



For Immediate Press Release

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**MRS. RUTH MORRIS KEESLING, COLORADO, USA, TO BE AWARDED THE
HONORARY DOCTORATE OF SCIENCE (DSC) OF MAKERERE
UNIVERSITY.**



Denver, CO – We are pleased to announce that on behalf of the global community and Uganda in particular, the Makerere University Council, at its 133rd Meeting held on the 11th of December 2014, agreed to award an **Honorary Doctorate of Science (DSC) of Makerere University, East Africa's oldest and premier University to Mrs. Ruth Morris Keesling of Englewood, Colorado, USA.**

This is in recognition of her phenomenal commitment to saving the Mountain Gorillas and advancing tourism in the Central and Eastern Africa region. In particular, it is in recognition and appreciation of her sponsorship of the scientific research and training, which led to the re-classification and upgrade of the Bwindi Gorillas to Mountain Gorillas in 1992. This in turn unleashed Mountain Gorilla Tourism, which now contributes over 50% of Uganda's Tourism Revenue and benefits.

Mrs. Ruth Morris Keesling's contribution has also in turn synergized the efforts of His Excellence the President of the Republic of Uganda at Makerere University to

reform and transform Uganda's only veterinary faculty into a regional college and hub for animal resources development and center of excellence in wildlife health and tourism research, training and extension.

Ruth Keesling met and took over the work of the late Dr. Dian Fossey after her murder in 1985. Dr. Fossey's life and the life of the mountain gorillas were made famous in the Hollywood movie, "Gorillas In The Mist" released in 1987. In 1987, only 248 Mountain Gorillas lived in the wild. The Mountain Gorilla Conservation Fund is dedicated to ensuring the future of the mountain gorillas of Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Ruth Keesling learned to love animals at an early age. She grew up in the first small animal hospital in the United States, established by her veterinarian father, Dr. Mark L. Morris, in New Jersey. After graduating from the University of Colorado in journalism in 1953, she became a partner in Mark Morris Associates and Theracon Laboratories, the family's animal nutritional research organizations which developed Prescription Diets and Science Diets for dogs and cats.

Since 1948, she has worked as a lifetime trustee and executive committee member to develop the Morris Animal Foundation, which is dedicated to solving health problems in companion animals and wildlife. It now is the largest non-governmental animal organization in the world.

As Lifetime Trustee of the Denver Zoological Foundation, she developed an educational program, veterinary program and was instrumental in starting the \$16 million dollar Primate Panorama project for the gorillas and orangutans in their captive environment.

At the request of Dian Fossey, she founded the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project for mountain gorillas in Rwanda, Uganda and the Congo. Keesling also served as president of the Dian Fossey Fund (predecessor to the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International) from 1987 to 1991 and served as President International from 1991 to 1993. She organized and served on the board of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund-Europe or today better known as the Gorilla Organization.

In 1996, she organized and developed the WARM Department at Makerere University after sponsoring a Makerere graduate, Dr. John Bosco Nizeyi, who obtained a Master of Science degree in recreational resources from Colorado State University in preparation for this assignment. The department has grown into a full service wildlife disease surveillance facility and educational services for wildlife veterinary medicine.

Ruth is past president of the University of Colorado Alumni Association, which gave her the outstanding alumni award in 1952. For her work with the mountain gorilla she has been recognized by British Airways and received the highest honors award in recognition of this achievement.

Ruth Keesling Story Of Mountain Gorilla Protection:

My first visit to the gorillas was in 1984 when I took some friends up to see all three groups available for tourists. My encounter with Mrithi, the silverback of group 13 made an impression on me I shall never forget. The next encounter was with Shinda, which changed my life forever. After staring at me, he took his large finger and wiped off my lipstick, which he thought, was blood and then he chased everyone else away who was standing around me. When they were gone, he went behind me to protect me and put his arms out stiff right behind me to show that he was in control. I stayed down on all fours for quite a while until the researcher who accompanied us said that that incident proved what Dian Fossey said all along: Gorillas can tell color. Shinda thought that my lipstick was blood and that I was hurt. Needless to say, I stayed a while with Shinda guarding me and then I crawled on all fours and he knew that I was OK and that I could leave.

