

Bwindi Ape Conservation Partnership (BACEP) Annual Report 2025

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This report summarizes the conservation education program conducted in 2025 around the communities surrounding Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP). The program, ongoing since 2008, aims to engage the younger generation in conservation efforts through interactive lessons, out of school activities, and interschool competitions. The overall aim of the program is to provide local school children with an opportunity to learn more about the endangered mountain gorillas and conservation of Bwindi. The program collaborates with four primary schools in the Ruhija sector: Ruhija Primary School, Bitanwa Primary School, Mburameizi Primary School, and Kanyashogi Primary School. Active participation from headmasters, teachers, and students facilitated the logistics of all activities, including the lessons and competitions. Conservation activities were provided for the students of primary 5 and 6.

Activities Conducted in 2025

In 2025, the program delivered three conservation classroom lessons in March, April and June. We also carried out both the forest walk plus litter picking days in July. Additionally, two interschool competition sessions were held in March and August. We did not carry out the debate competition that was scheduled for third term because government teachers were on strike for a month.

Table 1. Conservation Lessons and Competition Activities for 2025

		Month	Lesson
2025	1	MARCH	Human Wildlife Conflict Competition 1 (Athletics)
		APRIL	Forest walk lesson
	2	JUNE	Litter picking lesson
		JULY	Forest walk day Litter picking day
		AUGUST	Competition 2 (Music Dance and Drama)

We conducted fewer activities in 2025, due to the following reasons:

-There was a new UWA Warden In charge of Ruhija sector, who was not familiar with the BACEP activities for which we use help from UWA, specifically the forest walk and litter pick up day. Therefore, it took longer than usual to organize these activities and it interfered with our annual schedule for 2025.

-The government teachers in Uganda had a strike that lasted for the entire month of October, which interfered the lessons and competition scheduled for third term 2025. When they resumed teaching, the schools had a lot to cover in order to compensate the lost time hence difficulty in lesson delivery and competition.

-Overlapping community and school events.

-Change in Max Planck project manager that required time for training and orientation.

Conservation Lessons

A total of three lessons were done during the course of the year (Table 1). Each lesson had a specific subject to discuss with the children, which started with an introduction of the topic, objectives and different concepts were explained related to conservation of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The lessons involved a discussion between the students with an exchange of ideas to assess their knowledge. Additionally, MPI staff were able to deliver firsthand information based on their field experience. The theory was followed by an interactive activity where the students had to apply what was learnt during the lesson using different scenarios. Exercise/questions were given to pupils and they sat in groups to answer the questions that assigned to them. This helped to improve teamwork within the students. Visual materials such as diagrams and charts were used to describe what exactly was being taught, making the activity more informative to students (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Classroom lesson connected to the forest walk activity.

Forest Walk

In July 2025, BACEP conducted forest walk with the four schools for the first time since the Covid pandemic. Prior to the day-long forest activity, we had a lesson with the pupils to provide them with knowledge about the forest, the benefits of conserving the national park and its ecosystem. Additionally, they learned about cultural and traditional values that people previously had in Bwindi, including how taboos/totems, norms and myths have contributed to the conservation of the park. Then students for each school (a total of 287 students) went on a half-day forest walk. Each group of students was accompanied by MPI staff and two rangers from UWA to supervise and provide additional information during the activity. The students were challenged to identify and observe different habitats within the park, which helped develop critical thinking skills when examining similarities and differences of various habitats. Forest walk allows pupils to learn practically about Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, and it gives them the chance to walk through the park, which most pupils have never done (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Activity during forest walk

Litter Picking

In July 2025, we also carried out litter picking that took one day. A total of 239 pupils in grades Primary 5 and 6 from the four schools participated in the activity. Pupils from Ruhija, Bitanwa and Mburameize Primary school walked along the roads passing through the forest while collecting litter. Kanyashogi Primary school collected litter in Mpungu trading center since the park is far from the school. It is estimated that each school walked 5 kilometers, which totals 20 kilometers of cleaned roadways around Bwindi.

We conducted a lesson about litter collection in which the pupils learnt that conservation is group effort, and also understand that damage to the environment is not only localized and that it affects other people that did not cause the problem.

