



Many protected areas in Democratic Republic of Congo are threatened by overexploitation and human activities. That is the case for Itombwe nature reserve, which is one of the protected areas in Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Itombwe nature reserve represents one of the most important sites for conservation of the Grauer's gorilla (*Gorilla beringei graueri*) in the World. Several gorilla conservation initiatives have already been carried out in this reserve. But, because the land surrounding gorilla habitats in Itombwe nature reserve is some of the most densely populated in Democratic Republic of Congo, the survival of this great ape still remain increasingly threatened by hunting and habitat loss.

Local communities living in and around the Itombwe nature reserve hunt gorillas each year for subsistence bush meat, market demand within and outside the local villages, and as a coping strategy against economic hardship. Gorillas are also hunted in Itombwe nature reserve for opportunistic live animal trade. It is estimated that young gorillas cannot be captured without killing the mother and other family members that come to their defense. What is more, local communities hunt gorillas in Itombwe nature reserve for using their body parts in traditional medicine and as fetishes, while their skulls are made into highly priced souvenirs. The gorillas body parts have a lucrative local market and skulls are found in many villages as trophies. Yet, poaching threaten the gorillas and negatively impact their welfare and survival in Itombwe nature reserve through loss and decline in populations of this Critically Endangered ape species.

In addition to hunting, habitat destruction is having a devastating effect on Itombwe's ecosystem and its population of gorillas. Local loggers, artisanal miners and farmers destroy forest, and more forest habitat on which gorillas depend were already lost over the last decade, reducing tree cover and threatening the continued survival of this Critically Endangered ape species.

IGH (Itombwe Génération pour l'Humanité), a local nonprofit organization in eastern DR Congo, is developing an ongoing community-based conservation program to save wild gorilla populations and other threatened wildlife species in Itombwe nature reserve. The Association Française des Parcs Zoologiques (AFdPZ) is supporting the IGH's conservation efforts to ensure the survival of gorillas in Itombwe nature reserve, and gradually increase gorilla population number in this Protected Area. Activities look after intensive community antipoaching patrol operations and ongoing monitoring of gorillas in remotes areas of Itombwe nature reserve. Thanks to financial support from AFdPZ, IGH created Community Antipoaching Patrol Team composed of 14 local people. Member of community antipoaching patrol team were recruited from local community living in the vicinity of the Itombwe nature reserve. They carry out daily routine foot patrols to protect gorillas, keep vast forests intact, detect deforestation, monitor gorillas and enable them to thrive. Thank you so very much to Association Française des Parcs Zoologiques (AFdPZ) for their support to our program regarding Grauer's gorilla in Itombwe Nature reserve.

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