

## LESSON 5

### I. The Forests of Uganda

We've spent a lot of time talking about the animals of Uganda. Now it's time to talk about the places where many of them live--in the forests of Uganda!

The most famous forest in Uganda is the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. It is located in southwestern Uganda [SHOW MAP] and it is largely contained within Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Bwindi Impenetrable Forest comprises a large primeval forest in East Africa. While most of today's forests are no more than 12,000 years old, Bwindi's vegetation has been weaving itself into tangles over at least 25,000 years!

The Impenetrable Forest, also known as 'Place of Darkness', is located in southwestern Uganda on the edge of the western arm of the Great Rift Valley, only a few kilometers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo border and about 25 kilometers north of the Virunga Volcanoes. The forest is one of the richest ecosystems in Africa. In 1994, it was recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site for its biological significance.

The forest covers mountains that are very steep. Before you even get to the gorillas, you have to do a lot of climbing. The environment you see during the climb is very special. Scientists learn a lot just from exploring the forest and watching the animals interact with each other.

The part of the forest that is Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is home to 120 species of mammals, 346 species of birds, 202 species of butterflies, 163 species of trees, 27 species of frogs, chameleons, geckos and many endangered species. The park is also a *sanctuary* for colobus monkeys and chimpanzees. It is most known for its population of Mountain Gorillas. The park is home to 340 Bwindi gorillas, half of the world's population. There are six habituated Mountain Gorilla groups: Mubare, Habinyanja, Bitukura, Rushegura, Nshongi and Nkuringo. In 2006, research showed that the numbers of Mountain Gorillas in Bwindi National Park increased from 320 in 2002 to 340 in 2006. A small increase but it is still very exciting to know that the numbers are going up.

In 1932, two chunks of the forest were named the Crown Forest Reserves, referring to the British colonial administration. In 1942, the Crown Forest Reserves were enlarged and renamed the Impenetrable Central Crown Forest. In 1964, the reserve was named as an animal sanctuary in order to provide extra protection to its Mountain Gorillas. It was also renamed the Impenetrable Central Forest Reserve. In 1991, Impenetrable Central Forest Reserve was declared a national park and renamed Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. This dark forest has had a lot of names over the years!

The national park was declared in part to protect a range of species within it, most notably the Mountain Gorilla. Gorilla tracking became a tourist activity in April 1993, and the park became a popular tourist destination. Mountain Gorillas are currently the park's main tourist attraction. If you would like to track gorillas, you must first get a permit to do so. The gorillas seldom react to tourists but there are strict rules about visiting them to minimize the risk of diseases passing from humans to gorillas.

Protecting natural resources can also have negative consequences. When the Bwindi

Forest was declared a national park, local communities lost access to forest resources on which many had depended for livelihoods. This gave rise to a great deal of conflict between the park and local communities, which threatened the existence of the forest and the ability of the park authorities to manage it. For instance, the *reclassification* of the park has a large impact on the Batwa pygmy people, who were evicted from the forest and no longer permitted to enter the park or access its resources. They are called “conservation refugees.”

In recent years, the conservationists have worked together with the local people, so that everyone can benefit from the preservation of gorillas. In recent years, a quarter of the money coming in from tourism and gorilla fundraising has been used to strengthen the local community. Also, the Batwa people are working to build a trail for tourists that will show off their culture and history.

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest is also home to a number of Forest Elephants in one corner of the park that are rarely seen by visitors. Forest Elephants are smaller and hairier than their savanna cousins. You can also find forest duiker antelopes and bush buck antelopes and a few others. In Bwindi you can find over 350 different species of birds, some of which are found nowhere else.

Make sure you keep your eyes wide open while you are looking for gorillas at Bwindi! You never know what else you might see!

**Handout:** Maze. Help the Trekkers find their way to the heart of the forest where the gorillas live.

## II. Vocabulary:

- Impenetrable: *Impossible to pass through or enter*
- Environment: *The surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives; The natural world.*
- Climbing: *To go up a slope, incline, tree, etc. using the feet and sometimes the hands.*
- Exploring: *To travel in or through an unfamiliar area to learn more about it.*
- Ecosystem: *A biological community*
- Chameleon: *A small, slow moving lizard with a prehensile tail, long tongue, protruding eyes, and ability to change color.*
- Gecko: *A nocturnal and vocal lizard with adhesive pads on the feet to help climbing on smooth surfaces.*
- Conservation: *Preserving, protecting, and restoring the natural environment, ecosystems, vegetation, and wildlife.*
- Refugee: *A person who has been forced to leave their home to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster; Also a person who has been forcibly relocated by their government.*

