

#FutureForGorillas: Campaign launches to save Cameroon's cornered great apes from fate of population collapse

- ❖ World events have triggered a surge of poaching and logging in the home of the most northerly known population of the Western Lowland Gorilla, threatening to trap the critically endangered species into a genetic island at Cameroon's Deng Deng National Park.
- ❖ World Land Trust's #FutureForGorillas appeal will raise funds to support its partner ERuDeF, a local conservation charity who wants to create and protect two community forests to ensure wildlife can safely travel to the broader Congo Basin to the south.
- ❖ In the face of [new findings](#) of unprecedented destruction of animal life across the world – and [the new evidence](#) that conservation action works – the proposed corridor will offer a new chance to Gorilla but also Chimpanzee, Pangolin, Elephant, Leopard, Hippopotamus and others.

10 SEPTEMBER 2020 – A new campaign will offer this year a historic chance to rescue a critically endangered Gorilla subspecies from a future of isolation and decline, delivering a conservation reprieve at a time when human destruction of animal life is reaching unparalleled heights.

Launched in early September, the World Land Trust (WLT)'s [#FutureForGorillas appeal](#) will fund a new corridor to protect the most northerly known population of Western Lowland Gorillas, a species battered by pandemics, poaching and logging pressure on its forest home.

World events have made it critical to urgently safeguard the forests to the south of Deng Deng National Park, in eastern Cameroon. Armed conflict in western Cameroon and the Central African Republic has forced refugees to relocate to the area, ramping up human pressure over Deng Deng's threatened populations of Gorilla, Chimpanzee, Pangolin, Elephant, Leopard, Hippopotamus and others.

Supported by the #FutureForGorillas campaign, WLT partner Environment and Rural Development Foundation (ERuDeF) will use donations to secure and protect 23,692 acres of land across two community reserves, an area similar in size to the UK city of Manchester. The two properties will link Deng Deng National Park to the Belabo Council Forest, preserving one of wildlife's only access points to the broader Congo Basin.

ERuDeF – a conservation non-profit founded in 1999 – believes it is key to secure this crucial gateway before human encroachment closes it, to ensure the resident Gorilla and others survive in the long run. “We’re witnessing the arrival of new communities and we’re looking several decades into the future,” says ERuDeF CEO Louis Nkemi. “If we have no conservation bridge and this human pressure continues, this abundance of gorillas, elephants and others will be decimated through inbreeding.”

New future for great apes as global wildlife extinctions reach all-time high

The push to protect the Western Lowland Gorilla comes amid scientific warnings of an “unprecedented” destruction of animal life across the world.

According to the WWF and Zoological Society of London (ZSL)'s [Living Planet Report 2020](#) out in September, between 1970 and 2016 human activities sparked a 68% drop in global populations of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles. Hours earlier, however, [separate research in Conservation Letters](#) had evidenced the difference conservation action – including site protection – can make, finding that global animal extinction rates since 1993 would have been 2.9-4.2 times greater if intervention had not taken place.

Backed by the WLT's #FutureForGorillas appeal, ERuDeF's plan to protect land will seek to deliver yet another conservation win for the Western Lowland Gorilla. The critically endangered subspecies needs urgent help: it already [lost 19.4%](#) of its global numbers from 2005 to 2013, fuelled by an Ebola outbreak in the early 2000s that [wiped out 95%](#) of infected individuals. Going forward, its Africa-wide populations are expected to plummet by 80% over 66 years, from 2005 to 2071.

Around Deng Deng, ERuDeF's new forest corridor will offer a new chance to the estimated 300 Western Lowland Gorilla living within the National Park, but also the 400-600 resident Chimpanzee – an endangered species that [shares 99% of its DNA](#) with humans and has also been hit hard by deforestation and past pandemics.

Donations to the #FutureForGorillas campaign will not only help protect great apes, however. The proposed new corridor will safeguard the African Forest Elephant – an elusive subspecies classified as vulnerable by the IUCN – as well as the Grey Parrot, an endangered and [extremely intelligent bird](#) poached in its hundreds of thousands for the pet trade. Two resident Pangolin species (the endangered White-bellied and Giant Pangolin) will also be covered by the corridor.

Connecting Cameroon's forests to save the bond of people and planet

Alongside the preservation of forests, the #FutureForGorillas campaign will actively seek to improve the lives of eastern Cameroonians – some of the most deprived of a country that [continues to rank 150 of 189](#) in the United Nation's Human Development Index (HDI).

Donations will fund ERuDeF's efforts to bolster the local economy of four ethnic groups – Kepere, Bobolis, Pals and Deng Deng – whose cultures and traditions are closely linked with the forest. A helping hand will also be extended to the refugees fleeing [war in western Cameroon](#) and [the Central African Republic](#).

Support to both groups will come via investments to promote other livelihoods – bee-keeping, cattle rearing – to ensure those forced by hardship to hunt wildlife have an alternative. Local schools will be assisted to foster a shift to a more sustainable economy, easing the pressure on the forest in the long haul.

“We are all part of nature, so supporting local people alongside wildlife is critical for successful conservation” says Dr Jonathan Barnard, CEO of WLT. “This approach is proven to work and will ensure that Cameroon's wildlife and communities can coexist and thrive in the future.

NOTES TO EDITORS

World Land Trust (WLT) protects the world's most biologically significant and threatened habitats acre by acre. Through a network of partner organisations around the world, WLT funds the creation of reserves and provides permanent protection for habitats and wildlife. Partnerships are developed with established and highly respected local organisations who engage support and commitment among the local community. It also works to raise awareness, in the UK and elsewhere, of the need for conservation, to improve understanding and generate support through information and fundraising. <https://www.worldlandtrust.org/who-we-are-2/>

Environment and Rural Development Foundation (ERuDeF) is an award-winning non-profit Cameroonian conservation organisation established in 1999. ERuDeF has been working across Cameroon and has significantly contributed towards restoring fragile ecosystems, regeneration of forest through plantation and agroforestry, conservation of biodiversity through wildlife habitat protection and protected area management. ERuDeF is also promoting environmental education, as well as empowering rural communities through innovative economic and livelihood development programmes. <https://erudef.org/mission/>

Involving local communities: How the two new reserves will be established

The protection of this corridor with ERuDeF and the local communities does not utilise land purchase as a mechanism. Instead, ERuDeF and partners are working with local communities in order to officially designate village land as Community Forest Reserves. This is a fully participatory process whereby communities voluntarily set aside land for conservation purposes. Their motivation for doing so ranges from development of proper land zoning and management planning for their land to provision of improved livelihood opportunities for example pig keeping and climate-smart agriculture. ERuDeF work with the communities in order to identify which opportunities the villagers wish to pursue and then provide necessary training and crucial infrastructure. Meanwhile, there is a long process to officially designate the community forest reserves with ERuDeF following strict government guidelines throughout the process.

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For a **media gallery** with highlights of Deng Deng forests and the resident wildlife, see [here](#)

To find out more about **the iconic species** the #FutureForGorillas appeal will help preserve, follow the links to WLT's dedicated pages for [Western Lowland Gorilla](#), [Chimpanzee](#), [African Elephant](#), [African Leopard](#), [Giant Pangolin](#), [White-bellied Pangolin](#), [Hippopotamus](#), [African Clawless Otter](#), [Grey Parrot](#).