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The Mikeno Gorillas

This article describes the history of a gorilla group during the troubled times between November 1996 and April 1998.

The IGCP (*International Gorilla Conservation Programme*) initiated and supervised a program for the monitoring of the mountain gorillas and for the study of the ecology of the Mikeno (Virunga National Park), after several ICCN staff had been trained for this purpose. Every gorilla was observed, described and photographed; their characteristics were recorded on 'identity cards'. Subsequently, each habituated animal was named. The history of the former Ndungutse group could be followed during the war and subsequent turmoil. The group contained 25 individuals in 1996, but the silverback and several other group members were killed in May 1997.

What Happened Before

The Mikeno gorillas were introduced in an article published in *Gorilla Journal* 13 (December 1996). At that time, the factors threatening the survival of these animals included poaching, attempts to trade young gorillas, the decline of nature conservation organisations' support, insufficient cooperation between the ICCN and the local population, a lack of revenue from tourism, the risk of war and the presence of Rwandese refugees.

In October 1996, war broke out in the region. In the gorillas' area, several military operations were conducted to drive away Rwandan dissidents. Armed groups continue to terrorize the area to this date (August 1998).

The first of the habituated gorilla families in Jomba was found in December 1996. As the new rulers of the Democratic Republic of Congo regarded nature conservation as very important, mixed patrols into the area were carried out from February 1997, consisting of rangers and military personnel. Thanks to these patrols, all gorilla families have been observed at least once a month since the beginning of May 1997 except for the Rafiki group, which has disappeared.

Before May 1997, the number and composition of the habituated gorilla groups remained similar to what it was in September 1996. However, 2 young gorillas were killed in September 1998 by poachers/soldiers operating in the Jomba area.

The Former Ndungutse Group

On May 18, 1997, this gorilla group came under fire from the military. The silverback Ndungutse was killed after he had bitten a soldier; the soldier opened fire and shot 3 other gorillas as well. This event was followed by dramatic changes. One of them was that the gorillas left their usual range for several months.

Gorilla Group Sizes and Lone Males in 1998

	March	June	July
Lulengo	11	11	11
Kwitonda	10	11	12 ¹⁾
Rugendo	18	18	9
Humba	—	—	10
Munyaga	12	12	11 ²⁾
Kabirizi	11	14	14
Lone males	4	4	5 ³⁾
<i>Total</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>72</i>

¹⁾ One transfer from Nyakagezi

²⁾ Transfer of one to Kabirizi

³⁾ One blackback from Kabirizi

It was not clear which gorillas had been killed. At first, it was thought that the gorillas might be from the former Luwawa group. Casualties were estimated to be from 4 to more than 10. Some people thought that the group might have split or that the members might have joined other groups. Because of intensive military activities, the rangers were not able to go deep into the forest.

In October 1997, some members of the family were seen for the first time. In November, 2 subgroups were found, both led by blackbacks. One was led by Buhanga and contained 9 animals; the other one was led by Karateka and consisted of 4 animals. Hence, only 13 of the original 25 group members remained.

The two groups had similar habits and were ranging through the same area. They occasionally met and had severe clashes, during which several members transferred between groups. Among these were

- The female Mawazo, born 1990. In October 1997 she was a member of the Buhanga group. In November 1997 she transferred to Karateka immediately after a confrontation. On January 10, 1998, she followed Buhanga after another contact.

- The juvenile Mutaka switched from Buhanga to Karateka, then to Buhanga again and finally to Karateka between November 1997 and February 1998.

- The juvenile Bukima transferred from Buhanga to Karateka in November 1997 and

February 1998.

On February 23, 1998, a non-habituated silverback called Munyaga took over. The 2 blackbacks became lone males and have not been seen in their original range since.

