

KONG—PART THREE:

A MWAMI'S TALE:

**HENCHMEN AND HEARTBREAK
IN THE HEART OF DARKNESS**

**keith harmon snow
&
Georgianne Nienaber**

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I visited two large villages in the interior... where I found that fully half the population now consisted of refugees... nothing had remained for them at home but to be killed for failure to bring in a certain amount of rubber or to die from starvation or exposure in their attempts to satisfy the demands made upon them...I subsequently found other members of the tribe who confirmed the truth of the statements made to me.¹

British Consul Roger Casement, describing Congo, 1904

One hundred years ago, the Report of British Consul Roger Casement was a prescient narrative that foreshadowed conservation scandals festering in modern day Congo. Some ten million souls were sacrificed between 1895 and 1905 for profit at the close of the Industrial Revolution. Now, a century of “development” and “enlightenment” later, Casement’s description of refugees suffering the fate of foreign exploitation in Congo is an accurate and jarring description of life in remote, impoverished, war-torn villages in Central Africa.

¹ Casement Report, British Parliamentary Papers, 1904, LXII, Cd. 1933

At the turn of the century, rubber and ivory of the Congo basin became the source of Leopold's wealth and the bastion of his power, but it was built on slavery. The enslavers were Henry Morton Stanley and his Colonial cabal, the *Force Publique*—itself comprised of conscripted and enslaved natives as soldiers and henchmen—and for every native killed to enforce the system of taxation and terror, a hand was cut off and brought back to account for the bullet expended. The severed hands of men, women and children were piled high in the Colonial outposts along the Congo River.

Territorial concessions to colonial powers soon became the prize all over Africa. Congo developed smoothly under the oppression of Belgian Colonial Rule, always at the expense of the natives, and in parallel with the exploitation of the people and the expropriation of natural resources. By 1960 Congo had a standard of living as high as Portugal, but under the Mobutu dictatorship, backed by outside interests, the Congo degenerated.

Unfortunately the ruin and sorrow of tragedy, combined with exotic locales, makes good cinematography. Enter Tarzan, Indiana Jones, and the lasting and repackaged epic, King Kong, the primordial mythology of Beauty and the Beast.

Behind the Hollywood fantasies, wildlife habitat for tourism and scientific research became yet another prize—like gold, diamonds, coltan, cobalt, copper, timber, rubber and oil—all taken from Central Africa. And the exploiters imported terror. Indeed, for the people of Congo, suffering and death are a way of life. Now, the million-dollar question seems to be: How are “conservation” and “development” reconciled with the bloodbath that is Central Africa today?

HEART OF DARKNESS

While the film King Kong was set on a remote tropical island, the story definitively evokes images of Central Africa. It is no coincidence that Jimmy, the deckhand on the tram ship steamer that sets sail from New York harbor in King Kong, is reading Joseph Conrad's classic novel Heart of Darkness.

The Kong epic's Skull Island is a place inhabited by cannibals and headhunters who massacre innocent white people for no reason at all, who claim the white people's blood and bones, and use their live bodies for ritual sacrifice. The “innocent” whites in Kong might be Dian Fossey, “murdered by poachers” in the dark, inhospitable forests of Rwanda. In the Kong epic it is the sexy Ann Darrow, the ritual white woman, the white goddess in sexually revealing clothes, who is offered up to inflame the western fears against the dark, sub-human plotting of the naked, black savages. On the other side of the savages' coin is the sexual fantasy offered to the imaginations of viewers.

The natives on Skull Island are *zombies*, rolling their eyes and shaking their bodies in the standard representation of voodoo and spirit possession. They are the *Mai Mai* warriors of the Congo, the *Mau Mau* of Kenya, or the Hutu *Interahamwe* militias of Rwanda. Portrayed as savages in the film King Kong, they personify the kinds of images purveyed by western media in their misrepresentative portraits of war in the Congo—the very *Heart of Darkness*. But the images beamed to us out of Africa by Hollywood and the international media both manipulate reality and manipulate of our consciousness, because they are taken out of context. They are no longer the truth.

Take away the fictitious beasts and imagined creatures, and the forests of Skull Island are remarkably like those of the Mountains of the Moon—the Ruwenzories, the Virunga Mountains and Volcanoes National Parks, the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, and the Kahuzi Biega National Park in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. These are moist, cool, cloud forests with mosses and vines, steep inclines and treacherous ravines.

