



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE
ANIMAL RESOURCES & BIOSECURITY

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SAFER PLANET, PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES

SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE AND ANIMAL RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & AQUATIC ANIMAL RESOURCES

Nomination of Ruth Morris Keesling
For
Honorary Doctor of Science
Of
Makerere University



October 2014
College of Veterinary Medicine, Animals Resources and
Bio-security (COVAB)

School of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Resources
(SVAR)
Department of Wildlife & Aquatic Animal Resources
(WAAR)

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For

Honorary Doctor of Science of Makerere University

In response to:

The circular of 18th March 2010 calling for Honorary Degree Nominations based on Makerere University Statute and Section 47 of the Universities and other Tertiary Institution Act, 2001.

October 2014
Biography

Nominee: MS Ruth Morris Keesling
Address : 3220 Cherryridge Road, Englewood, Colorado, 80110
United States of America.
Tel +13038085286
E-mail: fmkeesling@aol.com
Nationality: American
Date of Birth: April 4th 1930
Place of Birth: New Brunswick, New Jersey
Education: Ruth graduated with a degree in Journalism at the University of Colorado
(USA) in 1953
Honorary Degree Nominated for: Doctor of Science

Brief:

Ruth Keesling grew up in the first small animal hospital in the country, established by her veterinarian father, Dr. Mark L. Morris, in New Jersey. Hence, she learned to love animals at an early age. After graduating from the University of Colorado, 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 (MAF), which is dedicated to solving health problems in companion animals and wildlife. Today, MAF is the largest animal-specialist non-governmental organization in the world.*

For the last 28 years since 1986, Ruth has dedicated her energies, finances and time to carry on the gorilla conservation legacy of the late Primatologist Dian Fossey; and has made major contribution to the recovery of the Mountain Gorilla population from 248 at the time to the current estimate of 880. This has come about as a result of commitment to the following specific contributions:

1. Contribution to Makerere's Mission and Vision:

i) Establishment of the Department of Wildlife and Animal Resources Management (WARM); now Wildlife and Aquatic Animal Resources WAAR)

Ruth and the veterinarians she was funding initiated collaboration with Makerere in 1996 (Faculty of Veterinary Medicine). After establishment of an MOU the following were accomplished:

- Financed a honorary lecturer position to build capacity in wildlife health management from 1996 to 2006
- Provided supplementary funds for selected BVM final students to carry out research on gorilla health and eventually given skills to manage their health. The graduates have eventually become the backbone of Mountain gorilla and other primate health management in the region
- Provided funds for renovation of an animal holding unit into office space, laboratory a lecture room
- Provided furniture for office spaces, materials and secretarial equipments.
- Was instrumental in negotiation for establishment of department of Wildlife and Animal Resources Management (WARM) in 1997 with commitment to provide supplementary budget for the running of WARM over the years
- Provided supplementary budget and technical support to running a field wildlife course at the field station in Lake Mburo National Park

- Established the first computer laboratory and internet connection in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
- Has provided funds in 2007 for physical improvements to transform a classroom on the COVAB main block to host a state of the Art GIS computer lab.
- Expensive specialized immobilization equipment like dart guns, and supplies were procured from USA for effective field training of WARM students.

ii) *Establishment of a Wildlife Health, Extension and Research Center*

In 2010-2011, an MOU was negotiated and established between Makerere and Ruth's organization; Mountain Gorilla Conservation Fund (MGCF), to expand WARM in the new Collegiate system:

- Funds (up to 250,000 USD) have been in renovating an old structure to transform it into a Regional Centre of Excellence in Wildlife Health and Management. Ruth was honored by Makerere in October 2013 at a donors dedication function and named the center after her (***Ruth Keesling Wildlife Health, Research and Center; RK-WHERE***)
- Partners of the Regional Center include; COVAB, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project / Gorilla Doctors, British Airways, Uganda Wildlife Veterinary Network, PREDICT, Echerd College (Tampa, Florida), USAID.
- The Center holds 2 laboratory block, a two-in one multipurpose lecture hall, one ten-office block
- The Center has now a well established biological bank in which wildlife and gorilla tissue samples are achieved for diagnostic and research purposes
- Gorilla doctors and USAID/ EPT are using the Bio-bank to track down organisms of bio-security concerns for Uganda and the region
- Gorilla tracking simulation garden has been established around the RK-WHERE Center to provide pre-gorilla visit experience at Makerere. It will also be used for conservation education to Ugandans. Students from Echerd College travelled to Uganda to help plant and establish this educational garden.
- Ruth/MGCF has recorded a statement for long-term commitment to the development of the WARM/WAAR and RK-WHERE, which among others includes furnishing of the center, expansion of graduate scholarship scheme and establishment of a Trust fund for the Center.

iii) *Scholarship for graduate training:*

- Funds are being committed to support Makerere's training efforts.
- Up to 8 full Masters and one Ph.D scholarships have been given for graduate training in Wildlife Health and Management.

