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## Gorillas fighting to death

Gorillas are very social animals - up to a point. Overcrowded areas can make silver backs more violent, scientists say. Silverbacks are adult male mountain gorillas that often have a white area on their backs. They are the heads of the gorilla families. Mountain gorillas are genetically similar to humans. Large animals spend most of their time sleeping, eating and cleaning each other. They are mostly peaceful creatures. They live in parts of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. Researchers recently studied 50 years of data from Rwanda. They found that as the number of family gorilla groups increased, so did the violent fighting between them. Most of the time, the silverbacks led the fight. Some gorillas have died, especially infants, or babies. These deaths, in turn, have slowed population growth. Damien Caillaud of the University of California, Davis was co-author of the new study, published in *Science Advances*. Men will fight to protect females and infants in their group and to acquire new females, he said. The study found that the amount of fighting was not the result of the total number of individuals in an area. What was important was the number of family groups in an area. **DOSSIER** - In this September 2, 2019, file photo, a silver mountain gorilla named Segasira is among the plants of volcanoes National Park, Rwanda. Since the 1960s, mountain gorillas have been carefully studied and protected in Central Africa. These animals almost died out in the 1970s. Since then, the population has grown to just over 1,000 animals. Rich Bergl is a primatologist at the North Carolina Zoo. Bergl was not involved in the study. We rarely think about how an animal's behaviour and social structure can affect population size, Bergl said. He added: But it turns out we should, especially for social animals like gorillas. Tara Stoinski was co-writer of the new newspaper. She is also president of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, a non-profit group. Everyone wants to know how many gorillas can live within the protected habitat area. It turns out that part of the answer depends on how they organize themselves socially, she says. During his trip to Rwanda, Stoinski said he saw changes in gorilla behavior from about 2007. At that time, three large family groups were divided into many small family groups. The gorilla population has increased and families have dispersed into Volcanoes National Park. There were about family groups in the study area. The number of fights between them has increased by three times. The number of infant deaths has increased five-fold. Population growth has halved. Large family groups probably split up after the deaths of important silver leaders, Stoinski said. When these former statesmen gorillas got older and died, the younger males were not able to keep the groups together, she says. The study was based on data from about 400 gorillas in Rwanda between 1968 and 2017. I'm John Russell. Christina Larson reported on this story for the Press. John Russell adapted it for Learning English. Caty Weaver was the editor. \_\_\_\_\_pour get (something): to come to own (something): to come to have (something) primatologist - n. an expert in the branch of zoology that deals with primates - any member of the group of animals that includes humans, monkeys, and habitat monkeys - n. the place or type of place where a plant or animal lives naturally or normally or grows older - adj. of older age We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments section. Two huge male gorillas join in the wild in a dominance test. Who will emerge victorious? Because of their sharp canines and their great strength, male gorillas are very dangerous opponents when they are in a combative mood. Therefore, most differences of opinion are not resolved by fighting, but by display and other threatening behaviors, without anyone getting hurt. Gorillas are famous for their display behavior culminating in the beating of the chest and loud boos. The beating of the breast seems particularly impressive in silver males. Severe aggression is rare in stable groups of gorillas, but when two groups meet, the main silverbacks can sometimes engage in a fight to the death, mainly using their sharp canines to cause deep and gaping wounds. Injury.