

# Virunga Amelonado

Growing peace, women empowerment and nature  
with cacao from Virunga Park, Eastern Congo



ORIGINAL BEANS

TASTE THE EARTH'S RAREST PLACES AND PRESERVE THEM



# Virunga Amelonado

---

## How it started

In 2007, East-Africa based agronomist Hilde de Beule was searching for a partner to turn the dormant plan for a cacao development project in Eastern Congo into reality. Two years earlier she had developed the plan together with Philip Betts, owner of an Eastern Congo based ethical agri-trading company who was looking for cacao as an alternative crop for farmers and his business after the decline of the regional coffee sector due to plant disease. When Hilde met Philipp Kauffmann, who was starting-up a new conservation chocolate company (later called Original Beans), she found the perfect partner for a long-term vision of peace and conservation around Virunga, Africa's oldest national park.

By early 2008, the partnership had secured the first support funds. By 2009, they had flown one ton of under-fermented *Virunga Amelonado* cacao to Europe to make the first-ever single-origin chocolate from war-torn Eastern Congo. By 2012, an independent study concluded that 13,000 farmers in the region had been guided and trained for certified cacao production. Their income had doubled from \$500 to over \$1000 per year. Most people involved had been educated about HIV/Aids and tuberculosis. The study calculated that 3 million trees had been planted and deforestation rates had halved since the beginning of the Virunga cacao project. In the meantime, Cru Virunga 70% had become a multi-awarded chocolate and was served by leading chefs and patissiers. In 2013, US chocolate brand Theo Chocolates joined the work in Eastern Congo supported by Hollywood actor Ben Affleck.

Hilde, now Original Beans' African Bean Team leader, pushed ahead for progress. She helped to start a local extension NGO, IDAD, and focused Original Beans' work on the empowerment of women. Femmes de Virunga 55% became a new project and chocolate, and in November 2016 the world's first women-led cacao cooperative - in one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman.

## The bean:

### the original Virunga Amelonado

Original Beans' cacao project introduced cacao at scale across the northern Virunga region which stretches over a 100 x 400 kilometers remote landscape. At the outset, the project obtained several local types of upper Amazonian cacaos held by INERA and the Yangambi Research Station in Kisangani. The seedlings were initially raised in a central nursery before being distributed to thousands of registered farmers. Today, we can find a mix of phenotypes across the cacao region, but the majority have the original Amelonado characteristics with a chocolatey, earthy character. Over the years, trainings, group fermentation, buying stations and logistics have become better organized and centralized and as a consequence, quality and consistency are impressive given the remoteness of the Virunga cacao farmers. The organic and fair for life farming groups are producing with additional shared requirements, and thus tend to produce even better and more homogenous quality.

### The origin: Virunga National Park, Congo DR

To learn about Virunga, we suggest you watch the Oscar nominated documentary of the same name on Netflix, or at least its trailer. Produced by Orlando von Einsiedel and with Leonardo DiCaprio as executive producer, the movie tells the breathtaking story of Africa's oldest nature park, about the unique geological riches of this region in the African Rift Valley and how they are still being brutally exploited by outsiders at the expense of local people. It shows how the struggle to defend nature and the right of the world's last mountain gorillas to have a home in Virunga is a battle of life and death. And it tells about all of us who still depend on oil for our transport, energy and material needs.

What the movie doesn't show are the solutions. Purchasing Virunga cacao from us is one of the best solutions.

# Bean profile

---

**Name:** Virunga Amelonado

**Origin:** Various villages in the buffer zone of Virunga National Park, North Kivu province, Congo DR

**Varietal:** Upper Amazonian cacaos from INERA and Yangambi Research Station mixed across a network of local nurseries

**Tasting notes:** Deep chocolate note with earthy tang and black tea.

**Rarity:** Total organic harvest volume of 65Mt

**Terroir:** Foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains sloping into the Semliki Rivershed and down into the wider Congo Bassin forests.

**Fermentation & drying:** Given their remoteness, individual farmers often ferment individually in banana leaves, bags or buckets. Our IDAD team has established and controls protocols, including sun-

drying on small platforms.

**Technical aspects:**

Fermentation level: > 70%

Moisture: < 7.25%

Bean size: 97 g / 100 beans

**Quality:** Quality is evaluated and flavours are validated for all shipments to assure that they comply with Original Beans standards.

**Certifications:** Organic

**Traceability:** Full.

## Cacao and community project

---

Eastern Congo has known decades of civil unrest, including two wars since 1996 that killed 6 million people and displaced millions. Displaced people are continuing to settle in the areas bordering the oldest African national park, Virunga, adding to deforestation and social tensions in the rural communities. All of these people are subsistence farmers who depend on agriculture for both their food and their income.

Amidst the turmoil on the edge of Virunga Park, hundreds of women have taken local leadership to create an opportunity for women from the new cacao crop. The women have planted more than a quarter of a million cacao trees and approximately 40 thousand shade trees. These are the Femmes de Virunga.



Marceline is one of the Femmes de Virunga and a leader among them. She has 10 children. The chronic illness of her husband leaves her as only caretaker. It also leaves her free to handle affairs as she chooses. She has seen cacao “chase poverty from her home” as she puts it. She plans to expand acreage, buy land for her sons, build a new house and start a business selling soap and salt. “I want to get out of poverty”, she says, “I prefer to dress like any other woman in the city.”

**What the project does**

- Grow from the ground a local cacao culture of quality and forest conservation
- Fund and support the local extension NGO, IDAD (Initiative for the Development of Sustainable Agroforestry)
- Fund and equip cacao infrastructure and nurseries in the villages at Virunga Park
- Build-up the world's first women-led cacao cooperative
- Plant hundred thousands of trees in the buffer zone of Virunga Park
- Help farmers get organic certified
- Training in organic cacao-agroforestry, post-harvest handling and quality control
- Radio program by women for women (since 2014)

600

women in organization  
development

100

women in seven  
locations on cocoa  
growing, harvest and  
post-harvest

108

women in the radio  
listening groups

610

women on  
apiculture/  
beekeeping

In **2016**  
the Femmes de Virunga  
project\* trained:

136

women on cacao-  
agroforestry

320

women in literacy  
(level 1) and numeracy,  
currency, hygiene  
(level 2)



\*Femmes de Virunga focuses on female village leaders that become trainers for other women.

To learn, view and hear more visit our

[Photo Gallery](#) and [Project and Impact Tracker](#) pages

Please reach out to us if you would like to taste a cacao—or chocolate—sample or if you want to hear more about the bean, region, growers, and supply chain. We would love to tell you more and explore how we can unite our efforts to make the world better with chocolate.

Anders Prien Saxbol, Bean Team  
anders@originalbeans.com  
+45 61683775  
www.originalbeans.com

