

Rwanda on Friday, Sept. 4, hosted its annual gorilla naming ceremony in the foothills of the Virunga Mountains, drawing about 10,000 people to Kinigi for an event that has become a major gathering for conservation, tourism, business and sport.

The 2026 Kwita Izina ceremony saw 22 baby mountain gorillas given names by prominent figures from Rwanda and abroad, including sports stars, business executives, tourism officials, entertainers and conservationists.



Among those chosen to name the gorillas was Shaikha Al Nuwais, who is set to become the first woman to lead UN Tourism. Atlético de Madrid chief executive and major shareholder Miguel Ángel Gil Marín, CAA Sports President Paul Danforth and Elsewedy Electric Chairman Ahmed Sadek Elsewedy also took part.

Former Manchester United and France captain Patrice Evra, former France and Paris Saint-Germain captain Mamadou Sakho, former Aston Villa and Wales captain James Chester and Qatari high-jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim were among the sports personalities at the ceremony.

International Cycling Union President David Lappartient also attended. He was involved in bringing the 2025 UCI Road World Championships to Rwanda, the first edition of the competition held in Africa.

Rwanda's entertainment industry was represented by gospel singer Israel Mbonyi and actress Marie Clémentine Dusabejambo. Her film *Benimana* was selected for the Un Certain Regard section of the 2026 Cannes Film Festival.

Other figures included British wildlife filmmaker Alastair Fothergill, Olivier Granet of Kasada Capital Management, Neil McDougall, founder of DelAgua, and Kelly O'Meara, chief executive of the Pan African Sanctuary Alliance.

Rwanda is home to more than 1,060 mountain gorillas. Since Kwita Izina was launched in 2005, 438 gorillas have been named.

The ceremony also comes as Rwanda continues to use tourism revenue to support communities around its national parks. Under a government revenue-sharing

programme, 10% of tourism income from national parks is returned to surrounding communities.



More than 23 billion Rwandan francs has so far been distributed through the programme, supporting about 1,300 projects, including schools, health centres and water infrastructure.

Rwanda is also preparing to expand Volcanoes National Park by about 3,740 hectares. The government says the expansion is expected to benefit more than 17,000 people and 3,400 households while helping reduce conflict between people and wildlife.

The 22 gorillas named on Friday bring the total number named through Kwita Izina since 2005 to 460.