- The Masters in Wildlife Health and Management is being reviewed with tracks to respond to the regional demands that have been expressed by Conservation Institutions and conservation NGOs

Contribution to Uganda:

i) Re-classification and upgrading the Bwindi Gorillas to Mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*)

- Ruth made a quest for the phylogenetic study in 1990 whose results helped in the determination of the exact phylogeny of the Bwindi gorillas and eventual upgrading mountain gorilla status (*Gorilla gorilla beringei*). Subsequently;
- Bwindi Forest Reserve was gazetted as a Bwindi Impenetrable National Park for the Mt. gorilla conservation
- National and International funds were secured for establishment of the Management Plans
- Mount gorilla-based tourism began in Bwindi in 1993. Currently there are 13 Mt. gorilla families visited by tourists, each is visited by a maximum of 8 tourists thus generating \$ 4800 per day, hence \$62400 in total.
- Gorilla tourism contributes up to 50% of the tourism revenue. This industry sector is a lead foreign exchange earner for Uganda, supporting 20% of the Nation's GDP.

ii) Development of Curriculum for conservation education in secondary and primary schools

- In 2006, Ruth funded a conservation education curriculum using the case of “*The Mountain Gorilla and Humans Surrounding the Parks of East Central Africa*”
- It was distributed among schools within the districts in which Bwindi-Mgahinga Conservation Areas is located
- Teachers and Wildlife club leaders within the area were trained to use the curriculum
- The result was enhancement of the Community Conservation efforts which are an integral part of saving Bwindi

2. Contribution to the Eastern – Central Africa region and global community

i) Establishment of the first World Veterinary Clinic dedicated to free-ranging wildlife

- In 1986 Ruth funded establishment of the Virunga Veterinary Center (VVC), dedicated to health care of gorillas, research in gorilla health and capacity building of local veterinarians to handle gorilla health
 - Employed all expatriate and local veterinarians who took care of gorillas from 1986 up to 2000 when VVC got transformed in its own NGO
 - Those veterinarians take care of all the Mountain Gorilla Populations found in Uganda, Rwanda and DR Congo
 - The VVC now provides quarantine services and rehabilitation of confiscated gorillas
- ii) ***Providing leadership in continuation of gorilla ecological research and conservation***
- Ruth fund raised for sustenance of ecological studies in the gorilla habitats based at Karisoke Research Centre.
 - Some of the professionals who benefited in the 90s are using lessons learnt to manage similar research and conservation of great apes in Uganda

iii) ***Contribution to knowledge generation and dissemination***

- She funded gorilla health research (by VVC staff and student trainees) which has yielded up to 85 publications, 54 abstracts, 10 books and chapters
- She funded the phylogenetic study in 1990, resulting into re-classification of the Bwindi gorillas to Mountain gorilla status thus ***making Bwindi a candidate as a World heritage Site***

3. Other highlight of contribution to the Global Society and Animal Health

i) ***Ruth is part and parcel of the Morris Animal Foundation (MAF)***

- As a member of the Morris family, she became part of **A discovery that changed Veterinary Medicine**, mixing diet prescriptions for companion animal, till the time when the factory aided packaging began.

- She is a life trustee in MAF, which is the world's largest NGO funding research in health of companion animals

ii) ***Leading efforts to care for great apes (gorillas and orangutan) living in captivity***

- She is Lifetime Trustee of the Denver Zoological Foundation and she developed an educational program, veterinary program and was instrumental in starting the new \$16 million dollar Primate Panorama project for the gorillas and orangutans in their captive environment. *At one time she celebrated her birth day in a cage at the zoo to draw public attention to the plight of great apes.*

- Contribution to international cultural exchange via the Travel Associate Inc. For 36 years designed and guided special interest programs and soft adventure programs around the world. This has made the couple contribute to cross-cultural exchanges across the world.

4. Awards: Ruth has received the following awards

- 1976 – Named outstanding Alumnus from the University of Colorado (USA).
- 2000 – Recipient of Carolyn Lichtenberg Crest Award, Pi Beta Phi Sorority.
- 2003 – Recipient, Collier County Florida Humane Society for Achievements in Animal Welfare.
- 2002/2003 – Listed Who’s Who of American Women.
- 2002 – Recipient, British Airways Lifetime Achievement Award for Conservation (First Time Ever Given)
- 2003 – Awarded Lifetime Trustee Status Denver Zoological Foundation.

5. How does Makerere benefit from offering this Honorary Doctor of Science to Ruth

- *The ceremony will make a contribution to MAK’s international image*
- *It will motivate all stakeholders to take on the mantle and plan to develop and sustain Ruth’s long-term commitment to MAK in the areas of wildlife professional training and research.*
- *Will act as a driver to expand and sustain the already started scholarship scheme.*
- *Will act as a driver for wider involvement of the International Community for sustainability of RK-WHERE Center following on their good will commitment expressed at the Donor’s dedication ceremony in October 2013*
- *It will provide opportunity for MAK to propose establishment of an Endowment Fund for RK-WHERE Center*

As we build for the future