In 1985, Dr. Fossey met with Ruth Morris Keesling, whose father was Dr. Mark Morris, founder of the Morris Animal Foundation and requested funding for a veterinary program. Ruth responded with the idea of a veterinary clinic. Sadly, Dr. Fossey's death followed this request. Fortunately, the promise was kept. Ruth responded by working with the Rwandan government to create a health-care policy that would protect the mountain gorillas. Fossey dedicated her life to studying and protecting mountain gorillas in the Virunga habitat, and by the mid-1980s, her research indicated that the mountain gorilla population was rapidly declining, with fewer than 300 known mountain gorillas remaining in the world. Gorillas were being killed outright by poachers, suffering from life-threatening injuries caused by snares, and succumbing to illnesses Fossey suspected were being transmitted by humans. At that time, there was no health program in place to treat sick and injured gorillas.

"There are 248 gorillas in the world, and they're all going to die," Fossey told Ruth Keesling. "Would you help me save them by sending a veterinarian for them?"

Ruth had Dian Fossey's grave headstone made and put it in place where it currently symbolizes her life's dedication right next to the gorilla grave yard at KARISOKE. The plaque reads; "NYIRAMACHABELLI" DIAN DOSSEY 1932-1985 No one loved gorillas more rest in peace, dear friend eternally protected in this sacred ground for you are home where you belong.

Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project

In 1986, the Rwandan Government gave a small building to Ruth who then developed a tiny clinic; The Volcano Veterinary Center was established. She hired the later Dr. James Foster to be the resident veterinarian—the first Gorilla

Doctor. Dr. Foster served as program director of what became the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project (MGVP) until his death in Rwanda in 1997. Thanks to his leadership, the project built a veterinary program that would ultimately help turn around the decline of the mountain gorilla species. From 1986 to 2000, Ruth funded expatriate veterinary surgeons / clinicians on annual rotation to care for the gorillas in their habitat up until local veterinarians had developed capacity to assume full-time responsibility.

Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International

Dr. Dian Fossey created her own non-profit called, Digit Fund. This fund was transferred to Ruth Keesling soon after Dian's death. Originally named the "Digit Fund" in memory of Dr. Fossey's favorite gorilla, Ruth changed the name in 1992 to Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund (DFGF-International) to underscore its commitment to carry on the gorilla protection and research programs established by Dr. Fossey at the Karisoke Research Center.

The Gorilla Organization

In 1989, Ruth opened a sister office in London, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund Europe (DFGF-E) to commemorate the life and work of Dian Fossey, and keep in line with the US based DFGFI. Whilst Dian would have been too modest to name the Fund after herself, many who admired her work expressed their appreciation of the name, and the Fund continued to support the anti-poaching patrols that Dian had started.

In 1996, and in response to these changing threats, local DFGF-E staff carried out surveys throughout the local communities, and identified the main reasons for people encroaching on the gorilla habitat. These community conversations built relationships with the local people, which would prove invaluable to the gorillas' future, and formed what would become the foundation's unique approach to gorilla conservation.

In October 2006 the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund Europe changed its name to the Gorilla Organization to reflect its work with all sub-species of gorilla throughout Africa.

Wildlife Animal Resources Management (WARM)

The Virunga Veterinary Center was established with three objectives including care of gorillas, carrying out research and building regional capacity. In 1996, Ruth through the project developed a collaboration with Makerere's Veterinary Facility and deployed Dr. John Bosco Nizeyi to develop capacity of veterinarians to handle health issues of great apes and other wildlife, as a result Uganda alone now has over 35 wildlife veterinarians. Additionally, students and staff got

nvolved in gorilla research and a wealth knowledge on the species and the communities around the park has been generated, a number of publications, book chapters have been written.

Makerere University gave Ruth an entire building to develop a wildlife medicine department for the University. She set out to fund raise for the conversion of this building into office space. It used to be a holding area for animals. Ruth fortunately received funding from the Howard Gilman Foundation at Yulee, Florida for the renovation. Mr. John Lukas, who is the director of White Oak Plantation, has been very supportive of our project. Fund raising continued for office furniture and fixtures so the professors can function opportunistically. Ruth received the wildlife medicine curriculum that Dr. Murray Fowler had set up at the University of California at Davis, and gave it to JBN. He continues today to mentor the next generation of African veterinarians and conducts research, including the use of fecal cortisol to monitor stress levels in wild animals. He received his veterinary degree at Makerere and his PhD in Veterinary Medicine at Makerere in 2005.

