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## Infant Adopt: *Sabato*



**Sabato is the second infant born to mother, Kurudi in Uganda's group, in March 2010. His nearest playmate in age is the juvenile female Igitangaza, two years his senior. As the only infant in his group, Sabato was used to getting plenty of attention from the other group members. He was often carried around by the young females in the group, who enjoyed practicing their maternal skills with him. Then, in February 2013, Sabato experienced a traumatic change: his mother Kurudi and the other females from Uganda's group transferred to lone silverback Gushimira, leaving their offspring behind, although there have been a few returns since then and the final outcome is still unclear.**

group, and some of her strength in the group probably derived from her close relationship with Uganda. Kurudi's apparent transfer to Gushimira may have been a good decision, since she will now be in a group with an unrelated male. However, for Sabato this is a traumatic experience, especially since he is not yet weaned. Fortunately, he was left in the protection of his father, Uganda, and the second-ranking silverback, Wageni.

### ◆◆◆◆◆ *The Family Tree*

Sabato's older brother, Iterambere, is now a sub-adult male in Uganda's group. Iterambere was conceived in Shinda's group before Uganda split off to form his own group in 2005. During splits like these, it is common for siblings to stay together. Indeed, that is what Sabato's mother, Kurudi, did when she followed Uganda, who is her older brother. Given that there were several silverbacks in Shinda's group, Iterambere's paternity is unknown. However, it is believed that Sabato's father is his uncle, Uganda. While young females often transfer out of their natal group to find breeding opportunities with unrelated males in other groups, the phenomenon of inbreeding is not particularly uncommon among mountain gorillas. With such a small population left in the wild, it is not surprising that gorillas would sometimes mate with related individuals.

It may have provided some advantages to mother Kurudi, and by extension Sabato, that she chose to remain in her older brother's group, even if it restricted her mating opportunities. Data indicates that Kurudi may have been the top-ranking female in Uganda's

### *A Difficult Year Ahead* ◆◆◆◆◆

Even before his mother transferred out of the group, Sabato was approaching the age of 4, when mothers typically wean their infants. Weaning is traumatic for infants under normal circumstances, and we sometimes see formerly active and playful infants become more withdrawn as they adjust to the new life stage. Unfortunately, Sabato's weaning will be unusually abrupt and traumatic now that his mother has left him.

Sabato was still nursing frequently up to the time of his mother's transfer, but at this age, he is also able to feed on foliage like older gorillas and has learned some of their techniques for processing food. Developmentally, he is capable of surviving without Kurudi. However, we expect to see some major changes in his behavior, and he will probably spend a lot of time with his father, Uganda. In the past when we have seen females transfer and leave behind young offspring, silverbacks tend to care for these offspring and help them through the difficult time. We expect that we will see a similar bond develop between Sabato and Uganda.