



# The Institute of Greatly Endangered and Rare Species



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## **PRESS RELEASE:**

Building Homes for the Batwa Pygmies

Supplemental video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3D8CNETHdI>



**A Batwa home sponsored by the RSF in the process of being built.**

The Rare Species Fund is helping support the Batwa pygmy tribe of western Uganda through the building of homes, education and cultural preservation.

The Batwa are one of the world's oldest tribes. Often referred to as the forest people, the Batwa have been living in the jungles of central Africa for as much as 30,000 years. Over the millennium, they have been able to coexist with their natural environment. With the modernization of the world, the regions of untouched forests have greatly diminished.



**A Batwa elder in the forest.**

In Uganda, 1992, the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest was established as a national park, helping to preserve some of the world's last 900 mountain gorillas. While this has been a great success in protecting the gorillas and other endangered species in the area, the creation of the park forced the Batwa out of the forests and into a modern society. They were not given homes, land or jobs. Many Batwa people, especially the elders, perished during the first decade of the parks existence. Most of the remaining Batwa tribes-people are currently trying to eke out a living by working as servants and laborers for other tribes and are often squatters living in extremely impoverished conditions.



**A Batwa woman with baby on her back adds mud to create house walls.**

The Batwa historically collected everything they needed for survival from the forests. By helping provide the tribe with houses, land and education, the Rare Species Fund is helping to reduce illegal poaching of supplies from the forests and is provide a brighter future for the Batwa. Providing houses and land ensures that the Batwa members have a stable home and farming plot and reduces the uncertainty of spontaneous uncertainty. Providing education ensures that the Batwa can integrate into a more modern workforce and provide resources for their families.



**Dr. Robert Johnson from the RSF helps excavate mud to build a Batwa home.**

Although these basic homes may not seem modern by western standards, they are quite an improvement from the conditions in which many of the Batwa still live. The timbers are locally farmed and must be purchased, as well as the rope that holds the structure together and the steel sheeting for the roof. Nothing is free in Uganda, even the mud. These materials were purchased by the Rare Species Fund. In addition, funding was put into a Batwa trust that purchases and legally protects land for tribal use.



**The most common method of construction for homes by rural people is western Uganda.**

The building of a home is a joyous occasion for tribe members and the entire community pitches in to construct the new house. Both adults and children enjoy the endeavor which reinforces community bonds and instills a sense of pride in their tribe and culture.



**A Batwa child helps build a home in his community.**



**Constructing a home, one handful of mud at a time.**



**Community involvement.**



**A Batwa pygmy child sleeps under a tree while the village builds a new home.**



**A new home takes about 2 months to dry and complete**

Funding for this project, as well as many others, is only possible because of money generated by animal ambassadors from the Myrtle Beach Safari. The animals are not only important ambassadors for their species, they inspire individuals to become proactive in conservation and take responsibility for the impact of their own daily choices. In addition, funding raised from the animal encounters at the Myrtle Beach Safari goes directly to help support the conservation of the world's most vulnerable biological hotspots. To date, more than \$1 million has gone directly from wildlife interactions to help support gorillas, chimpanzees, elephants, rhinos, tigers and orangutans in their natural habitats.



<http://www.RareSpeciesFund.org>