Which is the place rooted in the viewer’s psyche? Skull Island? Or is it Central Africa?

“This [gorilla conservation] project has stretched the boundaries of the application of advanced technologies for regional primatological research,” reads one Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGF-I) press release. “It is being conducted in an extremely remote and uncharted region of the world in the face of great political, and social, unrest.”²

Uncharted? Congo? Hardly. Congo has been mapped and re-mapped and mapped again by Western intelligence and defense technologies with each technological advance. And the very fact that high-tech—or even low-tech—primate research proceeds “in the face of great political, and social, unrest,” attests to the racial inequity of the human condition and devaluation of human life. Hollywood narratives of savagery further the degradation, and allowing the BINGOs and DINGOs of conservation and development and humanitarian aid to justify their platforms of dehumanization.

With six or eight or ten million dead in Central Africa since 1994, how does *primate* conservation and research proceed, and how can it be justified? Is the bloodshed incidental or innate to the Western conservation enterprise?

² DFGF-I Press Release, “Using Advanced Spatial Technologies for Gorilla Habitat Analysis – DFGF-I,” <
http://www.travelersconservationtrust.org/projects/dian_fossey.html >.

There remains no ‘uncharted’ region of the world. But because ‘uncharted wilderness’ as such does not exist in the real world, it has to be manufactured. Like Hollywood, conservation organizations have played their roles in manufacturing images of a people-free wilderness, but the process of driving the people from their own land is never shown.

“It’s no secret that millions of native peoples around the world have been pushed off their land to make room for big oil, big metal, big timber, and big agriculture,” wrote Mark Dowie in a courageous and prescient article in Orion magazine. “But few people realize that the same thing has happened for a much nobler cause: land and wildlife conservation. Today the list of culture-wrecking institutions put forth by tribal leaders on almost every continent includes not only Shell, Texaco, Freeport, and Bechtel, but also more surprising names like Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Even the more culturally sensitive World Conservation Union (IUCN) might get a mention.”³

CONQUEST BY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Over the past 100 years, the white, Western world has maintained an inequitable relationship with Africa. At the forefront came the great white hunters bagging their trophies. As the animals began to disappear, the great white hunters shifted attention to conservation—to secure and perpetuate the great white hunt—and to profit from tourism.

Our three premier femme fatales—Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey and Birute Galdikas—began their primate conservation projects in parallel in the 1960s, and through the 1970s and 1980s their projects proceeded amidst an exponential expansion of the conservation “sector.” The rise in global consciousness about earth and species decline brought with it an expanding animal rights movement and, finally, the more philosophically based interests in protecting biodiversity *for its own sake*. Along with the conservationists came the population programs, and species of radicals like EARTH FIRST! and ZERO POPULATION GROWTH, whose ideologies are premised on a Western imperial hubris that is blinded by its own bias: whiteness, affluence and a *bourgeois* white privilege.

After almost fifty years of massive investment in the conservation sector in Africa—at least tens of billions of dollars since the 1960’s—why are the big flagship species like gorillas and rhinos and elephants so close to the brink of extinction? Indeed, what the BINGOS involved in the Garamba National Park, located on Congo’s northern frontier, won’t tell you, is that the White Rhinoceros, as a species, is finished. Not a single press release has been issued which announces the loss of this flagship species in Congo. To do so would raise untidy questions demanding untidy answers, and the questions of

³ Mark Dowie, Conservation Refugees, Orion, November 10, 2005.

accountability of public funds sunk into Rhino conservation would sit as awkwardly as a white rhinoceros in the living room. Fifty years of conservation dedicated to the white rhinoceros in Congo resulted in a complete and total failure to protect the species.

The intense competition between rival conservation organizations for control of Africa's wildlife took a new turn with the birth of "community conservation." The concept evolved about ten years ago, but for decades the BINGOs and DINGOs have been waving banners of respect and autonomy for indigenous people. *Nouveau* conservation ostensibly turned control of endangered species and wildlife habitat over to the local people who stood to gain—or lose—the most from their protection.

Pandering to the proposal that native populations must have a stake in their own wildlife and the territories they live in, the BINGOS and DINGOS pushed millions of dollars in projects, and the new mantras to garner funding became "community conservation" and "capacity building" and "participatory mapping." The community conservation projects soon included family planning initiatives. Population control programs were pressed on local people to prevent their intrusion into "pristine" habitat, and to stop starving people from eating animals that are of interest to foreigners.

