

**VOLCANOES SAFARIS PARTNERSHIP TRUST  
ANNUAL REPORT 2019**

**HIGHLIGHTS**

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In 2019 VSPT has enjoyed progress and exciting developments at each lodge. The highlight of the year was the launch of the Kyambura Gorge Eco-tourism Project in February.

**Launch of Kyambura Gorge Eco-tourism Project – February 2019**

The Kyambura Gorge Eco-tourism project was officially launched on 16 February 2019. The project had been under development since 2009 and consists of a series of conservation and community activities to safeguard the Kyambura ecosystem.

Today, Volcanoes Safaris (VS) and Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust (VSPT) are the single largest stakeholders in the Gorge ecosystem after the Ugandan Wildlife Authority. Without the intervention of VS and VSPT, the survival of the gorge and chimps would be under severe threat.

The activities within the project include: Kyambura wildlife buffer zone, Kyambura Community Café, Tree nursery and reforestation project, wetland restoration, bee-keeping, community playground, Kyambura dance group and an elephant trench.

Through the project activities and the strategic assembling of four adjoining sites next to the Gorge over the last ten years, the VSPT helps to link Kyambura Gorge Lodge to the local community and promotes sustainable eco-tourism and conservation in one of the most important areas for avian, primate and wildlife biodiversity in Africa.



Initiatives include not only those listed above but also a series of smaller projects with the local schools, teaching them of the benefits of tourism and the natural value of the wildlife diversity in the area. The project is the first of its kind in the area and is an example of the pioneering work conducted by the VSPT.

The project stands as a flag-bearer for Volcanoes Safaris deep belief in connecting habitat protection, conservation activities and community livelihoods. At the project's core is the protection of the Kyambura Gorge and the 29 isolated chimpanzees living there.

A photo-essay book entitled "Safeguarding the Lost Gorge of Kyambura" is planned to commemorate the launch of the project. During 2019 a further 17 pieces of land have been purchased by VSPT to increase the size of the Kyambura Buffer Zone.

*"The Albertine Rift stretches from Murchison Falls to the Virunga volcanoes. It is one of the richest areas of biodiversity in the world. It is also one of the most densely populated areas of Africa. The challenges of safeguarding habitats for wildlife, preserving wilderness, creating world-class tourism products, maximising revenue from tourism, and ensuring communities have a substantial stake, remain enormous.*

*Volcanoes Safaris and Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust have been working on the Kyambura Gorge landscape for almost 20 years. The strategic assembling of four sites that were under severe threat aims to protect the Kyambura gorge ecosystem in perpetuity."*

— Praveen Moman, Founder of Volcanoes Safaris, on 16 February 2019  
at the launch of the Kyambura Gorge Ecotourism Project

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## REVIEW OF PROJECTS

### **KYAMBURA GORGE ECO-TOURISM PARTNERSHIP PROJECT, UGANDA**

The Kyambura Gorge Eco-Tourism Partnership Project helps to link the local community to conservation. The aim of the initiative is to promote sustainable eco-tourism and conserve the Greater Virunga landscape, which is one of the most important areas for avian, primate and wildlife biodiversity in Africa. It consists of series of projects that have been carefully thought out and executed by the team lead by the Project Coordinator based in Kyambura, Stella Ashabe.

#### **1. Kyambura Wetland**

##### **Expenditure \$1,062**

The VSPT secured a 30-acre wetland south of Kyambura Gorge in 2010. Previously used as an illegal brick works site, it is now regenerated back to its natural state and attracts over 100 species of birds.

During 2019 maintenance work was carried out, including: trail maintenance, removal of invasive spear grass to make way for, and plant, more wetland species. 200 trees have been planted in 2019 from 3 different species, including fruit bearing trees such as Crystal Florence and Microcapa. These will help to attract more birds and primates and improve the wetland experience for guests. 45 wetland tours were conducted to 134 VS clients who enjoyed the nature walks and bird watching.

During 2019 VSPT has held community engagement meetings with the local communities to try to reduce the amount of littering in and around the wetland area. These meetings have been successful in terms of community engagement and reduces the amount of litter in the area. VSPT staff have also met and engaged with the community to discuss the issue of pollution in the river at the entrance to Kyambura Gorge. The pollution is due to local people washing clothes and cleaning motorbikes in the river.



## 2. Kyambura Coffee Cooperative

### **Income \$2,324, Expenditure \$913**

The Kyambura Coffee Cooperative is a community-based initiative designed to provide vocational training to women and an alternative, but sustainable, source of income. Nine local women and their families are actively involved in the cooperative. They tend to over 1500 Arabica and Robusta coffee plants in 50 acres of rejuvenated VSPT land, and process the coffee by hand at a communal processing plant. Members of the cooperative commit to growing the coffee organically, without the use of pesticides or chemical fertilizers.