At the moment (August 16, 1998), we know of 6 gorilla groups which can be visited regularly if security is guaranteed. The Nyakagezi family was habituated in Congo (and called Faïda) but now it stays exclusively in Uganda. The Rafiki group cannot be observed at the moment because it ranges in a zone where security is bad. Two non-habituated males, Mapua and Ruzirabwoba, regularly visit the Jomba area and seek out confrontations with each other and with the Lulengo family. There have been 4 births since May: 2 in the Kabirizi group in April, 1 in the Kwitonda group in May and 1 in the Humba group on July 12. The Rugendo family has split into two. Rugendo managed to keep 8 members with him while 8 others joined Humba, Rugendo's son.

Claude Sikubwabo Kiyengo, Evariste Bararuha Ntayomba, Benjamin Ndakazi Lola and Vital Katembo Mushengezi

Two Young Gorillas Killed in Jomba

On September 3, poachers shot 2 mountain gorillas near Jomba in Virunga National Park, D. R. Congo, according to AWF (*African Wildlife Foundation*). Birori, a juvenile male, and Gasigwa, a 3-year-old female, who belonged to the Lulengo group, were killed only 100 m from the park boundary. During a group count, ICCN rangers noticed that only 6 of the 8 group members were present.

It is thought that the gorillas were killed mistakenly and that the poachers were hunting other animals. They left the apes' bodies and fled.

Progress Report on Mt. Tshiaberimu Conservation Activities

The project started in September 1996 with the aim of strengthening the management and protection of the biological resources of Mt. Tshiaberimu with effective participation of local communities. From August 1996 to May 1997, the Democratic Republic of Congo was swept by a tragic war which had an adverse impact on the national park system. During the war, efforts were made to provide moral support and relief assistance to the rangers and the park personnel. Following some recommendations from the 1997 expedition, there was an immediate need to enforce the anti-poaching activities by implementing a regular biodiversity monitoring program.

A team of 25 park rangers, among them 3 trackers and 20 other workers, are participating in the different project activities. Efforts were made to provide incentive and motivation bonuses ranging between US\$ 20 and 40 to the workers and rangers, respectively. The Conservator is also provided with US\$ 100. This is covered by the project as top-ups to the unpaid state salaries and has been paid regularly since January 1998. The project has also been covering medical charges and provides food rations during anti-poaching patrols in the forest.

Among the team, 8 rangers were selected to participate in the biodiversity monitoring program. They are located permanently at the Kalibina camping site. It is their task to locate gorilla groups and other animals and record information while others are involved in anti-poaching patrols and construction activities.

Park Infrastructure Development

Housing was a serious problem for the rangers working on Mt. Tshiaberimu, because the park had very poor or no existing infrastructure. The project has decided to provide improved shelter and housing to the rangers and their families. Tin-roofed houses built with local materials are to be constructed at Burusi, Kangai and Kasimbi, the 3 main patrol posts around the mountain. The construction has now been completed for 4 houses and 2 pailotes in Burusi, 2 houses in Kasimbi and 2 in Kangai. This provides shelter to 16 rangers' families. Other houses are still to be built but we are relying on the rangers to complete the construction. The Kalibina research cabin has not yet been set up, but a preliminary plan has been discussed with architects/entrepreneurs working in Butembo, Beni and Kyondo.

Antipoaching Activities and Protection of Biological Resources

In 1996 and 1997, many destructive activities were observed in the forest; protecting the park was difficult. Rangers had been disarmed during the liberation war and the local people took advantage of the situation and the poor working conditions in order to extend their illegal activities inside the park. Poachers set antelope and monkey snares and traps and dug gold clandestinely; others cultivated crops illegally, cut trees and burned charcoal. The most disastrous activity is charcoal burning and exploitation as it involves many villagers and opens the forest to cultivation.

In January 1998, an effort was made to bring a mixed delegation of ICCN, the Administrateur du territoire of Beni and DFGF representatives to discuss the problem in Burusi. The delegates used the occasion to explain some facts about community-based conservation and to sensitize the local people to stop poaching and cultivation inside the park boundaries.