In an article in 2000, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Paul Salopek described this *nouveau* conservation as "a sweeping, last-ditch battle for the soul of wild Africa... a vast and controversial testing ground for the theory of "community conservation."⁴

"Organizations such as the International Gorilla Conservation Program, the World Bank and CARE have chosen the misty jungles and crowded villages of southwestern Uganda," wrote Salopek, whose story applies equally to Congo, "as a vast and controversial testing ground for the theory of 'community conservation.' The idea is simple: To save what's left of Africa's fading wildlife, experts say, the animals must in essence be given back to the Africans, so the Africans will feel more of a kinship with them and feel the need to protect them."

"Africa for the Africans" and "Africans in control of Africa" and "African leaders for African people." Look to the media to find countless permutations of this comforting mantra. What Salopek didn't say was that CARE programs are partially funded by Lockheed Martin and Northrup Grumman and other invasive corporations.

Tourism would provide the money to build schools and infrastructures and fill village coffers—or so the theory went. To control the land, conservation organizations would win over the hearts and minds of the villagers. Treaties were signed, and contracts, and

⁴ Chicago Tribune, March 12, 2000, [Africa's Wildlife Runs Out of Room](#)

promises of development and shared futures proliferated like invasive exotic species. It had all happened before. Newly repackaged, it has happened again, and again, and again. It is the his-story (sic) of conquest by conservation.

THE MWAMI MYSTIQUE

“But it was some story,” wrote Frederic Hunter in Waiting for the Mwami, his book about writers writing about Africa. “An interview with an African king, demigod to some; autocrat to others... Being received by the Mwami of Kabare, absolute ruler of a quarter-million tribesmen here, is like stepping four hundred years back into 1563. He would make the Mwami a traditionalist rogue, a charming anachronism, and sprinkle gems of his wisdom throughout the piece.”

The key to the access and control of local communities in Central Africa was obvious to anyone who understood African culture. The *Mwami*—the Chief—the “lord of the lands”—protector and father—would guarantee access if and only if his cooperation could be won.

“Mwami” also means “king” and the kingdoms are the traditional territories of the Kivus, north and south, the provinces in Congo that today are awash in blood. Mwami is a dignified, revered title, a birthright, and in the rich cultural history of *Ruanda-Urundi* and *Kongo*, the Mwamis were demigods. African creation myths tell of three heavenly children who fell to earth by accident—the genesis of the Mwami lines of descent. The Mwamis trace their lineage and powers to these divine founders and the people trace their cosmologies to the Mwamis living amongst them.

The late Rosamond Carr, philanthropist to Rwanda and friend of the murdered primatologist, Dian Fossey, sums up the relationship of the Mwamis to their subjects in her book Land of a Thousand Hills.⁵ In 1957 Rosamond Carr attended festivities surrounding the 25th anniversary of the reign of a local Mwami. Carr was shocked to see that the Mwami seemed to accept all of the lavish gifts with indifference—some were not acknowledged at all. Her African companion reassured her: “But Madame, everything *belongs* to the mwami. The land, the crops, the people, and the animals are all his.”

This is a telling reality. The omnipotent power of the Mwami offers an important cultural concept—one that has been exploited to wrest concessions from native populations who cherish deep religious and familial ties to their trusted kings. Anthropologist John Oates examines this concept in Myth and Reality in the Rain Forest: How Conservation Strategies are Failing in West Africa. Dr. Oates notes that the “community conservation”

⁵ Rosamond Carr, Land of a Thousand Hills: My Life in Rwanda, Viking/Penguin, 2000

model pursued by Western conservationists overlooks the ethnic rivalries and differences, and the old and new antagonisms that could prevent cooperation between communities. The first loyalties of communities would always be to the chiefs, the Mwamis, or the ethnic lines of their familial descent, and never to a broad concept of wildlife corridors or world heritage landscapes imposed by outsiders.

Or perhaps there was no overlooking of anything, because exploitation is premised on the capacity to divide, and then conquer.

In Central Africa, the BINGOs and the DINGOs have been stitching together vast tracts of territory defined by the CARPE Program—the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment—as “landscapes.” These include the Maiko National Park (NP) of North Kivu (CARPE landscape No. 10) and the Kahuzi Biega National Park (CARPE landscape No. 11) that stretches from Bukavu, South Kivu, to the vast tropical forests of North Kivu, and the Tanya Gorilla Reserve, at the center of our Mwami’s story.

