

Great Ape Conservation Fund

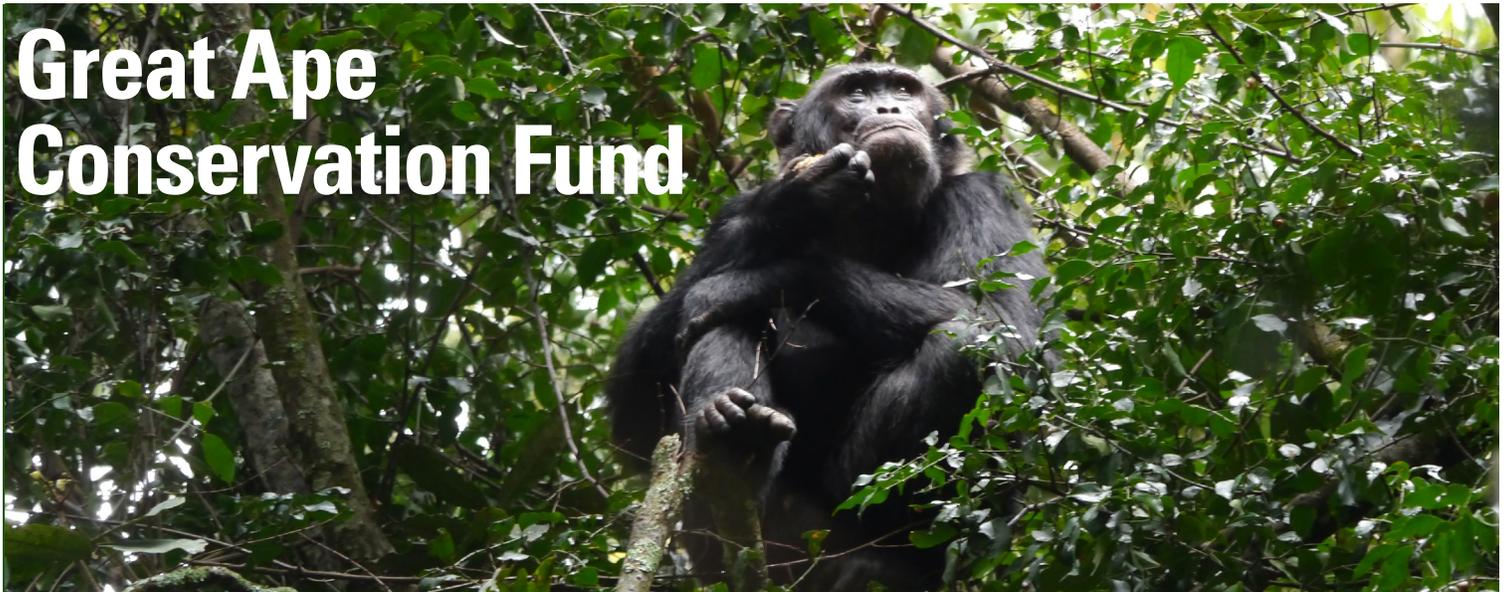


Photo: Eastern Chimpanzee (Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii) in Rwanda's Nyungwe Forest National Park. Credit: Dirck Byler / USFWS

Great apes are the closest living relatives of humans, and share many of our biological traits. Many of those same traits also make apes very vulnerable to human pressures. Great apes live in small groups, grow relatively slowly, produce few offspring and at long intervals, and have complex social relationships. Today, these highly intelligent and charismatic species face multiple largely human-caused threats in both Africa and Asia, including destruction of their forest habitats, illegal hunting for bushmeat and the live pet trade, and disease. These threats have combined to rapidly decimate many ape populations in Africa and Asia. In 1960, there were more than one million chimpanzees in the dense forests of Africa. Today, fewer than 200,000 survive in the wild and their numbers continue to fall. In fact, all of the world's ape species — gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos in Africa, and orangutans and gibbons in Asia — have suffered significant population declines over the past decades and are now at risk of extinction.

In 2000, in response to this looming risk, the U.S. Congress enacted the Great Ape Conservation Act. The Act provides for the conservation and protection of apes by supporting programs in countries within their ranges and the projects of individuals and organizations with demonstrated expertise in ape conservation. This Act created the Great Ape Conservation Fund, which is implemented by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The USFWS works closely with national governments, U.S. agencies, and a host of other partners to ensure a strategic, results-based approach to ape conservation in Africa and Asia.

Since 2000, USFWS has been working with partners on the ground to strengthen the capacity of governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities to address threats to great apes.