During 2019 the Cooperative harvested a total of 943 kilos of coffee as well as over 100 kilos of kidney beans, which had been intercropped with coffee shrubs. Over 200 coffee trees were cut to allow new growth and an increase in coffee production. 160 new coffee seedlings were planted. The coffee trees that were cut down have regrown and will soon be fruiting. The coffee tours and tasting sessions at the community café continue to be popular with lodge guests. Coffee beans are sold to visitors and also neighbouring lodges. In 2019 VSPT sold 209 packets (totalling \$1,071) of coffee to participants on the coffee tours. VS lodges bought 102 packets of coffee from VSPT.

The Kyambura soap project, which was incorporated into the coffee project in 2018, produced over 276 bars of coffee-incensed soap. The bars are sold to VS lodges and given to guests as gifts.

## 3. Kyambura Community Café

### **Income \$3,428, Expenditure \$5,605**

The Kyambura Community Café provides a training facility in service and hospitality for local youths. Every quarter the café aims to take on three trainees, who are trained in service, health and hygiene, and kitchen preparation.

In 2019 the café took on six trainees of which five graduated from the program. Five graduates are employed in neighbouring lodges, and Katwire Uzaifa and Monday Samuel are now working full time at Kyambura Gorge Lodge in service and also nature guiding. 540 guests visited the café during 2019, of which 200 were resident guests at Kyambura Gorge Lodge.



### 1. Kyambura Gorge Buffer Zone

#### Expenditure \$247,778 – land purchased

The Kyambura Gorge Buffer Zone is an area of land 3 km long and 45 acres in size running along the edge of northern side of Kyambura Gorge from the wetland through to the start of Kyambura Reserve. It serves as a wildlife buffer zone, primarily separating the local communities from the chimpanzee population that lives in the gorge.

During 2019 17 pieces of land were purchased. A trail through the buffer zone is being created to link both sides of the gorge, enabling guests of Kyambura Gorge Lodge to walk throughout one connected landscape. 400 trees of 5 species were planted during 2019 of which 107 planted by VS clients, bringing the total to over 3,000 indigenous trees.

### 2. Bee Keeping

#### Expenditure \$21

The *Kyambura Bee Keepers Cooperative* have been producing honey in Kyambura since 2006 in conjunction with VSPT. There are 85 beehives used as a deterrent for elephants along the escarpment. The cooperative harvested honey in early March 2019 and provided it to the lodge Kyambura Community Café. During the year 38 VS clients who did the bee tours were able to harvest some honey and enjoy it.



### 3. Kyambura Drama Group

#### Expenditure \$1,077

The VSPT has also continued to support this group, which consists of five tribes who perform educational plays about conservation and HIV/AIDS awareness to the local community once a month, and to Volcanoes Safaris clients on request. The support is in the form of a monthly donation, which is distributed among the members to ensure sustainability and to supplement the performers' income.



#### **4. Kyambura Community and Conservation Centre**

The Kyambura Community and Conservation Centre provides a local meeting and conference facility, as well as accommodation, to local communities, researchers, and tourists. It acts as a training centre for meetings on wildlife, conservation, and local community issues.

During 2019 meetings held at the centre were 35 meetings for child healthcare, sanitation and nutrition, 25 meetings on bee keeping and harvesting, and 4 meeting for the Kyenzaza community on sanitation, construction of pit latrines, and drying racks for kitchen utensils.

VSPT waived the cost of hiring the Community and Conservation Centre during the year for the groups that held meetings, at an estimated value of \$450.

#### **5. Kyambura Community Playgroup**

The VSPT in 2010 donated land for the creation of a playground which was built by members of Kyenzaza community. During 2019 VSPT organised various football matches, which aim to bring together the community with the VS staff and Kyambura Gorge Lodge guests. The highlight of the year is the Christmas Day football tournament, where VSPT gave out 7 footballs and sets of football kits to all participated teams, and the winning team received the Christmas trophy.



## **BWINDI LODGE**

### **1. Bwindi Bar**

**Income \$10,670, Expenditure \$19,521**

In 2015, the VSPT officially opened the Bwindi Bar, located near the Volcanoes Safaris Bwindi Lodge on the edge of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. The bar provides a practical training institution for local disadvantaged youths living near the Bwindi National Park in Buhoma, Bwindi.

The VSPT aims to provide practical experience in the tourism industry, to create more job opportunities in the region. Thanks to this programme, trainees are armed with the appropriate skills set to go on to gain successful employment in hospitality in the Bwindi area.