The twelve CARPE landscapes encompass 680,300 square kilometers of Central African land. From the Monte Alen-Monts de Cristal National Park (CARPE landscape No. 1) in Equatorial Guinea, to the Virungas National Park (CARPE landscape No. 12) in the Great Lakes region, the twelve “priority” biodiversity landscapes, stretching across Central Africa, are part of a vast forest of “conservation” initiatives defined by acronyms and big institutions. The Congo Basin Forest Partnership, for example, like CARPE, is connected to the Pentagon, and NASA, and that’s not all.

Stitching together these “landscapes” on the scale of the CARPE project would test the contention by anthropologist Dr. John Oates that jealousies, insecurities, competition and corruption would prevail and that the poisonous potential of money would open old wounds and create new antagonisms.

The emergence of the Tayna Gorilla Reserve (RGT) is a case study in promises made and broken to the village chiefs and people of Congo. It is a tale as old as Congo itself—a story of rivalry, greed, lies, even murder—and it exposes the soft underbelly of the conservation ideal and the dishonorable and duplicitous manifestations of human nature.

The Tayna Gorilla Reserve is located some 50 kilometers west of the spine of the Great African Rift Valley. Home to endangered human primates and their endangered relatives, the Grauer’s gorillas, the chimpanzees and another 12 species of non-human primates, there are also more than eighty species of mammals in this forested area, including elephants, leopard, buffalo and the rare okapi. It is an achingly vibrant and beautiful landscape, strategically located in the heart of the Congo Forest Basin.

The Tayna Gorilla Reserve is also the flagship Community Conservation Program of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGF-I). It is “a program that empowers local people to protect and preserve their heritage,” DFGF-I claims on their website. The claim is repeated in a jungle of press releases, fundraising campaigns, and expensive, glossy, full-color brochures.⁶

The Fossey Fund’s local and national partners are the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN)—the DRC wildlife authority—and a Congolese federation of community-based nature reserves, the Union for the Conservation of Gorillas and Development in Eastern DRC (UGADEC).

In November 2005, Conde Nast Group, including Hollywood glitterati in the form of actors of Glenn Close and Harrison Ford, gave its prestigious U.S. \$20,000 “Worldsaver” Conde Nast Traveler Environmental prize to Pierre Kakule Vwirasihikya, a DFGF-I project leader at Tayna Gorilla Reserve. At the time of the award, Kakule was a partner to Dr. Patrick Mehlman, the elusive monkey smuggler of this series, and then the Vice-President of Central Africa operations for DFGF-I.⁷

Patrick Mehlman now operates as some kind of go-between for DFGF-I and Conservation International. One document pegs him as CI’s Regional Director of the Central Africa Program, but he is not listed with other staff on either the DFGF-I or CI web sites. In recent years, Mehlman moved from monkey smuggler to Vice-President of DFGF-I operations in Rwanda, and finally to a close association with Russell Mittermeier, the President of Conservation International.

The CI mission “to conserve the Earth’s living heritage, our global biodiversity, and to demonstrate that human societies are able to live harmoniously with nature,”⁸ is another way of saying that managing natural resources is a process of “sustainable” development.

John Oates criticizes the linkage of nature conservancy with economic development as a profound mistake, which leads to “an exercise of materialism at local, national and international levels.” Indeed, the word “sustainable” in this context means to use natural resources in a paradigm of unlimited economic growth—and to “sustain” access to them for Western interests in their ruthless global competition for disappearing resources.

⁶ www.gorillafund.org

⁷ Worldsavers: Conde Nast Traveler’s 16th Annual Environmental Awards, November 2005: http://www.conservation.org/xp/news/press_releases/2005/101705.xml

⁸ www.conservation.org

USAID initiated its twenty-year Central African Program in “biodiversity conservation” in 1995. Phase Two of CARPE will be in effect until 2011 and Phase Three will kick in after that. USAID is invested in the region for the long haul.⁹ Total leveraged funds for CARPE are \$150 million, with \$74 million coming from USAID.¹⁰ Interestingly enough, in the official U.S. documents describing the Pentagon’s new Africa Command, AFRICOM—which will consolidate U.S. military power of EUCOM, CENTCOM AND PACCOM—the Pentagon will be working with USAID as a partner.

