemann and Burkhard Bröcker were unanimously re-elected. They accepted their appointments. Anja Klotz was re-elected as auditor.

As usual, the meeting was rounded off with a joint dinner and a get-together in the zoo's restaurant. The guided tour through the zoo on Sunday required a bit of stamina from all the visitors, as after many years of good weather on that day, it was raining during the tour – though this did nothing to dampen the mood.

Online board presentation

It goes without saying that only a small part of an association's members are able (or willing) to travel to a general meeting and attend in person. The board team therefore organised its first online members' meeting and presented the boards report, which had been delivered in Münster, via video conference in July 2025.

Although there is still plenty of room for improvement in terms of attendance, the board team would like to continue offering this option from time to time in the future (in German language) but hopes for a greater response.

Public relations during events

Information booths during species conservation days

In 2025, the association was once again invited to take part in several species conservation days in zoos.

On the International Day for Biological Diversity in May, association member Nicky Schubert represented the association with an information booth in Rostock Zoo. Speaking mainly to school pupils, he focused on explaining how the extraction of raw materials for electronic devices – including smart phones – affects the lives and habitats of gorillas. One highlight was a brief visit to the information booth by the Minister for Agriculture of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, who, accompanied by zoo director Antje Angeli, was given an explanation of the association's objectives and working methods, as well as the support provided by Rostock Zoo.



Nicky Schubert at the information stand in Rostock Zoo © J. Schubert



Information stand during the species day in the Wilhelma © A. Meder

The Species Conservation Day in the Wilhelma in Stuttgart in September was once again a 'home game' for Angela Meder, who, with the help of two members of the association, ran an information booth for children and interested adults, providing information about gorillas and our work, in addition to gorilla pictures to colour in. Unfortunately, turnout was low, at least partly due to the bad weather.

The association was invited by Duisburg Zoo to participate in its Species Conservation Day for the first time in August 2025. Laura Hagemann gave a presentation on the association's work and the situation facing the gorillas and their habitats to an interested audience, many of whom stopped by our booth as part of the 'Zoo Rally' organised by the zoo.

The "Society for Great Apes" is a university society founded by students at the University of Göttingen. It is dedicated to the protection of great apes and aims to raise awareness of conservation programmes and organisations.

Together with other organisations, Laura Hagemann took part in the first 'Great Ape Action Day' in Göttingen in July 2025, where she promoted our association and our aid projects through a keynote speech and an information booth.



Laura Hagemann at the information stand in Göttingen © David Rolinger

Panel discussion

To mark the opening of the new primate building in October, Krefeld Zoo organised a panel discussion, among other events, to which Angela Meder was invited as a representative of an organisation that protects gorillas through conservation projects.



Angela Meder during the panel discussion in Zoo Krefeld © Zoo Krefeld

Podcast: “World Improvers”

The journalist Birthe Gernhardt runs the podcast “World Improvers” (which, in her own words, is “the podcast for anyone who wants to look to the future with a positive yet mindful outlook. A podcast about sustainability, social projects and innovation”). At the invitation of Ms Gernhardt, Angela Meder and Laura Hagemann took part in an in-depth discussion in March 2025, during which they spoke about gorilla conservation, support for local communities and the tireless efforts of conservationists. (Podcast: World Improvers, episode 254)

Other activities of the association

Mountain gorilla webshop

The mountain gorilla webshop has been up and running since June 2021. On this (external) website, you can buy T-shirts, jumpers and other items featuring the club logo and/or gorilla designs. This is made possible through a partnership with Spreadshirt, an online shop platform operator based in Leipzig, which runs this website for us free of charge.

We have set up the shop and selected the items, colours and designs we want to provide. Spreadshirt does everything else: Purchasing and supplying the items, custom printing, dispatch and processing of payments to Spreadshirt. The association does not hold stock and therefore incurs neither risk nor costs.

