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First batch of gorillas reach nature reserve in DR Congo after UN airlift



Caregivers help two orphan gorillas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

29 April 2010 – United Nations peacekeepers in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have airlifted four endangered gorillas to a safer habitat to keep them from being illegally trafficked or eaten before they are released back into the wild.

“The hope is that the gorillas will bond into a unit strong enough to survive and multiply in the wild,” the UN Mission in the DRC ([MONUC](#)) said today in a [press release](#).

Three young females (Mapendo, Amani and Ndjingala) and a male named Kighoma – all eastern lowland gorillas – flew by helicopter for 50 minutes on Tuesday with veterinarians and other caregivers from Goma to a village near the heavily forested Tanya Nature Reserve in north Kivu province.

The decision to move the gorillas by air was made after scientists said ground transportation would be too difficult and traumatic.

The four gorillas, victims of illegal trafficking in wildlife and bushmeat, will be joined in early June by six adolescent orphans flown by MONUC from Rwanda.

The requests for the transports were made by the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN) and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, which along with other conservation supporters has established the Gorilla Rehabilitation and Conservation

Education Center (GRACE) in the village of Kasugho, the gorillas' temporary new home before they are released into the wild.

Gorillas may disappear from large parts of the Greater Congo Basin by the mid-2020s unless urgent action is taken to safeguard habitats and counter poaching, according to a report released last month by the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) and INTERPOL.

The Last Stand of the Gorilla – Environmental Crime and Conflict in the Congo Basin blamed violence between militias in the eastern part of the DRC involved in lucrative illegal natural resource trade for accelerating the possible demise of the gorillas.

“Caring for the Earth we all share is not just the job of governments. It requires us to reach across boundaries and do things we would not normally expect to do,” Alan Doss, head of MONUC, had said about his decision to approve air transport for the gorillas.

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