In making the CARPE grants, USAID emphasizes “landscape-level conservation, sustainable use and market-based mechanisms”—all of which are the red flags waved by expert John Oates. In the case of the Tanya Gorilla Reserve, this means that the indigenous population is not managing the money at the village level, regardless of the high-profile PR by the BINGOs that say otherwise.

According to CI, Pierre Kakule’s conservation vision and initiative at Tayna “has become an exemplar of how biodiversity conservation can benefit human welfare” because “it is remaking the lives of thousands of war-weary indigenous people who depend on healthy forest ecosystems and stable communities for their livelihoods and, in this case, sometimes their very survival.”¹¹

The people at Tayna who work for the USAID/CI/DFGF-I project, according to locals, are not being paid. Our own evaluation found a school in shambles and a health clinic that is little more than a dilapidated exoskeleton. Press releases and well-placed “news” stories by DINGOs and BINGOs paint quite a different picture.

Reports from CI and DFGF-I have trumpeted hopeful statements about the great apes, even while fundraising documents declare their imminent extinction. According to one press release, “This recent research also indicates that earlier surveys appear to have missed or underestimated important priority areas for this [Grauer’s] gorilla’s overall distribution.”¹²

According to DFGF-I, “The Tayna Reserve is an innovative grass-roots project that has as its goals both the conservation of biodiversity and rural development. This biodiversity

⁹ USAID Power Point

¹⁰ CARPE documents and Weidemann Report

¹¹ “Conserving Biodiversity and Saving Lives,” Feature Story, Conservation International, August 23, 2006.

¹² The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International Reports Gorillas in Eastern Congo More Numerous Than Expected, DFGF-I Press Release, September 26, 2005: <http://www.gorillafund.org/about/press_item.php?recordID=9>.

reserve... is entirely managed by local stakeholders, and receives technical advice, training, and financial assistance from DFGF-I.”¹³

All across the region, from the remote mining outposts of Walikale to Rutshuru to Tanya, three sites which can be pin-pointed on a map of the North Kivu region, the stories are told of how Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and their partner BINGOs and DINGOs—WWF and Conservation International and the Jane Goodall Institute—arrived on the scene, promised the world, stirred up trouble, and left. As if it were a bad dream, people see their communal lands expropriated, they see hunters and gatherers excluded, and mass forced displacements of locals to protect the unholy alliance of conservation corporations, and the boundaries of vast “conservation” reserves, their communal birthrights, taken from them.

And some of them see the research and the fancy 4x4 SUVs and armed escorts and the other evidence that gorilla and chimpanzee projects deep in the forest—being run by privileged foreign primatologists and anthropologists and whole troops of specialized other-ologists with GPS mapping equipment and hundred thousand dollar budgets—are ongoing. The locals never see the scientific papers—most are illiterate and uneducated and couldn’t read them if they tried—and they never travel to the fancy foreign conferences where research is presented and celebrities rub shoulders.

Said one local Congolese expert who works for the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature, “there is a cabal of insiders who get all the money, and they work together to get all the money, and even if you know more about your own land or your own animals than they do you are never allowed to travel to these fancy conferences in Paris or Washington or Vienna to present your knowledge.”

This Congolese expert’s credentials couldn’t be more appropriate to the primate conservation mission in Central Africa, but instead of collaborating and promoting him the conservation “clique”—as he describes it—has attacked him.

“I am loosing my job and whether innocent or no, the clique has already engaged me in a serious battle, to which I don’t have the means. For this I need your help and support as we should make sure that the truth is known and improve on the way people act and how they mishandle funds from various sources on the name of biodiversity conservation and poor Congolese livelihoods.”¹⁴

¹³ P.T. Mehlman, The Conservation Action Program: Eighteen Months After Inception, DFGF-I web site, September 2002.

¹⁴ Private communication,

Today the man lives under constant threat and in fear for his life.

MILKING THE MWAMIS

The paper trail that outlines the expropriation of the Tayna Gorilla Reserve and communal lands begins not with the *Mai Mai* or *Mau Mau* but with the official legal instrument, the MOU—the “memorandum of understanding” in the geekspeak of conservationists. Juan Carlos Bonilla, Director of the Africa Division of Conservation International, wrote the MOU that emphasizes the importance of the Mwamis to the international conservation project at Tayna. (Curiously, Bonilla’s biography is listed on the web site of the U.S. Department of State, but nowhere on the web site of CI.)

