

**VIRUNGA**

**Synopsis**

In the forested depths of eastern Congo lies Virunga National Park, one of the most biodiverse places on earth and home to the planet’s last remaining mountain gorillas. In this wild but enchanted environment, a small and embattled team of park rangers - including an ex-child soldier turned ranger, a caretaker of orphan gorillas and a dedicated conservationist - protect this UNESCO World Heritage site from armed militia, poachers and the dark forces struggling to control Congo's rich natural resources. When the newly formed M23 rebel group declares war, a new conflict threatens the lives and stability of everyone and everything they've worked so hard to protect, with the filmmakers and the film’s participants caught in the crossfire.

A powerful combination of investigative journalism and nature documentary, VIRUNGA is the incredible true story of a group of courageous people risking their lives to build a better future in eastern Congo, and a gripping exposé of the realities of life in the region.

**About the Director - Orlando von Einsiedel**

Orlando is a multi-award winning filmmaker and has directed films spanning Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Arctic. Covering topics from a skateboard school in Afghanistan, to the tracking and arrest of pirates in West Africa, he has won over 70 international film awards to date. His films are known for powerful visual aesthetics, intimate personal stories and globally spanning investigations.

2014 saw the completion of VIRUNGA, Orlando's debut feature length documentary, executive produced by Leonardo DiCaprio, and its global release as a Netflix Original production. The film was nominated for a BAFTA and an Academy Award as well as winning an Emmy, a Peabody and a duPont-Columbia Award for outstanding journalism. The film has helped to highlight the heroism and struggle of the rangers of Virunga National Park, and continues to support their fight against exploitative forces.

Orlando co-runs London based film production company Grain Media and is a director of Virunga Productions, a Community Interest Company.

**About the Producer - Joanna Natasegara**

Joanna Natasegara is a multi award-winning producer and founder of UK based production company, Violet Films. Joanna produced the BAFTA and Academy Award® nominated feature documentary *Virunga* which has won over 50 international awards including an Emmy, a Peabody and Grierson. Joanna has led multiple Doc Impact Award winning global campaigns, including *No Fire Zone* and *Virunga*, which successfully stopped a British oil company from illegally exploring for oil in Africa’s oldest national park.

[**See here for further information about the film team**](http://virungamovie.com/#team)

**Character Biographies**

**Mélanie Gouby** is a freelance journalist who was based in Goma, eastern Congo, for three years, working for The Associated Press, Le Figaro and France 24 among others. On the ground during all the major events that have shaken eastern Congo since the beginning of the M23 war, Mélanie's two-year investigation into British corporation, Soco International’s activitiesin the Virunga National Park gives an unprecedented view into the mechanisms of conflict in eastern Congo and how foreign actors have fueled the ongoing violence.

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After training as an anthropologist, **Dr. Emmanuel de Merode** worked for 20 years in support of Congo’s national parks. He spent most of those years in the field supporting Congolese park rangers through the 12-year civil war that claimed the lives of over 5 million civilians and 140 of the rangers with whom he worked.

In 2007, after witnessing the slaughter of nine mountain gorillas by armed militias, and investigating the root causes of environmental destruction in eastern Congo, he decided to focus his efforts on overcoming the illegal trafficking of natural resources in Virunga National Park. As a result of these efforts, he was appointed as Chief Warden of Virunga National Park by the Congolese Government in 2008. As chief warden, he has been assigned the rank of colonel in the Congolese security forces, has command of 400 rangers, is responsible for Africa’s oldest and richest protected area that includes all of Congo’s critically endangered Mountain Gorillas, as well as important populations of chimpanzees, forest and savanna elephants and a unique assemblage of other mammals, birds and reptiles.

The Park’s efforts to overcome illegal trafficking of natural resources placed him and his team in direct confrontation with several of eastern Congo’s armed militias, and subsequently with British oil company, Soco International, seeking to undertake illegal oil exploration activities within the park. To overcome this challenge, he helped to develop the Virunga Alliance, a Congolese initiative to create an alternative clean development strategy capable of eradicating poverty and bringing stability and peace to eastern Congo based on the sustainable use of water resources for energy and fisheries together with agriculture and tourism. He is seeking to draw a billion dollars of private sector investment in sustainable development in eastern Congo before 2020.

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**Andre Bauma** is head of the Senkwekwe Centre in Virunga National Park. Originally from Masisi, in North Kivu, Andre was born in 1972. He is married to Masika Rosette and they have three young children. He began his service as a Mountain Gorilla guide in the Mikeno sector but since June 2007 he has headed up the team of carers for the gorilla orphans, Matabishi, Ndeze, Ndakasi, and Maisha at the Senkwekwe Centre (located at the park headquarters, it is the only facility for critically endangered orphan mountain gorillas in the world). Andre was one of the first on the scene after the gorilla massacre in 2007 where baby Ndakasi, less than two months old was found clinging to her dead mother’s back.

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Born in Katana, South Kivu in 1976, **Rodrigue Mugaruka Katembo** was a Virunga National Park Ranger for 10 years and was made Chief Ranger and Warden of the Rwindi Sector in 2007 - 2014.

Rodrigue started life as a young soldier, serving for the AFDL, before finishing his high school diploma and going on to become a teacher at the Institute of Lwiro / South Kivu and the Head of Studies at the Kakungwe Institute. He studied at the University of Ruwenzori in North Kivu, where he gained a BA in Biology, sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation through the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP).

Rodrigue’s primary area of interest is the protection of biodiversity in the central area of Virunga National Park which includes, elephants, lions, buffalo, chimpanzee, colobus guereza, nile crocodile, the fish of Lake Edward and the Rutshuru rivers - the Ishasaha and the Rwindi. He was also responsible for the protection of the trees in the Mitumba sector which are vulnerable to charcoal poaching.

One of Rodrigue’s greatest achievements has been to restore and maintain the rule of the Central Sector of Virunga National Park through two major wars. During his tenure, hippopotamus populations increased from 350 individuals to over 1400. Moreover, he was able to restore security for the civilian populations living in, and passing through the park. The number of attacks on civilians by illegal armed groups diminished from an average of eighteen a month to less than one, thereby averting a large number of violent assaults on civilians. Rodrigue played a central and determining role in the investigation on illegal oil exploration in Virunga National Park, and delivered crucial information to the relevant authorities on the issue of illegal exploration in Virunga National Park. In 2013, he received the Abraham Conservation Award in recognition of his invaluable work.

[***VIRUNGA* is available to stream on Netflix worldwide.**](http://www.netflix.com/WiMovie/80009431)

[**VIRUNGA publicity stills**](https://www.dropbox.com/home/Virunga%20Press)

[**http://virungamovie.com**](http://virungamovie.com) **|** [**http://virunga.org**](http://virunga.org)