The entire purchase process is legally handled by Spreadshirt or its parent company, sprd.net AG. For every purchase, the association receives a donation equal to the difference between the purchase price and the selling price.

The shop is primarily intended to offer members the chance to purchase items featuring mountain gorilla designs, thereby promoting the association, which does not intend to generate significant revenue. In 2025, we received a payment of EUR 78.05 from Spreadshirt.

Collection of mobile phones

In 2025, once again, many of our members and countless other environmentally conscious people donated their old mobile phones and smart phones to us – thank you very much! Thanks mainly to a massive collection drive organised by Cusanus High School in Bruneck, South Tyrol, Italy, we achieved record proceeds of EUR 4,278.96 in 2025 from sales to recycling companies and resellers.

Annual reports

All annual reports (from 2021 onwards) are available to download and read on our website under ‘About us / Transparency’ (in German only).

7. Revenue and expenditures in 2025

The following two pages show revenue and expenditure for 2025 by account:

Revenue

Membership fees	25,220.00
00020 Membership fees	25,220.00
Donations	169,672.93
00021 Unspecified donations	66,043.74
00023 Donations – Mt. Tshiaberimu	27,500.00
00024 Donations – Sarambwe	19,600.00
00027 Donations – Bwindi	890.00
04505 Donations – Mondberge	29,820.00
04506 Donations – Betterplace Maiko	2,946.94
04508 Donations – Itombwe	5,040.00
04509 Donations – Betterplace Sarambwe	555.75
04510 Donations – Gorilla Doctors	4,185.00
04511 Donations – Betterplace Itombwe	2,091.50
04513 Donations – Maiko	11,000.00
Allocation of fines	1,820.00
00019 Allocation of fines	1,820.00
Revenue from sales	4,457.01
00025 Sale of books etc.	100.00
04010 Proceeds from mobile phone donations	4,278.96
04022 Proceeds from Spreadshirt (webshop)	78.05
Exchange rate differences	76.00
00046 Exchange rate differences	76.00
Reimbursements AGM	-199.44
00028 Reimbursements AGM	-199.44
Total	201,046.50

Remark: Betterplace is a German non-profit fundraising platform, collecting donations for dedicated projects of the association.

Note regarding the transparency rules of the Transparent Civil Society Initiative:

In 2025, we received one or more donations totalling more than 10% of the total annual budget from the following donors:

Stichting Gaia Nature Fund, Gaiaboulevard 1, 6468 PH Kerkrade (Netherlands)

Expenditure

Administration	-4,903.16
04001 Postage	-2,080.70
04002 Stpk. Mülheim account fee	-1,199.70
04003 Postfinance account fee	-393.00
04004 Website	-543.00
04005 Office supplies	-344.84
04006 Paypal fees	-48.14
04007 Returned direct debits	-293.78
Sales of goods	-150.00
04501 Purchase of books and DVDs	-150.00
Public relations	-2,096.84
04101 Printing costs for Gorilla Journal German	-1,294.48
04102 Printing costs for Gorilla Journal English	-802.36
Other ancillary expenses	-2,000.00
03617 Gorilla Doctors	-2,000.00
DR Congo	-172,976.00
00032 Salaries / Bonuses	-9,700.00
00033 Office and travel expenses Claude	-6,100.00
03601 Maiko	-33,900.00
03602 Sarambwe	-45,266.00
03603 Mount Tshiaberimu	-38,195.00
03613 Itombwe	-39,815.00
Uganda	-32,800.00
03606 Bwindi	-32,800.00
Total expenditure	-214,926.00
Loss	13.879,50

Note on expenditures:

Board members and the Treasurer generally waive their right to reimbursement of necessary travel expenses incurred on business trips undertaken on behalf of the association (e.g. hotel and travel costs incurred in connection with general meetings or other events).

In 2025, board members waived reimbursement of expenses incurred for the association's purposes (e.g. postage and delivery costs, office supplies) amounting to EUR 2,721.