“We have partnered with the *mwami*, traditional rulers with actual power to influence land-use allocation among local populations. These councils are resulting in voluntary easements over traditional land rights to allow for community-managed conservation areas, while concentrating economic activities in areas to be targeted by development projects.”

The Conservation International MOU relies on UGADEC—the consortium of local NGOs—as their vehicle to provide mutual support and channel technical and financial assistance to the process. Both ICCN and UGADEC receive technical support from CI’s main implementing partner in the landscape, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGF-I) and its partner the Jane Goodall Institute. CI partners WCS and WWF also support ICCN in Maiko (Tayna) and Kahuzi Biega.”¹⁵

In 2005, while still Vice-President of Africa Programs for DFGF-I, Patrick Mehlman wrote in a publicity brochure that the decree which gazetted the Tayna Nature Reserve was accompanied by “contracts in which the complete management and the responsibility for protecting the reserve(s) is ceded by the national park authorities to the local people.”¹⁶

How was this done? By expropriating the institution of the Mwami? Controlling the relations between the mwamis and their local territories, their *petite* kingdoms? Is this the application of that tried and true method of resource acquisition, divide and conquer?

Describing the award given to DFGF-I’s Pierre Kakule, for example, Conde Nast Traveler credited Kakule and Patrick Mehlman with organizing the mwamis and the local

¹⁵ Memorandum of Understanding

¹⁶ The Dian Fossey Gorilla Journal Spring 2006.

communities in eastern DRC behind gorilla conservation, and through this, establishing the Tayna Nature Reserve. “Following the Tayna model,” Conde Nast Traveler wrote, “other communities are now setting up seven contiguous gorilla reserves that will create a 2.5-million-acre corridor linking the Maiko and Kahuzi-Biega national parks.”¹⁷

In 2005, cracks began to appear in the facade of the Tayna project as rumors circulated about alleged strong-arm tactics practiced by the DFGF-I’s local award-winning chief, Pierre Kakule. This was not the first case of allegations of misdeeds perpetrated by the Congolese conservationist. The accusations intensified, and in early 2006, a story was making the rounds through competing conservation organizations that a conflict over Tayna boundaries resulted in the deaths of “several villagers.”

According to a Congolese gorilla expert connected all his life to gorilla conservation in DRC and Rwanda, another local expert whose life would be in danger if we named him, the statements from the DFGF-I press releases are patently untrue. This source traveled to areas purportedly involved in the DFGF-I programs.

“I recently went to visit some of these areas,” the source stated. “I spent ten days in one place. You should see the hard life of the people in there. No help at all from anyone, while the media are mobilizing and making all these claims about support from conservation organizations.”¹⁸

“The DFGF-I never used its funds to help the threatened Grauer’s gorillas through protection in Kahuzi Biega or in assisting the communities living around the park,” the gorilla expert continued. “Poor people around the park are suffering from malnutrition, diseases, lootings, and many women have been raped, but we always heard that the DFGF-I were funded in millions of US dollars for the gorilla’s protection. The populations of Grauer’s gorillas are more vulnerable today due to the war in the eastern DRC, and gorilla habitat has been cut down for militia shelters. Meanwhile the DFGF-I—Patrick Mehlman and Pierre Kakule—are saying that the number of Grauer’s gorilla remains higher, which is wrong, and wrong.”¹⁹

Eyewitness reports from the Tayna Gorilla Reserve say that anti-poaching patrols, among others, are not being paid the amounts publicized by DFGF-I.²⁰

¹⁷ WorldSavers: Conde Nast Traveler’s 16th Annual Environmental Awards, November 2005: http://www.conservation.org/xp/news/press_releases/2005/101705.xml

¹⁸ Private communication, Interviewee No. 10, 7 January 2006.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Email record, January 2005, Witness

“They (anti-poaching) teams work hard days and nights to achieve the goals. Do you know how much they are monthly paid? Thirty dollars. It was very astonishing to read that DFGF-I claims to pay them \$100 each a month while most of the children of the park guards suffer from malnutrition and some don’t go to school for lack of monthly educational fees.”

In another interview, a well-known conservationist reported that an incident took place on or around 2003 in neighboring Walikale. Allegedly, there is a Governor’s Report on the incident in which one community member was killed and many others injured. Kakule allegedly used a puppet mercenary to carry out the atrocities.²¹ The conservationist also refuses to be named for fear of retaliation and an abrupt termination of his/her career.