The trainees gain practical skills in food and service before they intern at the cafe for two months. They are then sent for further internships at nearby lodges. Bwindi Bar will serve a variety of coffees and teas as well as delicious breakfast options that blend international and local tastes.

During the year Bwindi Bar trained ten youths in service and hospitality. Tusasirwe Living and Nuwagaba Bosco are employed at Bwindi Lodge and Kyambura Gorge Lodge respectively as Kitchen Assistants. Norah Kyarimpa is employed in the service department at Bwindi Lodge and also now trains the new trainees at Bwindi Bar. Innocent Ahimbisibwe is employed at Bwindi lodge as a Kitchen Assistant.

All guests staying at Bwindi Lodge have at least one meal during their stay at Bwindi Bar. Further marketing will be done during 2020 to increase the number of customers at the bar and increase the level of engagement with surrounding lodges and the local community. In 2019 there were 3,845 customers at Bwindi Bar, of which 1,193 were resident guests at Bwindi Lodge.



## 2. Tea Processing

**Income \$901, Expenditure \$1,570**

In 2013 VSPT began simple tea processing at Bwindi Lodge. Guests at Bwindi Lodge can experience a tea tour around the tea gardens at the lodge and understand the tea making process.

During 2019 4,538 kg of tea was harvested from the site and sold at a value of \$762. 196 guests from Bwindi Lodge were taken on tea tours.



## **MOUNT GAHINGA LODGE**

The Batwa community is a minority hunter-gatherer group who traditionally lived within the forests of Mount Gahinga. When Mgahinga National Park was gazetted in 1991, they were forced to abandon their traditional way of life and subsequently suffered severe socio-economic problems. This community remains marginalized and is one of the poorest communities in Uganda, as the Batwa in Bwindi.

### **1. Gahinga Batwa Village**

#### **Expenditure \$81,335 – land purchased**

With international attention on conservation of the endangered mountain gorillas, the Mgahinga part of the Virunga volcanoes in Uganda was turned into a national park in 1991 to provide protection to the wildlife from poaching and habitat encroachment. The creation of the park required the Batwa to be removed from their homes in the mountains and be displaced in a modern world unfamiliar to them.

A group of about 18 Batwa families from those displaced live in makeshift shelters on a tiny rocky site at Musasa, about 4km from the entrance of Mgahinga National park and Volcanoes Mount Gahinga Lodge, surviving as best as they can.

Volcanoes Safaris has now built a permanent village for the Batwa community and their families. About 10 acres of land has been purchased to allow them to build homes, a community centre and have land for agricultural and recreational use. The homes were completed in early 2018 and the official launch of the village took place at the end of May 2018.

The Gahinga Batwa community is comprised of over 109 adults and children. They have had no permanent home since they left Mgahinga National Park over 25 years ago.

Praveen Moman, Founder of Volcanoes Safaris and Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust says of the project, “As a leading luxury lodge company offering unique safari and cultural experiences to our guests, we are also very proud of our company ethos to support communities around our lodges. Uganda is one of Africa’s most beautiful and diverse countries and we want to help preserve its rich culture. We are excited to see this project come to fruition after many years of working with the Batwa and understanding their culture and desperate needs”.

The Gahinga Batwa Village has been funded by VSPT supported by Volcanoes Safaris, the Adventure Travel Conservation Fund (ATCF), as well as donations received from guests. The settlement will enable the Batwa to break the cycle of manual labour and land rental payments and to use the land for growing crops. This will support the community’s development and allow their children to access education and health facilities.

The project has been widely welcomed by the Batwa and also by the wider local community. VSPT has built a relationship with the Gahinga Batwa community for several years which has allowed us to develop a solid understanding of their needs. Since July 2018 Kabeni Nsengiyumva and Claudine Nyiramahirwe, from the Batwa community, have been employed as nature trail guides by Volcanoes Safaris, based at Mount Gahinga Lodge.

A 60,000 litre water tank facility has also been built on nearby land allowing the Batwa community access to water. During 2019 VSPT worked with the Batwa community to provide improved health and medical resources and education, and adult literacy classes.



## 2. Batwa Cultural Heritage Experience

### Income \$nil, Expenditure \$877

The Batwa Cultural Heritage Experience began in 2013 and involves members of the Gahinga Batwa community delivering a genuine cultural experience for VS clients. The trail is on the grounds of Mount Gahinga Lodge and the performance involves the re-enactment of traditional forest life including hunting and gathering as well as seeking out medicinal plants and domestic home life. Under the guidance of a Batwa guide 563 VS clients participated to the experience during 2019.



## **2. Batwa Dance Performance**

### **Expenditure \$1,663**

The Batwa dance group supported by the VSPT continues to perform for Gahinga Lodge guests on arrival at the lodge.