Rangers have been carrying out patrols in various parts of the mountain to combat poaching. Despite being disarmed their presence had a very dissuasive effect on the poachers. During the patrols they remove snares and confiscate saws and machetes and other material used by poachers. This proved effective in reducing the poaching activities. Up to now 5 saws have been confiscated from the pitsawyers and gold mining no longer exists in the forest. About 50 snares were removed during the patrols. We have also identified and warned 6 pitsawyers living in the surrounding villages.

In July 1998, the military officer and Commandant in charge of Kyondo came to visit the project activities. His two-day stay in the forest was a boost to the anti-poaching campaign. A meeting was held in Burusi with different local leaders and responsible persons from the villages. The Commandant promised to send soldiers to help rangers in their activities, whenever this is necessary.

Biodiversity Monitoring

The number of gorillas living on Mt. Tshiaberimu has not been accurately determined. Data obtained by counting nests indicated between 14 and 22 individuals. To accurately determine the number we follow the group over a given period of time without losing it. This monitoring program was initiated in April and the team based at Kalibina is undertaking the regular daily location of the gorillas. The data are recorded on sheets with information on the GPS coordinates, the nest numbers and ages or the group composition – if observed –, weather conditions etc.

However, the density of the vegetation does not facilitate animal observations. So far we have initiated trail marking and maintenance. A 6,725 m grid system has been cut to allow easy movement and observation in the gorilla ranging zones. These trails were cut without major disturbance of the vegetation (trees were left and only bamboo and low plants were removed).

We have not downloaded the GPS records but most of the zones of activities of gorillas are known. We have located 2 large groups: one of 8 gorillas (7 + 1 baby), sometimes with a peripheral solitary male who used to nest near the group, and another group of 6 individuals. We have also evidence of about 4 solitary males ranging in the forest. On several occasions, gorillas were approached or seen at a very short distance, but on all occasions, some individuals charged and ran into the forest to avoid contact.

Local Community Participation

Several contacts were made with local leaders and political authorities in the region to ensure effective support of the project activities. The local head of the Bashu collectivity, Mr. Abdallatif, was contacted in person and he promised to do what he could to stop the destructive activities. In various places, such as Kabeka and Ngitse, the local people no longer recognized the original park and they claimed new park boundaries. Lambert Machozi, Chef de Groupement of Burusi, created many problems as he incited the villagers to destroy the park which he no longer considered to exist. In June he was replaced by Mr. Kabindula who has proved to be very cooperative.

During previous discussions and consultations with local leaders, the need for a permanent and regular consultation and dialogue between the park administration and the local population was expressed. However, there were other issues which required immediate action and decisions, such as the illegal exploitation of charcoal in the forest by the local people and the crops grown in illegal shambas/gardens within the park. The local leaders and the villagers have been allowed to harvest their crops but not to plant more and new cultivations.

In April, a Rockefeller-funded project was launched by Trinto Mugangu with the aim to understand traditional values, perception and attitudes of the local communities toward conservation of two mountains (Kalonge and Tshiaberimu). The project will also determine whether there are some traditional beliefs which serve to conserve these mountains and their resources and would therefore be suitable for promoting peoples' participation.

Two assistants, Kambumbu (a sociologist) and Kasivika (a development agent) have been involved in developing a questionnaire for the surveys. They made visits to various villages around Mt. Tshiaberimu and have gathered some data on people's views of the resources. No analysis has been made so far.

Most of the people in Burusi and neighbouring villages are peasants living from agricultural production and sometimes from the long-distance bicycle trade. It is a particular challenge to integrate development and conservation under these circumstances, and it imposes a proportionally higher amount of non-refundable resources. There is a great need to explore possibilities of supporting the efforts of the local initiatives to alleviate the burden of the extreme poverty they are confronted to. The local people will better understand the relevance of gorilla conservation on Mt. Tshiaberimu for their lives if they actively participate in conservation efforts and benefit directly from them.