The supporting background to this allegation is that villagers in the Walikale community realized that there were possibly many gorillas in the area and approached DFGF-Europe to help them organize a community-based conservation project. According to locals in Walikale and Goma, DFGF-E and DFGF-I apparently had it out over control of local landscapes and the CARPE funding that came with them. In the end, DFGF-E apparently took the Maiko National Park, CARPE landscape 10, and DFGF-I took the others. At the same time, Kakule and Patrick Mehlman were trying to woo support for the neighboring Tayna Gorilla Reserve Project—support that was essential to garnering millions in USAID dollars.

The Tanya Gorilla Project includes the “Tayna Conservation Center for Biology,” or TCCB, a research school established by Pierre Kakule, but while CI and DFGF-I press releases of March 2007 tout the Tayna success story, teachers at Tayna’s “American University” report that salaries are unpaid.

“Concerning our situation at TCCB [Tayna Conservation Center for Biology], I can’t tell you that many things have changed. They only paid up to February. March, April, and very soon May are still unpaid. So I can’t say that the salary is regular. Besides all the problems we discussed nothing is fulfilled. Please keep advocating for us.”²²

Testimony collected on the ground in Walikale, Tanya and Goma indicate that mining operations connected to international mafias—governments and embassies and multinational corporations—proceed in or around these conservation areas. The hospital at Walikale is a wreck, counting one or two archaic microscopes, a handful of slides and Petri dishes, and a stirrup table for women as its only capital equipment. There are also stores of donated pharmaceutical products like Depo Provera. (See Georgianne Nienaber

²¹ Phone Conversation with redacted interviewee, November 30, 2005

²² Private Communication, Witness, May 2007

and Keith Harmon Snow, “Primate Worship? Or Depo Privations?” COA News, May 9, 2007.)

The locals in Walikale, as throughout eastern Congo, have been brutalized again and again, with rampant and uncountable incidents of crimes against humanity, torture, mass rape and genocide. According to an April 2007 report by the ENOUGH campaign of the International Crises Group—itsself a specious “think-tank” entity worthy of DINGO status—the death rate continues at more than 1000 people every day in eastern Congo.

What position does the conservation community take on the massive human rights atrocities and war crimes? Consider the Joint Communiqué by ICCN and its conservation partners issued by the BINGOs and DINGOs in December 2007—after gorillas and hippos were killed by armed elements.

“A crisis of unprecedented proportions in the Virunga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in North Kivu, DRC, has been allowed to develop over the last few months,” it begins.

The statement was not referring to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced refugees, or about starving, homeless, distraught villagers forced off communal lands for conservation by the same BINGOs and DINGOs.

“Savage assaults on wildlife from the Mai Mai, FDLR [Forces for the Democratic Liberation of Rwanda] and other rebel groups coupled with a flourishing and unchecked trade in meat and ivory has led to a precipitous decline in numbers of wild animals. The scale of this slaughter is particularly apparent with the decimation of hippos in and around Lake Edward, these have declined from 30,000 to less than 200.”²³

Savage assaults on wildlife! While the slaughter of hippos and gorillas can certainly be described as savage, there is no comparable outrage expressed for the massive loss of human life and unprecedented human misery in the same areas, in the same timeframes.

The Joint ICCN Communiqué—picked up by all the international press—was addressed to *His Excellency Joseph Kabila Président de la République Démocratique du Congo*, to *Mr. William Lacy Swing, United Nations Special Representative to the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, and to *Major General Patrick Cammaert, General Officer in Command of Eastern Division of MONUC*, the top U.N. military commander, from Holland, in the region. The statement called on the above officials to (1) Uphold

²³ ICCN Joint Communiqué, Crises in The Virunga National Park, December 17, 2006.

Congolese law and intervene immediately to remove illegal militias and illegal settlements from the Virunga National Park; (2) Intervene immediately in support of the ICCN to prevent further poaching of protected species and to maintain the integrity of the Virunga National Park; and (3) Intervene immediately to cease the intimidation of ICCN rangers and local communities by armed rebel groups within and around the periphery of Virungas National Park.²⁴

