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TOP STORY

Sculpture honoring gorilla conservation unveiled at Scovill Zoo

Jaylyn Cook
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A sculpture depicting conservation efforts at Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was unveiled at Scovill Zoo.

Provided photo

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DECATUR — Visitors to **Scovill Zoo this season** will see a new **Sculpture honoring gorilla conservation** in a sculpture donated by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

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The zoo, which opens at 9:30 Saturday, April 7, unveiled the \$150,000 sculpture during a ceremony Friday morning. According to a news release from the Decatur Park District, the sculpture highlights the conservation efforts of rangers at Virunga National Park, a UNESCO world heritage site in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in central Africa.

Virunga and neighboring parks in Rwanda and Uganda are home to the world's remaining population of mountain gorillas, the release said. The sculpture depicts a gorilla and two park rangers, with a cross, helmet and a pair of boots sitting between them, Scovill Zoo director Ken Frye said Friday.

"It's a pretty dangerous job protecting life in the Congo," he said. "There's a sign on the sculpture that explains what it is and how dangerous the ranger's jobs are."

The private foundation of Macon County Sheriff Howard Buffett supports the efforts of park rangers to protect the habitat of the endangered mountain gorilla. Buffett, a multimillionaire who launched his foundation in 1999, is known worldwide as a philanthropist who specializes in helping the poorest of the poor, especially those who live in dangerous areas.

The sculpture was initially supposed to be installed in Africa after it was purchased by the Buffett Foundation, Frye said. Further discussions led to Scovill Zoo being mentioned as a potential home for it, he said, and the zoo ultimately received it and installed it over the zoo's off-season.

Frye said the statue has been installed near the zoo's howler monkey exhibit. The sculpture, which was made of bronze, can be seen outside of the zoo's fence as well.

Sculpture honoring gorilla conservation

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Frye said animal conservation remains a strong focus for the zoo, so the statue is a good representative both of its efforts and the efforts of other zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

"It's our job to help out with the conservation in the wild," he said. "We look forward to the hundreds and thousands of people who will come out to the zoo this season and make it a busy place to learn about animals."

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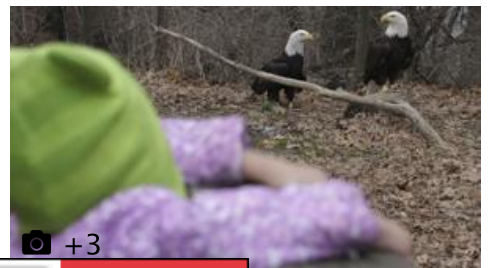
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