This past May, 2014, I was fortunate enough to travel to Rwanda, Africa, with television crews and my colleague Baerbel Koehler from Abaxis’ Germany office. Abaxis has been very involved in conservation; I have placed a spotlight on Abaxis’ initiatives multiple times in Vetcom, however, I have not had the good fortune to visit first hand the Gorilla Doctors, where I met with Regional Manager Dr. Jan Ramer along with her tremendous and dedicated staff. Not only did I get a sense of the Gorilla Doctors’ project goals, but I also felt the impact of the conservation project and how it positively effects the people of Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo. Dr. Jan, as they call her in Africa, works efficiently and tirelessly to ensure the health of the only remaining mountain gorillas in the world. Amazing! With about 880 mountain gorilla’s left in the world today, it is critical to the ensure the health and well-being of these gorillas and work toward the growth of this population by keeping these gorilla families healthy. The mountain gorilla project utilizes Abaxis Point-of-Care Diagnostics at the clinic sites and patient side due to the portability and accuracy of our products – it’s really incredible to see the work done at patient-side, in the jungle, on the side of a mountain!

For additional information please visit www.gorilladoctors.org if you are so inclined to make a donation or to get involved.

THE PATIENTS:
The Mountain Gorillas are only found in central Africa, with an estimated 480 gorillas living in the Virunga Massif region, which sprawls across Rwanda, DRC, and Uganda. Another 400 mountain gorillas live in Uganda’s Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The Mountain Gorillas have been named one of the top 25 most endangered primates in the world.

ORGANIZATION:
Powered by the nonprofit Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, Inc. and the UC Davis Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center, Gorilla Doctors is dedicated to conserving wild mountain and eastern lowland (Grauer’s) gorillas through life-saving veterinary care and a One Health approach.
Ndakasi was 2-months old when she was found clinging to her murdered mother. Thanks to the loving care of Andre and The Gorilla Doctors’ vets, she survived.

Young Ndakasi was not feeling well at all. Her caregivers called Dr. Eddy Kambale, Gorilla Doctors Head Veterinarian for DR Congo, explaining that Ndakasi had a fever and did not want to eat her food. Ndakasi is one of only 4 mountain gorillas in human care.

Ndakasi was orphaned in 2007 when her mother was killed in Virunga National Park. She now lives with Maisha, Ndeze and Matabishi at Senkwekwe Center, in Rumangabo, DR Congo. Dr. Eddy immediately traveled the 1.5 hours from Goma, DRC, to check on Ndakasi and found a very sick young gorilla.

The Senkwekwe Center, located at park headquarters in Rumangabo, is the only facility in the world that cares for mountain gorilla orphans. Each of the four gorillas living at the center was victimized by poachers or animal traffickers, and likely witnessed family members being murdered. Thanks to the financial support of individuals around the world – and the loving care provided by their human caregivers – the orphans now lead happy and secure lives in their forested enclosure. The orphans also receive veterinary care from the Gorilla Doctors, arguably the most skilled and experienced gorilla veterinarians in the world.
Ndakasi was anesthetized for a complete examination. We found that poor Ndakasi had very enlarged tonsils and inflamed throat, along with lesions on her lips that suggested viral infection. The lymph nodes under her mandible were also quite swollen – no wonder she didn’t want to eat! She had a low fever as well and was slightly dehydrated. As with all mountain gorilla procedures, blood was collected, along with swabs and biopsy of the lip lesions for pathogen detection. She was treated with an anti-inflammatory, long-lasting antibiotic and fluids. As she recovered she went to her caregiver for comfort.

Blood samples were analyzed by Dr. Methode Bahizi, Gorilla Doctors Laboratory Veterinarian, using Abaxis VetScan HM5 and VS2, and we found that she was slightly anemic and had some changes in her CBC compatible with infection. At this time there are no reference ranges for eastern gorillas so we had to reference those established for western lowland gorillas. Fortunately Ndakasi’s liver, kidney and other chemistry values were within normal limits using these reference ranges. There is a current Gorilla Doctors PhD student who is establishing reference ranges for eastern gorillas using the VetScan HM5 and VS2 – more on that in the future!

Gorillas are more than 98% the same as humans genetically and are susceptible to all the viruses and other infections that affect humans. Respiratory disease can be a significant cause of illness and even death in mountain gorillas when a virus causes a secondary bacterial pneumonia. Fortunately Ndakasi is recovering well and is back to eating and playing normally. We suspect she had a virus and possible secondary bacterial throat infection that was sensitive to the antibiotic she received. Confirmation will come once the biopsy and swab are analyzed.

The other orphan gorillas received their annual examinations within days of Ndakasi’s procedure, and were found to be in good health!

Many thanks to Abaxis for all of their generous support of Gorilla Doctors over the years. Their support allows Gorilla Doctors to use the best technology available for local diagnostic tests on these critically endangered gorillas.
The Gorilla Doctors is dedicated to saving mountain gorilla lives.

With only about 880 mountain gorillas left in the world today, we believe it is critical to ensure the health and well being of every individual possible. Our international team of veterinarians, the Gorilla Doctors, is the only group providing wild mountain gorillas with direct medical care. Research has proven that by intervening to save sick and injured gorillas, the Gorilla Doctors have helped the overall mountain gorilla population to increase.

