

KIBALE CHIMPANZEES ELECT NEW LEADER

By Julius Luwemba

In November 2023, Nfuuzi, the alpha male chimp of Kibale National Park, was assassinated by a team of six dissident chimps.

Nfuuzi's death left behind a leadership vacuum, plunging the community of 120 chimpanzees into chaos and a power struggle for more than two years.

The community, which inhabits the Kanyanchu sector of Kibale National Park, endured a dramatic story of power fights, betrayal and survival, until recently, when one dominant figure named Rukara emerged as a winner, beating his closest rival, Bahoire.

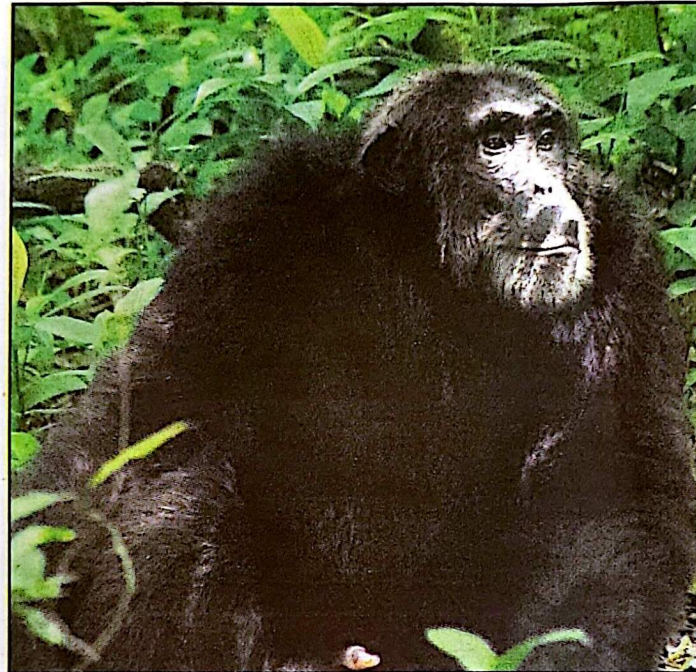
Richard Alicwamu, a ranger guide in the national park, said Bahoire among the six chimps that orchestrated the 'assassination' of Nfuuzi.

"This must have been one of the major factors why he [Bahoire] failed to win the hearts of the majority community members," Alicwamu remarked.

He based his observation on the fact that chimpanzees share a 98.7% DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) similarity with human beings.

Bosco Bwambale, a ranger guide, said Nfuuzi had taken over the leadership of the group from Toti, who had passed on in an accident.

"Nfuuzi was a lovely chimpanzee. Whereas there was another chimp gearing up for the leadership position, it was not to the taste of the group's



Rukara the current alpha male of Kanyantare chimp community

elders due to his aggressive nature," Bwambale narrated.

Chimpanzees win leadership in different ways, including charging and body displays, as well as fighting.

A male remains an alpha for as long as he plays his cards well. However, males that assume power at quite an old age do not stay in power for long. Citing examples of Magezi and Mobutu, among others that were

quite old, Bwambale said, they gave up power after sensing danger.

He says an alpha male in a community of chimpanzees enjoys special privileges, such as unlimited sexual romps with any female of choice. All members of the community always pay homage to the alpha male, which in turn must bear the responsibility of protecting members of its community against danger.

ABOUT CHIMPS

Whereas there is a record of a female which has lived up to 65 years, chimpanzees in the wild live up to between 50-55 years on average. A chimpanzee is said to be three times stronger than an average able-bodied human being. Female chimpanzees become sexually active in from the age of eight to nine years.

On average, Chimps in the wild have their first babies when they are approximately 11-12 years old. The males on the other hand become fertile when they are about 10 years old in the wild.

Mating occurs when females are in estrus, which lasts only 10 days each month. Their gestation period is 225-240 days, where after, a female will start cycling again after 14 months to four years.

that is 25-35 square kilometres wide.

Rukara, the current leader of the community, always leads the members in search of food among other necessities. He is followed by the majority, including his former rival Bahoire, who has also been seen bowing to Rukara.

TOURISM IN KIBALE

Kibale National Park, which is also known as the primates' capital of the world, is a 766-square-kilometre forested habitat of at least 60 mammals and 13 species of primates.

According to Jane Mutahinga, a ranger-guide, Kibale is dominated by rainforests with over 250 tree species, but interspersed with grassland and swamps. Herds of forest elephants, 21 reptile species, 372 bird species and 251 butterfly species are recorded in the national park, which extends southwards to form a contiguous block with Queen Elizabeth National Park. The most prominent of the primates are the chimpanzees, which are estimated at 1,450 individuals divided into 13 communities. Out of the 13 communities, only five are said to be habituated for research and tourism.

Last month, international media organisations reported a 'civil war' in the Ngogo Chimpanzee community.

Ngogo remains a reserve for researchers and is rarely accessible to tourists. It's the same community which was filmed for the famous documentary known as "Chimp Planet."

Margaret Kobusingye, a researcher on Chimpanzees in Kibale, says that although each chimpanzee community has a leader, some groups can break away when the group expands.

"It happened to the Ngogo community, which had over 200 individuals," she remarked.

The Kanyantare community of chimpanzees is said to roam an area