

## Rise in number of critically endangered gorillas expected

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Uganda is expecting a rise in the number of critically endangered mountain gorillas after a “baby boom” in its Bwindi national park.

Bwindi is home to nearly half of the world’s mountain gorillas and 321sq km of dense forest at altitudes of up to 2607m is to be monitored.



Researchers will analyse the status of the population, assess the impact of threats, and evaluate the effectiveness of conservation strategies. They are expecting numbers to rise from the 400 estimated at the last census in 2011.

A team of rangers, wardens and Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) staff will be assembled to comb the forest for evidence of gorillas. Teams will move systematically through the undergrowth recording gorilla nests, evidence of movement (broken branches and pathways) and faecal samples, which are collected for genetic analysis.

The next census is broken into two phases – beginning in March, whilst the second will be conducted in October 2018. The genetic analysis will provide an accurate population figure soon after the data capture is completed. This will allow for the development of gorilla conservation strategies for the future. Whilst the official global population was last recorded as 900 individuals, this is significantly up on the 600 low-point recorded in the 1990s.

Mountain gorillas have survived in Uganda, largely due to conservation efforts. Their habitat has been protected and managed by UWA who have also supported local communities living in the region with better healthcare, education, sanitation and employment opportunities, all aided by tourism.

UWA executive director, Andrew Seguya said: “Thanks to investment from tourism and national conservation efforts, the population figures are set to rise. We’re really excited to see the results of this census.”