

Mobile phones and the murder of gorillas: How Can We Help?

By Kayla Year 6

Coltan mining is directly threatening the critically endangered Gorillas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It has caused a very steep drop in the gorilla population from 17,000 to 5000.



A Gorilla at Taronga Zoo.

Coltan is a dull metallic ore found in major quantities in the Eastern areas of the Congo. When refined, it becomes Metallic Tantalum, a heat resistant powder that can hold a high electrical charge. It is used to create capacitors, which is the electronic elements that control current flow inside miniature circuit boards.

In order to mine for coltan, rebels have to clear out large chunks of Congo's National Parks, including the Kahuzi Biega National Park, which is home to both Mountain Gorillas and the Eastern Lowland Gorillas. In the last 50 years, the Eastern Lowland Gorillas range had decreased from 81,000 square miles to around 46,000 square miles. While in Congo's National Park, the number of the Mountain Gorillas is constantly decreasing, before there were over 14,000 Gorillas, now only 130 are left.

Coltan mining and its subsequent increase in human occupation of Gorilla habitats has resulted in a rise in the "bush meat" trade. "They're hunted and killed for bush meat... bush meat is pretty muck meat from the forest and people will actually eat the gorillas, it's a very sad thing, but that's what actually happens," said a zoo keeper at Taronga Zoo.

"Their hunted and killed for bush meat."

While the rebels mine for coltan, they poach innocent Gorillas as a food source or to make a profit. This is the leading cause of wildlife loss in



the Congo Basin. According to the World Wildlife Fund, in the DRC alone, bushmeat is consumed at a rate of over a million per year.

Humans to the region also bring with them diseases which gorillas are susceptible to. They are particularly vulnerable to respiratory infection. With any form of contact between gorillas and humans or human waste diseases can be transmitted to Gorillas. In particular the Ebola virus is extremely lethal for both humans and gorillas. Between 2001 and 2005 around 55,000 Gorillas were killed in The Lossi Sanctuary, located in the North West Republic of Congo.

To help protect Gorillas from extinction, Australians have been encouraged to donate their old phones to the Jane Goodall Institute. Dr. Jane Goodall is a world renowned primatologist, humanitarian, conservationist and UN Messenger of peace.



The Jane Goodall Institute's Logo.

Alternatively, old phones can be donated to the Australian mobile phone industry's official product stewardship program to be recycled. All brands and types of mobile phones and mobile phone accessories are accepted.



Another way to help is to simply spread the word about the gorillas and the coltan mining; it is a very simple yet effective way to raise awareness. For even the smallest of actions can have a big impact. “Every individual matters. Every individual has a role to play. Every individual makes a difference,” wrote Jane Goodall.