

Narrative of Introduction, videos, questions and comments for the talk, “Ecotourism Ended the Traditional Lives of Uganda’s Batwa Pygmies”

Animal Matters Seminar, Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, November 28, 2018
Tony Schwartz

Introduction (in the original Facebook version, but not posted in final YouTube Version: Dr. Allen Rutberg. “It is nice to have everyone here today. I know we have here today a number of alumni for whom you were a professor. Anyway, it is my great pleasure to introduce Dr. Tony Schwartz. Dr. Schwartz received his veterinary degree at Cornell University many years ago, and in 1979 was invited to join the original faculty here at the Tufts School of Veterinary Medicine, as it was known at the time. And Tony served here as professor of surgery and chair of the department, as well as an associate dean, for many years until he retired in 2005. He’s maintained his connections with the school, and many of us who are here, but at the same time he has developed a kind of a second career, he told me that he started planning for about four years before he retired, and since became a serious photographer and artist. He has also taught photography. After working on landscapes and animals for several years he turned to people, who have become his primary subjects of interest. So, Tony, thank you for coming today. We look forward to your talk.”

Problems with the videos during the talk: During the talk there were three videos. Unfortunately, the sound in video did not reproduce well in Video I (Slide 51), and the narrative is presented below.

Video I (Slide titled, “Barekwe Flora: ‘The Story of the Mutwa and the Duiker’”): The first video is an interview with Barakwe Flora, who discussed the story of the “The Story of the Mutwa and the Duiker [an antelope].” This is the complete translated narrative, derived from Busingye Levi’s on the spot translation, with additions from the notes of Musinuzi Amos, which he took down as the story was being told:

“Long ago, the Batwa lived in Bwindi forest. While in the forest, there came a time when they lacked honey, wild yams, fruits, wild meat, among other needs. This was a disaster - famine in the forest.

A Mutwa man proposed to his family that he would wander away to other parts of the forest to look for food. He carried with him fire-setting sticks, bows, arrows, stones, sharpened spears, and a mat bag. He walked several miles in the forest and looked everywhere, uphill and downhill and up in the trees, but he did not find anything to eat.

Luckily, at some point he spotted a wild duiker (an antelope) grazing on grass deep in the forest. He was very excited and started blessing and praising Nyabingyi for the opportunity given. He asked his god to help him kill the duiker and have food for his family.

He got himself in position to kill the duiker. But, as he raised his spear, the duiker rose up on its rear legs and said to the Mutwa: “my friend, do you really want to kill me?”

The Mutwa immediately threw down the spear and said: “Oh my god, I wanted to eat meat, but this animal has said that I should not kill it.”

The duiker came closer and hugged the Mutwa and said, “from today onwards, you are my friend, but you should never talk about me,” and that he would then always get everything he wanted to eat. He also invited the Mutwa to sleep at its home that night.

The duiker took the Mutwa to its home, where there was honey, meat, yams, fruits and all the foods the Mutwa desired. They ate until they were satisfied and spent a good night at the duiker’s place.

Early in the morning, the duiker packed all sorts of foods for the Mutwa to take to his home and accompanied him to the point where they had met. The duiker told the Mutwa never to tell anyone about its whereabouts and then went away.

The Mutwa carried the food to his family. When he was near his home, his children and wife spotted him from a distance; they welcomed him, saying “here comes dad!” The family enjoyed the food. They were satisfied and very happy.

Questions and comments after the talk. Unfortunately, a microphone was not used for questions and I was not asked to repeat the questions. I was able to listen to a greatly amplified version of the video and transcribed the questions and comments below. Sometimes these are paraphrased because of difficulty understanding the spoken words.

Questions and comments in order of presentations, with my answers and comments present on the video:

1. “You said at the beginning that the average age of the Batwa was 28.
 - a. You had several very old people?”

2. “I was wondering if they were affected by AIDS.” Addendum: Although I answered that AIDS was not their problem, that was true until they left the forest, but HIV did become a problem as they were integrated into the community in Buhoma. It was not relevant to the early 38% mortality rate of children by age 5, however.

3. Well, if you could go back in time, what would you have done differently?
4. We hear a lot about how habituation negatively impacts the animals themselves. What is your opinion on that?
5. Do you think this model can be replicated in other countries in Africa? Is it replicable?

Comments by Dr. Ellen Rogers: I am Ellen Rogers. I taught in the Center for Conservation Medicine and worked in Uganda for a number of years. One thing about, is ecotourism good for the animals? Ecotourism brings in so much money that all three countries want to preserve [the gorillas]. There has been a tremendous amount of war and terrorism in those areas, but nobody wants to hurt the gorillas, because when they take over the country, they want that money also. So, I think that for the gorillas in that habitat, ecotourism has saved them; I don't know if they would be there otherwise. What you (Tony) said in the beginning is so true; this is an old story in Africa. This is an old story about many different levels of power coming in from the first days of colonialism; and they said "these animals are now ours," the government, and you people, whoever you are, are no longer allowed to hunt them, live with them, etc., and this has happened in basically every country where there is wildlife.

6. You were saying that in 1984 there were 284 gorillas. What dropped their numbers [in this century?]?
 - a. So it wasn't the Batwa....? (I really did not respond to that.)

In my answers I said I said about 15% of income from the gate fees goes to the community – It actually is 20%, but because the Batwa have no means of applying for the money, they do not benefit.

7. Second Dr. Ellen Rogers comments:

"I have another comment...before Dian Fossey came, it actually was a status symbol to have a gorilla hand; a dried-up gorilla hand inside your house, or whatever." "And in the US...{not just] Uganda. So there are always local forces working both ways.

8. Ginny Shugrue reported that there was a question from on line: "Are there any places where Pygmy people still live in the forest?"

9. We went to visit a tribe called the Hadzapi, and they actually are the only tribe, Tanzanians, Africans, that could hunt legally – Bush People. But is there anything like that being discussed for the Batwa? They (Hadzapi) are the only people allowed to smoke marijuana and the only people allowed to hunt. They are in small numbers and it actually is sustainable for them to hunt.