## III. Multiple Choice

1. How many mountain gorillas call Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park home?
  - a. 340

- b. 1000
  - c. 75
  - d. 720
2. TRUE or FALSE: Bwindi Impenetrable Forest is known for its ecological diversity.
  3. Bwindi's vegetation is nearly how many years old?
    - a. 1,000
    - b. 5,000
    - c. 12,000
    - d. 25,000
  4. What is the main tourist attraction at Bwindi?
    - a. Mountain gorillas
    - b. Volcanoes
    - c. Elephants
    - d. Giraffes
  5. What is a downside to protecting natural resources?
    - a. Conservation refugees
    - b. High entrance fees
    - c. Protection of endangered animals
    - d. Protection of ecosystems
  6. Why are there strict rules for human-gorilla interactions at Bwindi?
    - a. The potential to spread diseases from humans to gorillas
    - b. Gorillas will take your camera!
    - c. Because a mama gorilla might mistake you for her baby!
  7. TRUE or FALSE: Protecting gorillas was the main reason Bwindi Impenetrable Forest was named an animal sanctuary.
  8. TRUE or FALSE: Bwindi is home to all of the world's mountain gorilla population.
  9. Other animals you will see at Bwindi include:
    - a. Forest Elephant
    - b. Gecko
    - c. Chameleon
    - d. All of the above
  10. Before it was called the Bwindi, the park was known as:
    - a. Yellowstone National Park
    - b. Mount Rushmore
    - c. Crown Forest Reserves
    - d. Maasai Mara National Park

#### **IV. Activity**

Each student makes his/her own gorilla puppet using whatever materials are available. Regular notebook paper can be easily substituted for construction paper. As they are making their puppet, they should name it and come up with a short background story about their gorilla to either share with a partner, a small group, or the entire class.

#### **V. Activity**

Read the story about one of Bwindi's gorilla families: Habinyanja. Based on time allotment and group preference, role-play the gorillas described and act out their family relationships. Show children the importance of family among mountain gorillas and the similarities to humans. If possible, encourage students to take on roles as the activity progresses.

### **The Story of the Habinyanja Family**

The original Habinyanja group was habituated in 1997 and 1999. This group started receiving visitors in 1999.

In the past decade, the family has seen more than one reversal of power, as the Silverbacks have struggled for supremacy.

The saga begins during habituation in the reign of the dominant, but aging silverback patriarch, Mukurusi. He was the undisputed leader of a peaceful family of about 30 individuals - a large number even by gorilla family standards.

Mukurusi means 'old man' in Rukiga. He was named this because the trackers had noted that, even though he was still the commander-in-chief of the group, his days were numbered and sure enough, he soon passed away, leaving several sons.

In most families, the death of the patriarch unleashes smoldering sibling rivalries. This brood is no exception. The first cause of friction was family leadership. This thorny issue was brought about by the fact that there were four silverbacks in the group. These being:

Rwansigazi --A silverback at father's death, he was next-in-line to lead the family. But his dominance was not guaranteed because of his half-brothers.

Mwirima--Also a silverback at father's death and a contender for supremacy; initially, both brothers shared power but it was only a matter of time before the situation came to a head.

Further fuelling the struggles for dominance were Mukurusi's other sons;

The young and restless, Makara;

The black-sheep (or is it gorilla) of the family, Binyindo.

And Maraya, he of elastic morals and equally elastic loyalties.

Five sons all started contending for the crown.

The drama is heightened by the adult females of the group, led by the shrewd lady, one-eyed Kisho.

After the death of Mukurusi the original group remained as a family unit under the leadership of the two eldest silverbacks, Rwansigazi and Mwirima, for a number of years. The two brothers would have continued living as one family unit except for one irreconcilable difference. Rwansigazi favored a large home range and would lead the family in difficult marches far away from the much smaller home range that Mukurusi had favored.

Trackers theorize that perhaps Rwansigazi was satisfying a need to explore the world that he felt was denied him by his father who, at his advanced age, didn't have the ability to travel long distances.

Whatever the reason, his brother and co-leader, Mwirima preferred to keep the family within a narrower area.

On Valentine's Day 2002, an event could have potentially been a cause of conflict that may have ended in the death of one of the leading silverbacks. Rwansigazi communicated to the group that they were in for a long trek that day. To which Mwirima may have replied:

"Well, I don't fancy a long walk in the woods today bro, how about you just mosey along without me and (turning to the group) whichever of you gals wants to hang around with me just feel free to do so."

That settled matters in an easy, friendly manner and the family divided with a cheerful "Cheerio" from both sides.

The group that left with Rwansigazi maintained the name Habinyanja.

The group that decided to stay with Mwirima was named the Rushegura family.

But Rwansigazi's troubles weren't over.

Later, Makara ousted his elder brother Rwansigazi and took over as the dominant male. Rather than killing Rwansigazi's children, Makara has taken all the juveniles and infants under his care and protection.