Problems, Constraints and Perspectives

The efforts to achieve a sound conservation program on Mt. Tshiaberimu are challenged by several problems. Although some progress has been observed, serious constraints are faced by the project. They include

- The lack of adequate funding,
- The need to address the problems of long-term conservation as a joint effort by various stakeholders,
- The political unrest and radiating crisis and escalation of violence in the region.

Regarding the new rebellion, we have set up a strategy to face the situation on the project level: maintain a permanent presence of dedicated rangers in the forest who will continue their monitoring activities and continue providing the needed support.

Addition: The Present Situation at Mt. Tshiaberimu

Kampala, December 22, 1998: Efforts have been made to keep most of the project activities in the field. Since the beginning of the war, Tshiaberimu has been the only area in Virunga National Park where a set of coordinated and coherent activities aiming at conservation of the biodiversity is still feasible. This has been possible not only because it is a remote area but also due to:

- The strong dedication of rangers to save what remains in Tshiaberimu,
- The continuing support provided by the project despite very difficult logistics and access to the field by road,
- The flexibility in our operational base.

The war has made it necessary to channel most of our communication and funding support via Kampala. We have been able to rely on various people and organizations who are willing to support the project and ensure its continuation despite the war in the region. We have been forced to create a flexible plan of activities which can be adjusted in accordance with the new developments in the area. This new channel could be created because the security situation is good on the road Kampala-Kasindi(border)-Beni and to Tshiaberimu.

Vital Katembo Mushengezi

Brief News from Kahuzi-Biega National Park

After the war, which started in October 1996, the security at the Tshivanga station began to improve until the beginning of 1998. Normal park duties were gradually resumed – for example, surveillance and research. Some development activities around the park, especially some rehabilitation activities and awareness campaigns were started again. The restoration of the infrastructure of Kahuzi-Biega National Park and especially of Tshivanga, which was nearly completed after the storm that had devastated the park in 1996 and destroyed most of the installations.

Unfortunately, this glimmer of hope was very brief because the same crimes that had been committed during the first war were repeated during the second war that started August 2, 1998. More destruction resulted.

Since that date, most activities have been discontinued, in the interior as well as the exterior of the park, because of insecurity. In the meantime, those responsible for the park and the project Kahuzi-Biega/GTZ have not been idle. The park and project employees who had stayed in Bukavu tried to make realistic and feasible plans to deal with the critical period until the situation returned to normal again.

Accordingly, it was decided to continue two activities: surveillance and local awareness. The aim of the surveillance was to reduce the destruction of the park's resources during the crisis. The park has been a battlefield for different parties from time to time. It is therefore difficult to plan activities in the interior of the park. In order to discourage troublemakers who take advantage of the crisis to carry out their destructive activities, the surveillance will now be directed around the park, where we are encouraging the traditional chiefs and the local administration to organize mixed patrols of rangers and local police. This form of collaboration had also been successful during and after the 1996 war.

By means of sensitization, we want to convince the population to reduce the present excessive destruction of the park's resources. To this end, the severe problems that the Kahuzi-Biega National Park experienced during the two wars were reported clearly to the local political and administrative authorities as well as the people living around the park, and appropriate solutions were found. As for surveillance, the priority with sensitization was to encourage communication between traditional chiefs and the local administration, and to ensure their inclusion in each activity.

We have learned from our surveillance efforts that large mammals, especially elephants, have already suffered from the poaching with firearms. So far, we have no evidence that any gorillas have been killed recently, according to the team of pygmy pистeurs who enter the park to localize the habituated groups. They ask their brothers to preserve this species because the economy of the park and their own survival depends on them.