Program Highlights

- USFWS has been actively collaborating with NGO, government, and community-based partners in Cameroon and Nigeria to ensure the survival of Africa's most critically endangered ape subspecies, the Cross River gorilla. Using a landscape approach, this project has not only been successful in securing key habitat and developing community support, but also in attracting additional much-needed donor support.
- USFWS supported the successful reintroduction of rescued orangutans into a well-protected natural forest in Indonesia. This was conducted in synergy with local community engagement and support, thus contributing to the creation of a long-lasting legacy for nature conservation and poverty eradication.
- USFWS provided financial support for stakeholders to meet and contribute to great ape conservation action plans in collaboration with the Primate Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission. These action plans will enable a more targeted, strategic, and coordinated approach to ape conservation.



Photo: A Bornean orangutan (Pongo pygmaeus) mother and infant in Sabangau Forest, Indonesia. Credit: OuTrop



Photo: Camera trap photo of a Cross River gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*) silverback in Nigeria. Credit: Wildlife Conservation Society

Strategic Objectives

The Great Ape Conservation Fund supports efforts to combat poaching and trafficking in great apes, increase habitat protection by helping to create and manage protected areas, reduce the threat of disease transmission to at-risk ape populations, and create long-term buy-in and stewardship for conservation of great apes with local communities.

USFWS Support to Great Ape Conservation Fund, 2015 - 2017

| <i>Fiscal Year</i> | <i>Amount Awarded</i> | <i>Amount Leveraged</i> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 2017 | \$2,992,302 | \$2,880,809 |
| 2016 | \$2,100,204 | \$4,635,989 |
| 2015 | \$1,966,050 | \$3,377,689 |
| <i>3-year total</i> | <i>\$7,058,556</i> | <i>\$10,894,487</i> |



Orangutan with infant. Credit: Cory Brown / USFWS

Threats to African and Asian Apes

Africa's apes - gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos - face a variety of threats, including hunting for bushmeat and the illegal pet trade, habitat loss, and disease outbreaks. These threats are exacerbated as roads built for logging and mining operations promote human encroachment and settlement of formerly pristine ape habitat. This also facilitates the transfer of illegal commercial bushmeat and live animals to cities to satisfy growing urban demand.

Apes are susceptible to many of the same diseases as humans. As growing human populations penetrate further into ape habitat, the potential for disease transmission between apes and people, and vice versa, increases. Over the past few decades, outbreaks of Ebola Virus Disease have killed an estimated tens of thousands of gorillas and chimpanzees in Central Africa, reducing some populations by up to 90%.

In Asia, apes also face many severe threats. Orangutans, found only on the islands of Sumatra and Borneo, face the risk of imminent extinction if illegal logging, forest fires, poorly planned road construction, conversion of indigenous forest to plantations, draining of peat lands, and poaching continue unchecked.

Asia's lesser apes, the gibbons, are threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation, as well as by hunting for food, medicine, and sport. Many existing protected areas suffer from inadequate management and poor enforcement of wildlife laws.

Achievements

Since its inception, the Great Ape Conservation Fund has been committed to supporting results-driven projects in Africa and Asia that effectively address threats and conservation priorities.

The Great Ape Conservation Fund continues to help conserve globally significant populations of gibbons and orangutans in Asia. Several projects support conservation of orangutans and critical habitat in Indonesia and Malaysia, areas recently hard-hit by forest fires. Project activities include protecting habitats; preventing forest encroachment; mitigating threats such as road construction and human-wildlife conflict; engaging in reforestation efforts; conducting population surveys and health assessments; building support through environmental education; and strengthening conservation planning and law enforcement.

In Cambodia, India, Myanmar, and Vietnam, funds have supported projects to protect populations of gibbon species by monitoring populations; preventing habitat loss; reducing poaching pressure; engaging in improved conservation planning; training environmental educators; improving law enforcement efforts; strengthening trans-boundary cooperation; developing sustainable finance mechanisms for long-term community-based protection; and supporting the development of gibbon-based ecotourism.

In the tri-border region of Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, USFWS support of mountain gorilla conservation efforts has allowed the recovery of the species from a few hundred three decades ago to roughly 1,000 today - a great conservation success, especially considering the area's volatility.

In West Africa, USFWS funds are helping to protect chimpanzees by preserving their habitat through the creation of new protected areas supported by local communities. In the Republic of Guinea, funds assisted the government with wildlife law enforcement by building capacity; developing deterrents to the killing of chimpanzees, elephants and other threatened wildlife; and monitoring the illegal wildlife trade and other activities detrimental to ape survival.



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