

ARCH/BIOANTH LUNCH TALK

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SOC SCI 1, 261

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GORILLA CONSERVATION IN CENTRAL AFRICA: LESSONS LEARNED FROM 50 YEARS OF RESEARCH AT KARISOKE

The mountain gorilla (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) is the only great ape whose numbers are increasing. Fifty years of research, protection and tourism development have saved mountain gorillas from extinction and the two remaining populations in Rwanda, DR Congo and Uganda are now increasing at a steady 1% annual rate. Yet, these populations



are surrounded by some of the densest human populations in Africa and have very little space available for growth. The Virunga population, for example, now reaches ca. 600 individuals living in a small 380km² forest. While other large herbivores typically face increased feeding competition at high density, causing reduced fertility and lower survival of adults and young, the analysis of 50 years of mountain gorilla demographical data and 18 years of group

movement data from the Karisoke Research Center unveiled new mechanisms linking density to population growth. In the absence of predation and while food abundance and quality remain high, social factors have emerged as key population regulating forces.

The long and sinuous history of gorilla research and conservation in the Virunga has taught us important lessons that are now being applied to protect critically-endangered Grauer's gorillas in DR Congo. The second part of this seminar will focus on the challenges of field conservation in the absence of law enforcement, and will present how new technologies can be used to protect gorillas and their habitats.