In face of this reality, we wonder if this park and its biological diversity can survive in the long term if the destruction cannot be stopped soon. This World Heritage Site was at its height 4 years ago and was then the pride in particular of South Kivu, the Congo and informed scientists. Now it is generally sinking into disarray. The war has not stopped illegal land distribution in the park, especially in the corridor between the mountain and lowland sectors. Soon there will be two separate blocks of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park because the corridor which connects these two parts (mountain and lowland part) is being destroyed. Should we let this World Heritage Site deteriorate in plain view of the whole world? This is an alarm cry from the Kahuzi-Biega National Park directed at everybody who loves nature!

Mbake Sivha

Gorilla Groups in Mgahinga Park, August 1997 to July 1998

Mgahinga Gorilla National Park was established on May 9, 1991, following a long history of name and boundary changes. It is located in the southwestern corner of Uganda and is the smallest park in Uganda with an area of 33.7 km². It contains a range of montane forest and non-forest vegetation, a range of animal species (including the golden monkey, elephants, buffaloes, duikers), and is visited frequently by groups of mountain gorillas which cross the border from the adjacent national parks in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Parc National des Virunga) and Rwanda (Parc National des Volcans).

The park consists of the Ugandan slopes of three inactive volcanoes: Muhavura, Gahinga and Sabinyo. Due to El Niño, the park and its surroundings experienced a very wet season, with the highest peak of rainfall from December 1997 to February 1998. In April 1998, there were reports of several deaths of people who were swept away by run off from the slopes of the volcanoes. On April 13, 1998, a child of our porter drowned in a heavy downpour of rain.

Aims and Methods

The aim of the survey was to determine the number of mountain gorillas that use Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, which area and which time of the year. Emphasis was laid on unhabituated groups.

A team of 4 experienced rangers was deployed (not on a daily basis) to carry out monitoring of the presence or signs of any gorilla group and at the same time patrol for illegal activities. Any findings were recorded on a piece of paper including the name of the place. This information was later plotted on a map of the park. In the second half of the monitoring period, most of the data collected also included the tourist group (Nyakagezi). There were rare sightings of wild groups.

Results

In the second half of the study period, few observations were made compared to the first half. Dung droppings, trails, nest sites and physical sightings were recorded. The gorilla signs were noted mainly around Rugezi Swamp, Sabinyo, Gahinga, Muhavura and Kabiranyuma, near the Rwanda-Uganda border. The observations were mainly confined to Zone 1 of the park.

It was noted that only the Nyakagezi group (habituated) uses part of the formerly encroached areas in Zone 2, Nyakagezi triangle, mainly when in transit to and from the Congo. The earlier group of about 7 individuals sighted in February 1997 was not seen at all during the later part of the study. However, 4 nests were seen close to Rugezi swamp on the border to Rwanda; the nests are believed to have been made by a part of the group of 7.

The following groups were found: a group of 7, a group of 3, a group of 2, a lone gorilla and a group of 10 (Nyakagezi).

The dominant male in the tourist group is constantly being challenged by a younger silverback. The dominant male has had wounds for a good period of time.

As May, June and July progressed, there were few sightings and observations due to the onset of the dry spell with parts of the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park becoming dry; this hampered the observation of signs like trails. We strongly believe that during the study period, there were 4 gorilla groups (including the tourist group) and a lone silverback, making a total of 23 individuals.

Conclusion

Although it has been estimated that about 23 animals use the park, this figure may not be accurate. In the second half of the study period, the same manpower was deployed as in the first half; however, not all areas could be visited on all days in every month. This was due to the increasing activities in the park, namely research, security patrols, community liaison and tourism.

The donation by *Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe* of 2 pairs of binoculars was an additional incentive to the field staff, who at the moment are involved in observing and identifying birds. The jungle boots (good quality) went a long way in facilitating the field work. These boots have proved to be ideal for the rough terrain in Mgahinga Gorilla National Park. Special thanks go to *Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe* who provided financial and material support and the willingness of the staff to ensure the field data collection and write-up of this report.