Mountain Gorilla Conservation Fund

In 2000, an M.D., Dr. Theogene Rudasingwa, headed the Rwandan cabinet of ministers, asked Ruth to organize a worldwide meeting to discuss the ecosystem of the area surrounding the Virunga Volcanoes. She was asked to invite people who had a stake in Africa and they all met to brainstorm the issues at hand. Dr. Rudasingwa appointed a task force and Ruth was the Chairperson in charge of it.

The MGCF was born to accomplish these tasks.

From 2002, the MGCF has been involved in the BINP, Buhoma area by hosting teacher training conferences and distributing an education curriculum to the primary schools in the area. MGCF has also funded and built 25 protected garbage pits in and around UWA park headquarters for the collection of trash left over from tourists, which gorillas would get into. These garbage pits helped to stop the spread of disease from this trash to the gorillas. It also brought employment as people were needed to remove the non-biodegradable trash out from the park and burned outside. MGCF also funded the construction of the Visitors Center where tourists would come and purchase gorilla permits. We are currently in conversations with UWA about a further expansion for a larger Visitors Information Center.

MGCF has always been a supporting organization of the veterinary education work at WARM. When JBN asked for assistance for WARM's expansion, MGCF went to work quickly to fund raise and come up with the needed funds. Ruth and her staff with MGCF are very proud to be in a position to be able to assist with this massive capacity building effort for veterinary medicine education. MGCF has developed a very close network of partners who are the leaders in mountain gorilla protection as well as Uganda's wildlife conservation.

Ruth Keesling Wildlife Health And Research Center

Opened in October 2013 this new facility has transform the WARM Department at Makerere University into a center for Wildlife and Tourism bio security. The center shall house state-of-the-art offices, laboratories, a bio-bank (to store biological samples) and lecture rooms. The center shall be used for research and training in the conservation of gorilla and other wildlife species. Through this center, availability of knowledge on wildlife species through research shall be enhanced.

This new center is being designed to further the wildlife veterinary education to monitor the healthcare of the mountain gorilla and Uganda's wildlife. It's complete with two lecture rooms with a capacity of one hundred students combined, two buildings with eighteen total research laboratories and the fourth building for post-graduate and grant research office space. In the lower level, the largest Bio- Hazard Laboratory for wildlife disease surveillance in the central African region.

Just outside, students from Echerd College, in Tampa, FL helped the MGCF incorporate an educational and training and tourism garden. This garden is designed to serve as a multi-functional area for education and scientific training. First, the tourism concept designed for capacity building with our visitors to better educate them about the area around the national parks and provide a visual experience of the pressures on the natural habitat where the mountain gorilla calls home. As the tourist visits the garden they will walk through the different aspects of farming of potatoes, banana trees, tea, etc., and continue to a slope where the farming then converts to terrace farming. Placards will be on display featuring a description of the different types of vegetation on display. At the conclusion of the farming segment we have come to the edge of the national park divided by a water passage. The tourists will cross a bridge, which now enters into the national park. This begins the mountain gorilla experience educating about gorilla night nests, snares, and types of vegetation the gorilla consumes and of course a visit to a mountain gorilla family.

From the scientific approach, the educators can take their students into the park and teach the students about the collection of dung, hair follicles, and urine samples for study. The garden will demonstrate how to give assistance to a gorilla that may have been caught in a snare. The educators can teach about keeping the gorilla family away, darting, collecting samples and stats about the animal, removing the snare and attending to the wound. If the wound is severe enough the educators can teach for proper techniques about how to consider amputation and procedures. All this can be done at the center without having to go to the national park, which is a two days drive away.

Today, gorillas are still threatened by poaching, deforestation and the spread of diseases. "If we don't manage all these issues at the same time the mountain gorilla population could easily slip into a decline" Keesling states. Gorillas are 98.6% the same DNA as humans and need to be protected.

For more information about The Mountain Gorilla Conservation Fund, please visit www.saveagorilla.org or contact via phone at 720-524-0272 or 303-808-5286.

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The Mountain Gorilla Conservation Fund is dedicated to the conservation and protection of the highly endangered Mountain Gorillas in Africa, the preservation of their habitat, and working with the people around the National Parks.
