UGANDA RE-LAUNCHES PRIMATE TOURISM, BABY GORILLA NAMED BUTIME

Kanungu - September 25, 2020 - Uganda Wildlife Authority has officially re-launched primate tourism in the country following the suspension of the activity on March 25, 2020.

The re-launch was officiated over by the Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities Hon. Tom Butime at Buhoma in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.

Hon. Butime said that the suspension was a painful but necessary undertaking in order to protect both the primates and humans from possible infection of the coronavirus. He observed that the suspension had a negative impact on UWA revenues hence its operations. “Gorilla tourism accounts for over 70% of UWA’s revenue and therefore its suspension has had a negative effect on the revenues of UWA and some of its operations had to be scaled down giving priority to wildlife protection”.

Minister Butime further said that the suspension of primate tourism activities affected not only the economy but also the local communities. “People neighbouring the protected areas have been getting 20% revenue share from gate collections and communities here also get 10 dollars gorilla levy on every gorilla permit sold, all this has been negatively affected”

The Ministers reiterated governments commitment to the safety of visitors who come to Uganda saying that the Ministry has put in place adequate standard operating procedures (SoPs) for the sector that would help mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.” As a Ministry, we have since put in place standard operating procedure for the tourism sector so that we can restart tourism activities in a safer manner. We pay particular attention to the safety of our visitors and we will continue to do so to ensure every visitor who comes to Uganda, returns home safely, he said”

He revealed that Government is committed to revamping the tourism sector citing opening borders and the airport is one of the key interventions of government. “Now that the
sector is fully open, our next course of action is to market Uganda post covid-19 so that we attract people from different walks of life to come and visit our beautiful country”.

The Chairman UWA Board of Trustees Dr. Pantaleon Kasoma said that the resumption of primate tourism is very significant because it is a major driver for visitors to come back and tour our country as primates are our flagship species. Mountain gorillas particularly are Uganda’s prized tourist attraction, contributing a large share of tourism earnings to UWA’s operations.

He thanked the President of Uganda HE Yoweri Kaguta Museveni for easing the lockdown restrictions imposed since March. He observed that the opening of the country’s International boarders including Entebbe International Airport, a key tourist entry point to the country to our visitors is a demonstration of the President’s commitment to the revamping of the tourism sector in Uganda.

As Uganda Wildlife Authority, to support resurgence of tourism, we are putting in place measures to support recovery. Some of the measures include a raft of incentives to both individual visitors and tour operators. “For example, for every 30 gorilla permits bought, the tour operator gets two permits free. Every gorilla permit purchased entitles a visitor to free entry to Mount Elgon National Park or Toro Semliki Wildlife Reserve. Filming fees have also been reduced to enable creation of material for marketing.

The Minister trekked Ruhegura Gorilla group and management of UWA named the baby gorilla born to the group on August 27, 2020 Butime in honour of the Minister’s visit.

Uganda Wildlife Authority in March suspended primate tourism, related research and filming following the confirmation of COVID-19 cases in the country and subsequently closed all the parks in April. The savannah parks were reopened in July and the reopening of primate parks marks the full resumption of tourism activities in all protected areas.

About Rushegura Group

Rushegura group was initiated habituated in 1996 as Habinyanja group but split in 1998 on a hill called Rushegura with Mwirima as the dominant Silverback of the splinter group. It derives its name from the hill where it split from Habinyanja. Following the death of Mwirima in 2014, Kabukojo took leadership of the group up to now and the mother of baby Butime is called Kibande. The group is composed of eighteen (18) individuals.

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