Founded in 1986 at the request of the late gorilla researcher Dian Fossey, the Gorilla Doctors’ veterinary team is dedicated to saving the lives of Central Africa’s endangered mountain and Grauer’s gorillas through health care. Powered by the nonprofit Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, Inc. and the UC Davis Karen C. Drayer Wildlife Health Center, Gorilla Doctors treats wild human-habituated gorillas suffering from life-threatening injury and illness, aids in the rescue and treatment of orphaned gorillas, conducts gorilla and wildlife disease research and surveillance, and facilitates preventive health care for the people who work in the national parks and come into close contact with the gorillas. [www.gorilladoctors.org](http://www.gorilladoctors.org)
“There are 248 gorillas in the world, and they’re all going to die,” Dian Fossey told Ruth Morris Keesling of the Morris Animal Foundation in 1984. “Would you help me save them and send a vet for them?”

In 1986, the Foundation sent Dr. James Foster, the first Gorilla Doctor, to Rwanda. Beginning as the Centre Veterinaire des Volcans (CVV), Gorilla Doctors has grown to employ 14 veterinarians working in all three countries where mountain gorillas live.

In the face of war, genocide, financial downturns, and other setbacks, Gorilla Doctors has performed more than 425 veterinary interventions on ill or injured eastern gorillas.

*Mountain Gorilla Conservation Fund
OUR EXTREME

THANK YOU

The Gorilla Doctors’ Veterinary Staff
Dr. Mike Cranfield - Executive Director
Dr. Kirsten Gilardi - Executive Director
Dr. Jan Ramer - Regional Veterinary Manager
Dr. Eddy Kambale - Head Veterinarian, DRC
Dr. Jean Bosco Noheri - Field Veterinarian, Rwanda
Schadrack Niyonzima - Administrator, Rwanda
Jessica Burbridge - Director of Marketing and Communications
... and all the project staff

Photography
Molly Feltner & Baerbel Koehler
Through our flagship Employee Health Program, we continue to support human health initiatives to mitigate the risk of disease transfer between people and gorillas.

Gorilla Doctors’ facilitates health screenings, follow-up care, and health education for those people who frequently come into contact with gorillas: National Park staff, trackers, porters, researchers, and their families. Thousands of individuals participated in our program. As part of the One Health initiative, third-year residents from the UC Davis Medical Center join staff at Ruhengeri Hospital near Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda, for one-month rotations to help treat patients and train staff members.
Over the past 12 months, the Gorilla Doctors have assisted in the treatment and care of five new infant gorilla orphans confiscated from poachers – an all-time high for rescues in one year.

The four Grauer’s gorillas and one mountain gorilla were poached from the DRC and required medical attention for ailments including respiratory disease, malnutrition, parasites, and wounds caused by restraints.

Dr. Kambale took the lead on medical care for the Grauer’s gorilla orphans in the DRC while female mountain gorilla, Ihirwe, who was confiscated in Rwanda in August 2011, is residing at MGVP’s orphan quarantine facility in Kinigi, Rwanda. Once DNA tests confirm that Ihirwe is in fact a mountain gorilla, she will be transferred to the Senkwekwe sanctuary in the DRC to be with other mountain gorillas.

**MOUNTAIN GORILLAS ARE THE ONLY GREAT APE WHOSE NUMBERS IN THE WILD ARE INCREASING**

A 2010 census, published in 2011, shows that over the previous seven years the number of mountain gorillas living in the Virunga Volcanoes Massif of Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC grew by an incredible 26.3%.

These results highlight the effectiveness of the conservation work carried out by National Park authorities and non-profits like the MGVP. Although the overall number of these animals remains critically low, mountain gorillas are the only great ape whose numbers in the wild are increasing. This species has a fighting chance for survival if we continue to work to address conservation challenges.
The Gorilla Doctors work in close partnership with national park and wildlife authorities including the Rwanda Development Board, L’institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature, and the Uganda Wildlife Authority, all of which conduct daily health monitoring of the gorillas, anti-poaching patrols, and provide support during interventions. In addition, The Gorilla Doctors also work with other gorilla conservation groups, especially the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, International’s Karisoke Research Center and the International Gorilla Conservation Programme. This past year, the success of these partnerships has been highlighted by the results of the mountain gorilla census and the confiscation and care of multiple orphan gorillas.

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS**

**TESTING, HELPING, SAVING LIVES**

Empowering African Veterinarians – We aim to employ outstanding African veterinarians and mentor the next generation of wild animal health experts. In order to help our veterinarians in their quest for professional growth, we sponsor continuing education for staff members.

Gorilla Doctors supports its staff in seeking to refine their skills and learn new techniques through attendance at workshops, conferences, graduate programs, and other educational opportunities. Most recently, Dr. Jean Bosco Noheri trained at the Indianapolis and Maryland Zoos in February 2011, Dr. Eddy Kambale spent July 2011 working at the California National Primate Research Center at UC Davis, and Dr. Fred completed a 4-week training stint at the same center in April 2012. In November 2011, Dr. Jean-Felix Kinani completed his Masters of Field Epidemiology at the National University of Rwanda.

Our Research Veterinarian Dr. Nizeyi will soon embark on his 15th year teaching at Makerere University in Kampala where he has mentored more than 70 veterinary and wildlife health students, several of whom are now on our staff.