



Where I work Gladys Kalema- Zikusoka

Photographed by Jo-Anne
McArthur/We Animals/
Nature Picture Library.

I have been investigating and managing wildlife diseases since 1996, when I joined the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) as its first veterinarian. After I graduated from the Royal Veterinary College of the University of London in 1995, I was eager to fulfil my passion for working with wildlife, particularly gorillas.

At the UWA, I saw how human communities could pass diseases to wildlife. I knew this could be disastrous. Mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) have contracted scabies and other conditions from people; other types of wildlife have transmitted Ebola and other viral diseases to humans and are vulnerable to tuberculosis and other infections.

In 2003, I founded a non-profit organization that monitors and tracks zoonotic diseases – those transmitted between wildlife, humans and livestock – and promotes the conservation of mountain gorillas. We work in and around the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in southwest Uganda.

We also aim to improve the health of

the people living near the park. We teach communities how to live with wildlife, encouraging them to avoid eating wildlife meat, especially if it has not been inspected for disease, and discouraging them from poaching. And we monitor and treat community livestock and domesticated animals to minimize disease transmission.

This picture was taken in the national park. I am holding a sample collection pot and faeces from the Habinyanja gorilla group, ready to test it for diseases. The test results showed just tapeworms and roundworms, which are easy to treat.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been working with the Uganda Virus Research Institute in Entebbe to test the gorillas for any coronavirus infections. We are lucky not to have had any infected animals so far.

Conservation scientist and veterinarian **Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka** is the founder and chief executive of Conservation Through Public Health in Entebbe, Uganda. **Interview by Christopher Bendana.**