The act of litter collection helps develop a personal accountability for the environment, and build a sense of community responsibility for keeping the local area clean. Not only does this activity encourage pupils to take initiative with respect to maintaining the health of their local environment, but it also exposes them to local wildlife they might not otherwise encounter, such as monkeys, birds, snakes, and other small animals (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Litter picking activity

School Competitions

Two competitions were held this year. The debate competition did not happen this year since it was scheduled for third term and the schools were on strike for a month.

The first competition was Sports, in which we had athletics. This included the following activities: relay races, sack races, egg carrying, three legged races, bottle carrying and filling races, and a 200m and 100m race. Despite not being related to conservation, this competition helps with creating the bond between the students of the four different schools. Each school provided 25 pupils (both girls and boys). The competition was held at the Church of Uganda playground. Community and Bwindi Gorilla Project members were selected to act as referees, ensuring neutrality to avoid future difficulties. The winning school was Mburameizi Primary School (figure 4). At the end of the event, each school received a box of exercise books and one box of pens. A total of 100 students participated.



Figure 4: Mburameizi Primary School with the trophy.

The second competition was Music, Dance and Drama, which was held in August. The theme was ‘conservation is the responsibility for everyone’. For this event, the competition was held at Ruhija Church of Uganda. Each school had to prepare a song, poem, play and dance illustrating with clarity to the theme. The judges were Uganda Wildlife Authority rangers and ITFC staff to avoid possible bias in choosing the winner. The poem and song were to be presented in English, the dance was either traditional dance or creative dance and play was to be presented in Rukiga, which is the local language, making it easier for the students to deliver the message and at the same time to reach more people from the community. The winning school was Mburameizi Primary School, (Figure 5) for second year in row. Each school came with 40 students making it an overall 160 students who participated.



Figure 5: Mburameizi Primary School with the trophy

Other Activities

World Gorilla Day was on September 25, 2025. A weekend of activities was organized by 'Change a Life' NGO, with collaboration from UWA and the local governments in Kanungu district. All MPI staff attended, with the project manager, Moses Akantorana, giving a speech in a discussion section conservation of Bwindi. In addition, Mburameizi Primary school was invited to attend and present some of their items from the Music Dance and Drama competition held in August. It was very well received. We hope to participate in this community activity again if it is held next year.

Future plans

For the upcoming year 2026, the project aims to continue with BACEP activities and to engage the students and motivate them. Since students, teachers, community and other institutions showed great interest and they are willing to collaborate with BACEP activities, the plan is to create more participatory environments for the community, parents and students to reach more people and spread the conservation message widely. Continuing with the school competitions is also important, as this helps in building the sense of community between the schools and create a wider social network between teachers, students and community. Continuing to raise the awareness for gender equity, which, during this year a bigger participation by the girls was evident.

Recommendations for 2026

- **Enhanced coordination:** Develop a more robust coordination mechanism with schools to mitigate scheduling conflicts and ensure consistent lesson delivery.
- **Diversification of activities:** Explore incorporating new activities, such as film shows and radio talk shows to further engage students and broaden the program's reach.
- **Strengthening partnerships:** Continue nurturing existing partnerships and seek new collaborations to enhance program effectiveness and sustainability.
- **Exam assessments:** Implement annual exams to assess students understanding of conservation.

Additional Elements:

- **Visual Aids:** Include photographs of the lessons, competitions, and participating students to enhance the report's visual appeal and showcase the program's impact.
- **Impact Assessment:** Consider incorporating a section on the program's impact, highlighting any observed changes in students' knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors towards conservation.

Conclusions

The conservation education program in 2025 successfully engaged young people in the Ruhija sector with conservation issues. Despite facing some challenges, the program adapted and continued to deliver impactful activities. The strong support from partner organizations and the local community remains crucial to the program's success.

Overall, the conservation education program remains a vital component of conservation efforts in the BINP region. By fostering environmental awareness and responsibility among future generations, the program contributes to the long-term preservation of this invaluable ecosystem.

Partnerships and Support

The project benefited significantly from the support of various stakeholders:

- **MPI staff:** Provided logistical support for lessons and competitions.
- **Local government representatives:** Their presence in the villages enhanced community engagement beyond the schools.
- **Religious institutions:** Generously offered the use of their facilities for program activities.
- **Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA):** Had a crucial role as neutral judges in the competitions also providing us security during forest walk and litter picking activities.

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