

Uganda Relief Fund Report | From Herbert Byaruhanga

Report on the relief fund for the porters and guides around primate tourism areas in Uganda.

From Herbert Byaruhanga



Conservation and protecting primates is very vital in helping the human beings in understanding the biological role they play in ecosystem. Primates are our closest living biological relatives, offering critical insights into human evolution, biology, and behavior and playing important roles in the livelihoods, cultures, and religions of many societies.

Primate tourism is one of the leading tourism attractions that continuously bring tourists to Uganda where, they spend time and money to witness these Gorillas and Chimpanzees in their natural homes. This tourism has contributed immensely to the well-being of the indigenous communities that live around the protected areas in the African tropics.

The initiative “Saving our Primates Together” (SAPTO) started after the untimely death of the Silverback Gorilla from the Nkuringo Group south of Bwindi Forest. The killer was hunting wild animals in the forest to feed his family. It was during this illegal activity that he was confronted by the dominant male and in defense the hunter killed it.

The purpose of this relief fund is to provide alternative means of survival for these communities, who largely depend on tourism activities. The cause of hunting was largely believed to have been lack of food due to the Coronavirus pandemic lockdown. All tourism activities were closed in the area and isolated villages suffered.

We deemed it timely and important to add a strong conservation message to the communities who live around the forests where primates dwell and have tourism activities, that they should be active voluntary conservation police to ensure that these habitats are safe from any illegal activities.

SAPTO’s first relief effort brought food and supplies to both sides of the Bwindi National Park area. During non-COVID times, villagers share the job of being a porter to tourists on Gorilla and Chimpanzee treks, taking turns as tourist groups need services. The Bwindi area has about 500 porters who work

Uganda Relief Fund Report | From Herbert Byaruhanga

directly with the park and a similar number that come in as support staff. Their families depend on the Gorilla tourism for their sustenance. The abrupt closure of business due to COVID-19 has badly affected this community.

Areas that are affected are Bwindi National Park, Mgahinga National Park, Kibale National Park, and Queen Elizabeth National Park and Budongo Forest. Bwindi and Mgahinga are home to the Mountain Gorillas, while Kibale, Queen Elizabeth and Budongo Forest are home to the Chimpanzees

By the beginning of August, the idea had been floated and some activities has been arranged. The announcement of SAPTO on Facebook attracted a number of sympathizers who started contributing to the relief pool, managed by Peg Abbott of [Naturalist Journeys](#).

Herbert Byaruhanga, director of Bird Uganda Safaris, is well-known to the communities because of his leadership in guide-training and his role in Uganda's ecotourism efforts. This established trust with the local communities contributed greatly to the project's success. Herbert has also traveled widely in the USA to various birding festivals to introduce Uganda to birders, so he is known to many of us here. Herbert personally assembled a team to help, picked up supplies, and drove to the remote areas to deliver the assistance, working with local people to organize distribution. These are large and remote areas, and some villagers walked good distances to receive supplies. His challenges were to analyze the challenges faced by the target groups, mobilize resources to run the project activities, supply relief food to the affected groups and to attend to administration to run the project. Food supplies were most immediate, but as the country stayed shut down to protect its citizens from potential spread of COVID-19, the need for seeds and gardening tools to ramp up local food production was also recognized. Distribution was well-organized with care to uphold COVID-19 safety guidelines.

The work continues and there is still time to donate! \$8500 in donations received to date by wire through Naturalist Journeys and an additional \$650 through Malimbe Safaris have allowed the following work to be done:

	Ruhija	Rushaga	Nkuringo	Kibale Forest	Mgahinga	Buhoma	Logistics
No. of porters and guides that received food relief	130	150	110	50	90	-	
Amount spent per homestead (\$16)	2080	2400	1760		1440	-	
Kibale Forest (\$7)				350		-	
Transport, fuel, accommodation, and food for 2 people administrating						-	\$1200

Uganda Relief Fund Report | From Herbert Byaruhanga

Additional funds received were wired the first week of October, another \$2300 will allow the work to continue and to get relief to the remaining target areas. If we are able to raise additional funds, more supplies will be distributed as needed, particularly the seeds and garden tools identified by local people as important to their sustainability.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

Donations may be sent by check to **Naturalist Journeys, P.O. Box 16545, Portal, AZ 85632**. A secure link can also be sent for credit card payment; if you opt to donate by credit card we ask that you to add 3% to your contribution to cover processing fees so that the full amount of your donation can be sent to Uganda.

WHAT'S AHEAD: Sustainability – The Project Continues

The pandemic demonstrated the need for job diversity and skill training in communities. Through the interactions with these porters and guides, it was found out that they are very willing to be trained in different skills that can give them the capacity to establish alternative income generating activities. There are opportunities to run small businesses and offer different guiding services. Agrotourism, crafts, cultural activities, and guiding in community-based activities besides primates.