



## Art Expedition to Retrace Steps of Iconic Explorer in Support of Mountain Gorillas

*American natural history artist wins prestigious fellowship to study endangered species and support conservation in Central Africa.*

**Vancouver, B.C., CANADA -- (March 23, 2009)**— The Artists for Conservation Foundation (AFC) is pleased to announce its eleventh fellowship involving a grant of \$5,000 US, under the AFC Flag Expeditions Program, awarded to Stephen C. Quinn, renowned artist, author and world authority on museum dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). The objective of the AFC's Flag Expeditions Program is to make possible the artistic field study and rendering of endangered species or habitats deserving of greater public attention, particularly in remote parts of the world.

With additional support from the Houston Zoo Wildlife Conservation Program (HZWCP) and AMNH, Quinn will travel to Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to spend approximately three weeks observing, sketching, painting and photographing endangered mountain gorillas and their rugged jungle environment in the eastern Congo basin of Central Africa.

While in Rwanda, Quinn will participate in mountain gorilla treks where he will have face-to-face encounters with the majestic species. He will spend time researching their habitat and learning first-hand about the critical conservation work being done today. In particular, Quinn will be working with experts from the Mountain Gorilla Veterinarian Project (MGVP)—a leading NGO based in Rwanda—and the “Mountain Gorilla One Health” program—a collaborative program between MGVP and University of California Davis’ Wildlife Health Center. There, Quinn will have special access to rehabilitation facilities including the opportunity to observe young gorillas, orphaned by poaching.

The Expedition will also retrace the footsteps of Carl Akeley—iconic artist, inventor, explorer and father of modern taxidermy—to understand his contributions to saving the endangered mountain gorilla. Akeley, who worked at AMNH in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, helped to convince King Leopold II of Belgium to create Africa's first National Park—a park that still exists today and now straddles three countries: Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC. Akeley researched and collected specimens in the region to create a now-famous diorama on display at AMNH in Manhattan.

“When Carl Akeley first encountered the Mountain Gorilla in 1921, it was a creature steeped in myth and folklore. His work was among the first to accurately document them as a gentle, intelligent and social animal that, even then, was under grave threat from over-hunting”, explains Quinn. Akeley's research inspired him to dedicate the last few years of his life to conservation and protection of the mountain gorilla.

In 1926, Akeley died during a return visit to the area and was buried very near his research site. Largely due to Akeley's efforts, the Mountain Gorilla survives today and his diorama stands as a monument to his achieving its protection.

To share and better understand the extraordinary story and historic example of art directly influencing international policy, Quinn will venture deep into the dense jungles of the Congo basin to climb Mount Mikeno, to seek out Akeley's research site and his grave. From the same location and vantage point that Akeley took nearly a century ago, Quinn plans to create plein-air paintings that document the changes to the ecology and topography in the last century with the intention to create an educational exhibit in association with the famous diorama at AMNH.

Quinn elaborates: “Leading an Expedition to the actual site of Akeley's gorilla diorama is to revisit this great achievement in the history of global wildlife conservation and celebrate its success. Using the art of the diorama to document the environmental changes that may have occurred in the scene since Akeley's visit is a unique way to use art to serve science and our understanding of the region.”

Expanding on the meaning of the expedition, Quinn adds, “The Mountain Gorilla is Carl Akeley's living legacy. To walk in the footsteps of this great artist of African wildlife and champion for its preservation will be, for me, a great and profound adventure.”

The expedition is planned for late November 2010.

**About Mountain Gorillas:** Except for four orphaned youngsters being prepared for release, there are no mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) living in captivity. (Gorillas commonly seen in zoos are Western lowland gorillas, *Gorilla gorilla gorilla*.) About 740 mountain gorillas remain in the wild, living in the Virunga Mountains where the borders of Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo intersect. Because of the popularity of tourism treks to see the gorillas and constant monitoring of 75 percent of the population by rangers and researchers, each gorilla receives on average 2,000 to 3,000 human visitors each year.

Mountain gorillas are susceptible to the "childhood" diseases of people as well as to most other infections. But they are a wild population and thus not vaccinated. If there was an outbreak of measles or influenza in the local community of people

living near a gorilla park, it could spread to the gorillas. Some other serious diseases do not have vaccines and cannot be immunized against even if it were feasible. In addition to diseases, threats to gorilla populations include habitat loss and poaching.