The Village Local Chairman and VSPT have been actively involved in sensitizing the community about the values of the Batwa and the importance of community interaction during these dance performances. Guests from the neighboring campsite have also participated as well as Uganda Wildlife Authority staff and visitors.



## **3. Batwa Vocational Centre and Agricultural Project**

### **Expenditure \$79**

The Batwa Vocational Centre was opened in 2013 and is the hub of the educational work conducted by the VSPT with the Batwa. Here the VSPT has donated a quarter of an acre of land where they learn how to farm, particularly potatoes and wheat. They are also taught sewing skills and how to make crafts, which will allow them to repair and make their own clothes as well as utensils. They also sell their products to generate an income to allow them to pay for food, medicine and other necessary items within the community.

During 2019 the revenue generated from crafts made and sold at the Batwa Vocational Centre was \$820. The baskets are supplied both to the lodge and local markets. The Gahinga Village Batwa community receive 100% of the proceeds from craft sales at the Vocational Centre.

In 2013 VSPT donated to the Batwa Community a quarter of an acre for purposes of growing food next to the Vocational Centre. Potatoes, wheat and vegetable are planted in rotation to train the Batwa in agricultural techniques. There were three successful seasonal yields during 2019 which were shared amongst the Gahinga Batwa Village families.



## **VIRUNGA LODGE**

### **1. Intore Dance Troop**

#### **Expenditure \$3,200**

Intore Dance is the finest example of Rwanda's varied musical and dance tradition. Since its inception in 2009 VSPT has trained and equipped a troop of local dancers and trainers based at Virunga Lodge. The Intore Dance Troop continues to perform regularly for guests staying at the Lodge. In supporting the troop, by providing training, costumes and musical instruments, the VSPT helps preserve this aspect of Rwanda's cultural heritage. Virunga Lodge also employs 18 members of the Intore Dance Troop within the lodge.



## 2. “One Sheep Per Family” Project

In June 2014 Virunga Lodge launched the “One Sheep per Family” project, to provide one sheep to each of the 140 families in the Sunzu community. The sheep manure provides natural and effective fertiliser for growing crops. As well as providing manure, selling lambs provide income for the family.

As at 31 December 2019, all 138 families from the Sunzu, 175 families of Bugeyo village, and 11 families of Kigugu village have received a sheep through the project. In 2020 the project will focus on completing donations for the remaining families in Bugeyo village, which has a total of 175 families.



## 3. Virunga Lodge Water Tank Project

Although it rains heavily around Virunga Lodge, there are very few facilities for water catchment and storage and in the dry season there is an acute shortage of water. The villagers in Sunzu village around the lodge, where 138 families live, do not have enough clean water for drinking or for growing crops.

During 2019 105 water tanks, costing \$210 each, were donated by Virunga Lodge guests to families living around the lodge. All families in Sunzu village and 31 families in Bugeyo village have received a water tank.

## 4. Kinoni Water Source Project

A water tap was built in 2016 to provide a safe access point to water to the Kinoni village, neighbouring Virunga Lodge.

During 2018 a housing structure for the water taps was created, in order to ensure secure access to water for members of the Kinoni village. The water source project is managed by a committee who are voted by local leaders.

## 5. Virunga Microcredit Project

In March 2018 VSPT has launched a microfinance savings scheme for members of Sunzu Village. The objective of the project is to provide a loan that will help to generate income from investment in small scale sustainable agricultural projects, as well as weaving baskets, and breeding domestic animals. The fund is managed by a local committee and has 32 members. Loans are given for 6 months and repaid at an interest rate of 5%.

The fund started with \$1,176 and as at 31 December 2019 has increased to \$2,790, due to the interest payments received from beneficiaries of the short-term loans.

## 6. Virunga Lodge Crafts Project

### Income \$1,136

A group of 10 local ladies make local Rwandan crafts, which are sold directly to guests at Virunga Lodge, as well as to all VS lodges. Crafts such as baskets, table placemats and coasters, and kitenge bathrobes are made and sold by the group.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

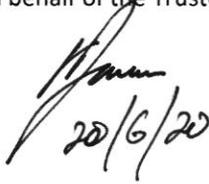
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The VSPT would like to thank its dedicated staff and partners in the field, who have made possible the work and objectives of the trust. The VSPT would like to thank the staff of Volcanoes Safaris who provide precious marketing, administrative and bookkeeping support. Finally the VSPT would also like to thank the Trustees for their continued support and guidance.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees by:

Trustee

Date

Handwritten signature and date. The signature is a cursive scribble, and the date is written as 20/6/20.