Ignatius Achoka

Status of the Rwandan Mountain Gorillas

In September 1998, the first visit to the Parc National des Volcans by staff of the Karisoke Research Centre for almost 14 months was permitted and facilitated by military escorts. When the trackers began making weekly visits to 3 groups of mountain gorillas, it was very reassuring to find the population in apparently good health. There have been several births. Only 3 of more than 80 gorillas remain to be accounted for. They may not be missing, but we will need to make repeated visits to get opportunities to see all individuals. The groups are observed in less than optimal conditions: they have been in the bamboo zone, and visits usually last less than an hour. One of the 'missing' adult females immigrated from the Susa group in 1996, but was not well integrated into Pablo's group. We have yet to establish whether she has returned to the Susa group.

Until recently, the most serious threats to the mountain gorillas were poaching and habitat encroachment. Recent periods of conflict could have had both direct and indirect impacts on the population. Direct impacts may result from the presence of armed individuals from both sides in the civil war: the dangers of being shot or shelled, and the stress of confronting fleeing people or armed combat. Indirect effects, however, are likely to pose more severe threats to the mountain gorilla population. While patrols were still active we witnessed 4 gorilla casualties resulting from antelope snares (3 infants and 1 adult female gorilla). The infants recovered completely after veterinary intervention; a wire snare cut off the fifth digit of the left hand of an adult female. Unable to monitor them regularly, we feared that more gorillas would become accidental victims of snares. Also, large numbers of people, both civilian and military, have deposited potentially infectious faecal matter and other waste in the forest.

Snares

The Parc National des Volcans is protected by Rwandan and international laws, yet poaching of bamboo, wood and meat is a perpetual problem. Karisoke anti-poaching patrols had removed 673 snares in the first half of 1997. In June, Karisoke and government park staff (ORTPN) daily patrols were suspended, and the local population took advantage of the lack of protection for the park's flora and fauna. The intensity of illegal activities became extremely worrying, with large quantities of meat coming out of the park (mostly antelope) for sale in local markets. During just 6 days in late July and early August, Karisoke trackers collected 140 snares, thus the likelihood of gorillas becoming snare victims was high.

We have recently established that at least 96% of individuals in the 3 Karisoke groups are visibly in good physical shape. Apparently the same is true of the 'tourist' groups. Fortunately, there has been no loss of limbs or life to snares; this may be partially attributed to the ability of certain gorillas to recognise snares. At least 2 silverbacks seem to be aware of the danger posed by snares, and react strongly when a snare is detected (unpublished observations). Having come through the last 18 months intact, it may be that the most serious health threat is the transmission of human parasites and diseases to the gorillas.

Parasites

For decades, the Virunga Volcanoes region has been subject to high human pressure because of the rate of human population growth and the extremely fertile soil. Pressure on these volcanoes, indicated by a human density of up to 400 people/km², has forced the gorillas to limit their range to a small portion of these mountains, near the volcanoes' summits. Close contact with humans has, however, increased in recent years. Since 1994, as a result of the war and genocide in Rwanda, there have been massive movements of refugees through the Volcanoes and Virunga National Parks, followed by a military presence.

Faecal samples were collected from habituated gorillas in Rwanda to investigate their evolving endoparasite fauna. Gorillas seem able to tolerate certain species of gastrointestinal parasites without manifesting signs of sickness. In 1997, veterinarians of the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Centre and researchers of University of Tennessee found 3 intestinal parasites not previously identified in gorillas, but known to infect humans. The presence of these parasites may have resulted from increased contact with human faecal matter or other waste. Such contact is likely to have happened when large numbers of people were crossing the park during the genocide in 1994. Infectious waste was probably left uncovered in the forest. Due to the close genetic relatedness of humans and gorillas, disease transmission is possible with potentially devastating consequences.

The Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Centre has initiated a comparative study in the Virunga National Park and may find further evidence of human impact on the gorillas' health. Pressures on this protected area have been enormous due to the presence

of two major refugee camps at the edge of the park from July 1994 to October 1996.

