

HEALTH MONITORING TOOLS FOR ILLUSIVE GREAT APE POPULATIONS

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According to International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) experts the western lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) population has decreased by 60% in the past 20-25 years. This has contributed to their reclassification from endangered to '*critically endangered*'. Disease (both emerging infectious disease and anthropogenic pathogens) is emerging as a threat to the survival of both wild lowland gorillas and chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) in central Africa. This health crisis underlies the need to understand more about all diseases which affects apes. Ebola virus, anthrax, TB, measles and influenza have caused morbidity or mortality in apes, but there is scant information regarding their overall prevalence in and impact on free ranging apes. This paucity of comprehensive health data is due in part to the remoteness of the forested regions in which the apes live. The identification of wildlife mortality events and the acquisition of objective health information is extremely challenging under these conditions. A summary of methods and strategies aimed at gathering health information on large populations of illusive great apes will be presented and include fecal analysis, visual observations, remote monitoring techniques, necropsies, hunter based surveillance for the purpose of locating epidemics and ecological surveillance in order to identify trends in population densities.

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