**About the Artists for Conservation Foundation (AFC):** he Artists for Conservation Foundation (AFC) is a non-profit, international organization dedicated to the celebration and preservation of the natural world. Based in Vancouver, Canada, the Foundation represents the world's leading collective of artists focused on nature and wildlife, with a membership spanning five continents and twenty-seven countries. The organization's mission is to support wildlife and habitat conservation, biodiversity, sustainability and environmental education through art that celebrates our natural heritage. Membership reads like a "Who's Who" of nature art, and includes the top names in the field, such as Robert Bateman, John Banovich, Guy Coheleach, Pollyanna Pickering and David Shepherd. For more information about the AFC's innovative initiatives, visit [www.natureartists.com](http://www.natureartists.com).

**About the AFC Flag Expeditions Program:** The objective of the Flag Expeditions Program is to make possible the artistic field study and rendering of biodiversity deserving of greater public attention with strong emphasis on unique and threatened habitats and rare or endangered species in remote parts of the world. For more information on the AFC Flag Expeditions Program, or sponsorship opportunities, please visit the Expedition Web site at [www.natureartists.com/flagexpeditions/](http://www.natureartists.com/flagexpeditions/).

**About the American Museum of Natural History:** The American Museum of Natural History is one of the world's preeminent scientific, educational, and cultural institutions. Since its founding in 1869, the Museum has advanced its global mission to explore and interpret human cultures, the natural world, and the universe through a wide-reaching program of scientific research, education, and exhibitions. The Museum shares its treasures and discoveries with approximately four million on-site visitors from around the world each year. AMNH-produced exhibitions and Space Shows can currently be seen in venues on five continents, reaching an audience of millions. In addition, the Museum's website, [amnh.org](http://amnh.org), extends its collections, exhibitions, and educational programs to millions more beyond the Museum's walls.

**About the Houston Zoo Wildlife Conservation Program:** The Houston Zoo Wildlife Conservation Program was launched in 2004 to more effectively address a critical part of our Zoo mission. The program oversees 20 projects in 11 countries, and creates partnerships, both here and abroad, to ensure long-term support. While some of our projects are crisis responses to immediate threats, others are multi-year strategic initiatives. The program's ultimate goal is to connect all Houston Zoo exhibits with a habitat or species conservation program that is economically sustainable and mutually beneficial to local communities and their wildlife. Another goal is to inspire all our guests to care more about conservation and become part of the solution and not the problem.

**About the Mountain Gorilla Veterinarian Project:** Founded in 1986, the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project (MGVP, Inc.) monitors the health of wild mountain gorillas, treats trauma and illness, researches significant issues in gorilla health and develops protocols and partnerships to support the One Health programs in the Virungas and environs. It works in close partnership with the governments of Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other gorilla conversation organizations to achieve mutual goals, and its work is shared to strengthen wildlife conservation efforts around the world. The MGVP depends upon grants and donations to conduct its operations.

**About UC Davis "One Health" Program:** The One-Health program operates under the UC Davis Wildlife Health Center - a Center of Excellence within the School of Veterinary Medicine. The purpose of the program is to conserve the world's remaining 740 mountain gorillas by caring for not only the gorillas but also the people and the other animals that share their home in the forests of central Africa. The program runs in partnership with the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, begun in 1986, to continue improving gorilla health and survival by addressing human health, livestock health and agricultural issues.

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For further information:

- Artists for Conservation (AFC) [www.natureartists.com](http://www.natureartists.com)
- AFC Flag Expeditions Program: [www.natureartists.com/flagexpeditions](http://www.natureartists.com/flagexpeditions)
- American Museum of Natural History: [www.natureartists.com/quinn2010.htm](http://www.natureartists.com/quinn2010.htm)
- Houston Zoo Wildlife Conservation Program: [www.houstonzoo.org](http://www.houstonzoo.org)
- Mountain Gorilla Veterinarian Project: [www.gorilladoctors.org](http://www.gorilladoctors.org)
- University of California Davis: [www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/whc/](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/whc/)

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