

To create awareness of conservation efforts for the endangered mountain gorilla on September 7, Rwanda hosted the 14th edition of Kwita Izina, naming 23 baby gorillas in a colourful ceremony in Kinigi, Musanze District.

The conservation ceremony inspired by the ancient Rwandan tradition of naming new born babies was attended by a long list of global icons who participated in the baby gorillas.

Thousands of residents, officials, diplomats, renown philanthropists, local and international conservationists were also in attendance with the aim of creating awareness of conservation efforts for the majestic apes.

The Kwita Izina celebrations this year designated 'Conservation is Life' as the theme with a list of events including a Conversation on Conservation forum in Kigali, a community project launch in Kitabi Sector, Nyaruguru District and ended with the launch of a community project in Ndego Sector, Eastern Province on 8, September.

Rwanda's Premier Edouard Ngirente speaking to the gathering said that the benefits of Kwita Izina and all the conservation efforts go beyond promoting tourism and leisure, and contribute to the well-being of the people.

"This ceremony is not just about tourism and travel. It's about our people. When we protect our environment and our Gorillas, we help our people to improve their well-being. Indeed, where there is peaceful co-existence of wildlife and people, there are mutual benefits", the Premier said.

After the naming event guests were hosted to a spectacular gala dinner at the shores of Lake Kivu, in Rubavu district. The dinner was spiced up by musical performances from Gakondo Group, a traditional band and Mafikizolo, South African duo.

In the 13 years since the event was established, 262 mountain gorilla babies have been named to celebrate nature together with the communities who protect the majestic mountain gorillas. A portion of revenues from national parks goes directly to helping the communities around the parks by way of extension of social amenities.

As a result of conservation efforts such as Kwita Izina, the population of the endangered mountain gorilla has increased to 604 in 2016 in the Virunga Massif compared to 480 in 2010.

Mountain gorillas contribute up to 90 percent of government revenues from national parks. In 2016 alone, Rwanda earned \$404 million from tourism and the target this year is \$444 million.