

VS Partnership Trust

Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust Reveals First Update from Groundbreaking Study of Uganda's "Lost Chimps"

The first findings from the VSPT's monitoring programme demonstrate the potential of science-based conservation to understand and support the endangered chimpanzees of Kyambura Gorge.



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Kampala, Uganda (14 July 2026): On World Chimpanzee Day, [Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust](#) (VSPT) today announced a major milestone in its efforts to protect the endangered chimpanzees of the Kyambura Gorge. Just six months after launching Uganda's first permanent, science-based monitoring programme for the isolated population, researchers have successfully identified 25 of the gorge's chimpanzees, laying the foundation for future research. Researchers will continue field surveys, as the first six months establish a baseline for the scientific study of this isolated chimpanzee community.

Known as the "Lost Chimps of Kyambura," this small and vulnerable population has become isolated from other chimpanzee communities, leaving it with a limited gene pool and increasing pressure from growing human-wildlife conflict from development surrounding the gorge. By identifying individual chimpanzees for the first time through scientific monitoring, researchers can now track births, deaths, family groups and population changes with unprecedented accuracy, allowing conservation action before declines become irreversible.

The Chimpanzee Monitoring Project is a partnership between Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust (VSPT), the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), building on more than two decades of pioneering research by Nicole Simmons. The programme combines traditional field tracking with individual facial recognition and advanced spatial modelling, creating a new benchmark for monitoring isolated chimpanzee populations across Africa.

Over the past six months, researchers, UWA rangers and community trackers have completed 34 field expeditions, covering more than 500 kilometres on foot through the steep forested gorge to locate and document the chimpanzees. The data collected is now being analysed using spatially explicit Bayesian capture-recapture modelling, with findings expected to be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal later this year.

"The competition between humans and chimpanzees is becoming critical. I've come to realise that every individual chimpanzee matters to the survival of the community and every human community member surrounding the gorge is critical for the survival of the forest and the chimpanzee population it holds," shares Andrew Kato, Lead Researcher for the VSPT Chimpanzee Monitoring Project.

Dr. Alexander Brackowski, Scientific Director of VSPT, adds, *"We are excited to use the Kyambura chimpanzee population as a case study using field-based foot surveys, facial recognition and modelling. This research will help understand whether demographic changes are stable and identify changes early. As chimpanzees are long-lived and slow to reproduce, declines can remain undetected for years without the ground breaking scientific monitoring that VSPT is doing."*

The monitoring programme forms part of the broader Kyambura Gorge Ecotourism Project, launched by VSPT in 2009 to connect conservation, community livelihoods and responsible tourism. Through habitat restoration, research, education and community partnerships, the initiative works to protect one of Uganda's most remarkable ecosystems while ensuring neighbouring communities benefit from its long-term conservation.

World Chimpanzee Day marks the anniversary of Dr. Jane Goodall's arrival at Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania on 14 July 1960, the beginning of her pioneering research that transformed the world's understanding of chimpanzees. Today, the work being undertaken in Kyambura Gorge continues that legacy by applying modern science to safeguard one of Uganda's most isolated chimpanzee populations.

The Chimpanzee Monitoring Project is funded through the VSPT, the non-profit conservation arm of [Volcanoes Safaris](#), a pioneer of great ape ecotourism with four lodges in Uganda and one in Rwanda. Every guest staying at a Volcanoes Safaris lodge contributes US\$50 per night to VSPT, directly supporting conservation and community initiatives across the region. Together with grants from conservation organizations and donations from guests and private supporters, these contributions fund long-term projects like the Kyambura Gorge Chimpanzee Monitoring Project, demonstrating how tourism can be a powerful force for conservation.

To learn more about how to travel and support conservation visit www.volcanoessafaris.com. To donate directly to the Kyambura Gorge Chimpanzee Monitoring project visit www.empowersafrica.org/partners/volcanoes-safaris-partnership-trust.

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About Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust

[Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust](#) (VSPT) is a non-profit organization in Uganda that connects Volcanoes Safaris lodges to the neighbouring communities and conservation activities. VSPT works with local communities and conservation partners to enrich local livelihoods, promote the conservation of the great apes, restore natural habitats, and reduce human-wildlife conflict. Contributions made through Empowers Africa from US residents are tax-deductible. Kyambura Gorge, on the edge of Queen Elizabeth National Park in Western Uganda, is at the centre of an important area for avian, primate and wildlife biodiversity in Africa. The 11km long gorge is home to an isolated group of chimpanzees which is being studied by VSPT.

About Volcanoes Safaris:

[Volcanoes Safaris](#) offers curated mountain gorilla, chimpanzee and wildlife safaris, led by expert guides, to its five award-winning luxury lodges based near the finest great ape sites in Rwanda and Uganda. Its work as the leader in great ape ecotourism since 1997 has been recognised by many international awards. Experience the rich culture, history, and hospitality traditions of the Great Lakes Region of Africa, on tailor made safaris which give a unique insight into the world of the endangered great apes, their habitats and the communities that live nearby. Guests can participate in sustainable conservation and community projects as part of their safari, developed by the Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust (VSPT) and in partnerships with leading conservation organisations.

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