Rwanda Development Board (RDB) this Friday announced that it has suspended tourism and research activities in three primate-dominated national parks effective immediately.

Tourism and research activities have been temporarily suspended in and around three national parks of primates, namely, Volcanoes, Mukura-Gishwati and Nyungwe due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the RDB said in a statement.

While it is still unknown if wild animals can contract COVID-19, mountain gorillas and chimpanzees are known to be susceptible to infection with human respiratory pathogens, said the statement.

According to the board, the country's fourth park – Akagera national park, remains open to visitors with the COVID-19 monitoring measures in place.

Early this month, the board revised tourism permit rules to allow tourists planning to visit the country to reschedule their travel plans and restrict international travel in face of the global spread of COVID-19.

Volcanoes national park is a home to endangered mountains gorillas, while Mukura-Gishwati and Nyungwe host a wide range of species of primates and are home to East Africa's most diverse primate population.

Gorilla trekking is one of the major cash cows of the Rwanda's tourism industry, contributing about 90 percent of the revenues from Rwanda national parks.

In 2017, Rwanda increased mountain gorilla trekking permits from 750 to 1,500 U.S. dollars for all people intending to visit gorillas in order to ensure the sustainability of gorilla conservation initiatives and enhance visitor experience.

Rwanda sold 15,132 gorilla trekking permits worth 19.2 million dollars to tourists in 2018, according to the board.

Rwanda on Friday reported six new cases of COVID-19, bringing the total confirmed cases to 17, said the ministry of health in a statement.