

# Lowland gorilla born in DRC, boosting Virunga park population to seven

The new arrival is a boost for the critically endangered species, which has been hard-hit by unrest in eastern Congo



A baby lowland gorilla has been born in Virunga national park in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

*Agence France-Presse*

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A lowland gorilla, a critically endangered species, has been born in the Democratic Republic of Congo's famed Virunga national park, authorities said, boosting the population to seven.

Conservationists have long sought to protect the world heritage site's gorilla population even as violence and instability has plagued the DRC's eastern provinces for the past 25 years.

"We're excited to announce the first lowland gorilla birth of the year! Rangers discovered the newborn during a patrol in the Tshiaberimu area yesterday," park authorities tweeted late on Friday.

“Rangers are working hard to safeguard this vulnerable population which now stands at seven individuals,” it added.

The global population of lowland gorillas has plunged from around 17,000 to fewer than 6,000 today and they continue to experience a rate of decline of 5% per year, according to the park.

They are often illegally hunted for bushmeat.

Seventeen mountain gorillas – a close cousin of the lowland gorilla – were born in the park last year.

Situated on Democratic Republic of Congo’s borders with Rwanda and Uganda, Virunga covers around 7,800 square kilometres (3,000 square miles) of the North Kivu province, of which Goma is the capital.

Inaugurated in 1925, it is the oldest nature reserve in **Africa** and a sanctuary for the rare mountain gorillas, which are also present in neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda.

Virunga has also become a hideout for **local and foreign armed groups** that have operated in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo for around 25 years.