Since October 1997, human presence in the forest has again increased significantly as a result of the renewal of war in Congo. This could be disastrous for the gorilla population. There is, therefore, a need to continue to closely monitor the health of this population and, specifically, to periodically assess changes in the spectrum of parasites carried by gorillas and variation in parasite loads. This would contribute to the control of disease outbreaks and provide additional data for the long-term management of this endangered primate.

*Liz Williamson
and Antoine Mudakikwa*

Gorilla Killed in Cross River State, Nigeria

On October 27, 1998, an adult male gorilla was killed by a hunter on Afi Mountain, a proposed wildlife sanctuary within the *Afi River Forest Reserve*. Researchers of the *Afi Gorilla Research Project* discovered the dead gorilla. When they were following a fresh gorilla trail, they discovered a site where a gorilla had been killed and butchered. They followed the hunter's trail to a cave where he had smoked the meat. The head and one hand and foot were collected as evidence, but the rest of the meat was already on its way to the local village where it was sold to 6 bushmeat vendors for the equivalent of US\$ 25. The *Forestry Department*, local communities, police, and the *Afi Gorilla Research Project* moved quickly to search the mountain until the hunter was found and arrested. On November 17, he was charged in court and the Magistrate ordered him to remain in prison while the case is referred to the Department of Public Prosecution and Federal High Court.

Gorillas in Nigeria are fully protected under Federal Decree 11 and Cross River State Wild Animals Protection Act. There are only approximately 150 gorillas remaining in Nigeria. They exist in 4 isolated, small subpopulations (25–50 individuals each) in the southeastern Nigeria-Cameroon border region. Each subpopulation is surrounded by a dense human population making transfers between them nearly impossible. The Nigeria-Cameroon population is isolated from the much larger populations of western lowland gorillas in Central Africa. Studies are underway to establish the population's uniqueness; it may be classified as a new subspecies of gorilla. This would make them the most endangered gorillas in Africa.

The Forestry Department, *Pandrillus*, *Afi Gorilla Research Project*, and others are working to establish Afi Mountain as a wildlife sanctuary. It contains the largest and most dense subpopulation (approximately 50 individuals) of gorillas in Nigeria. Yet, it remains unprotected. The other gorilla subpopulations occur within the Cross River National Park which does not include Afi Mountain. Presently, the proposal to create the wildlife sanctuary is reaching the final planning stages. Kelley McFarland, an American doctoral student, is conducting an ecological study of gorillas inhabiting Afi Mountain and is working with the *Forestry Department* to provide information necessary for the establishment and management of the proposed wildlife sanctuary.

Needless to say, gorillas in Nigeria are extremely vulnerable to hunting and the hunter in question is presently the greatest threat to the survival of the gorillas inhabiting Afi Mountain. He is well known as the most prolific hunter in the area. For most of the past 12 years, he has lived and hunted on Afi Mountain. All other hunters in the area only visit the mountain periodically, never remaining for more than one night. This particular hunter also recently killed 5 drill monkeys (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*) and the skull of a female drill was recovered. Drills are another highly endangered species under absolute protection in Nigeria.

Over the past 4 years, *Pandrillus*, which established the Drill Rehabilitation and Breeding Center, attempted to provide the hunter with alternative employment. However, at each attempt he abandoned his duties and returned to hunting. The *Forestry Department* was in the midst of efforts to once again provide an alternative for the hunter when these most recent killings occurred. All involved felt that enough was enough and more serious action was needed.

It is imperative to foster Nigeria's commitment to conservation. The immediate actions taken by the *Cross River State Forestry Department* and police to arrest and prosecute the hunter demonstrate their commitment to conserving endangered species. Their actions will send a strong and clear message that hunting endangered species will not be tolerated. The arrest of the hunter and establishment of a wildlife sanctuary are firsts for the *Cross River State Forestry Department*. If these unique and special gorillas are to be conserved, it is important to support this authority as they enter into new conservation territory.

Kelley McFarland