While the people and organizations who issued the ICCN Communiqué were asking that military force be used to “cease intimidation of ICCN rangers and local communities,” it is clear that the concern lay with the wildlife, and the protection or support of the ICCN wildlife authority, and the call to “cease intimidation of... local communities” was merely cosmetic lip service necessary to maintain some minimal semblance of concern for human beings. The demand for immediate intervention to “remove illegal settlements” from Virunga National Park is also a call against desperate local people forced to endure inhuman conditions and unprecedented misery due to war and displacement. The Joint Communiqué was stamped with the logos of DFGF-I, The Gorilla Organization, CI, WCS, ICCN, ZSL (Zoological Society of London), WWF, IGCP, UNESCO, the African Conservation Fund and the European Union.²⁵

In the course of this investigation, repeated attempts were made to communicate with the conservation organizations in question to get their sides of this story and fairly represent their positions. Given numerous opportunities, the officials of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund refused to answer any questions beyond simple enquiries. While an appointment was requested with Fauna and Flora International, part of the International Gorilla Conservation Program (IGCP), officials could not find the time to meet to discuss their activities when we were in Cambridge, U.K., where they are based. Sally Coxe, founder of the Bonobo Conservation Initiative, operating in CARPE landscape No. 7, refused to respond to even the most basic questions.

To be fair, many conservationists working in Africa are good-intentioned people with good hearts. For the innocent victims of Congo however, the road to Tayna is the road to hell and it has been literally paved with blood.

A call to Frank Hawkins's, Technical Director for Conservation International, requesting clarification, resulted in a suggestion that we call Patrick Mehlman or Juan Carlos Bonilla. Repeated calls and emails to Bonilla have gone unanswered.²⁶ Due to the heavy travel schedule of Russell Mittermeier, the President of CI, his secretary deemed the possibility of arranging an interview to be virtually impossible.

²⁴ ICCN Joint Communiqué, Crises in The Virunga National Park, December 17, 2006.

²⁵ ICCN Joint Communiqué, Crises in The Virunga National Park, December 17, 2006.

²⁶ Georgianne Nienaber phone records

And then we met one of the Mwamis from the Tanya conservation area. And he had all the time in the world...

Given his health and the scale of his suffering, this won't be very long at all.

THE MWAMI'S TALE

"They tried to kill me because the area that belongs to the Mwamis has many animals... very bad if I stayed with the project because they want to take this area away."

Meet Mwami, an obviously frightened man from a village in Tayna. We will refer to him by his title only, because his life is in danger. The all-too-human *demigod* wears a baseball cap. He sits before us in a wicker chair in a hotel room in Central Africa and barks accusations of attempted assassination and theft of ancestral lands. He is old for his years, frail, suffering from constant headaches and diabetes and other undiagnosed ailments. He is talking about Pierre Kakule Vwirasihikya and his hired henchmen, local agents of the conservation *clique*—the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and Conservation International.

The windows are closed, shades drawn, at the Mwami's request, and some 120 pages of documents litter the floor. In a typically agitated, excited Congolese manner our Mwami-on-the-run explains why he is fleeing to another country. He keeps asking for water—lots of water—because of his sickness. He looks about to pass out or suffer a stroke. Sweat runs down his face, steaming his oversized glasses. Each time he makes a point he gestures to the papers scattered on the carpet and shouts a number—every document is meticulously referenced by circled numerals. He coughs out his story between gulps of water and nervous glances at the hotel room door, double-bolted at his insistence.

Waving his arms and complaining about his headache every few minutes, Mwami begins his story by telling us something we had already heard, but had dismissed as un-provable. Mwami swore that there have been at least four attempts to "remove him" from the "landscape project" at Tayna Reserve.

The story of bad blood between Mwami and Pierre Kakule begins in Mbingi, a remote village in the Lubero District of North Kivu. Sometime prior to 2003, Mwami was involved with Actions Development Plateau Bilateral Luholu (ADPBL or L'ADPBL), a local organization of chieftains that provided assistance for malnourished children, orphans and widows in Mbingi. Mwami signed an agreement with Kakule to share in the administration of the orphanage.

In March 2003, a meeting was held among the principal sponsors of ADPBL.²⁷ Nine persons attended the meeting, including Kakule and Mwami, and the discussion centered upon a promised donation that never materialized.

The “wives of members of the DFGF-I” are supposed to have a representative in DRC who will distribute money “according to needs,” the letter reads. Mwami charged that \$10,000 was promised in 2003, and directly challenged Kakule about the missing funds. Mwami claims that Kakule confiscated the ADPBL’s \$10,000, and that it never reached the orphans. The \$10,000 was promised “by a group of women in Atlanta,” Mwami said, adding, “only Kakule knows the name of this organization.”

Atlanta is the headquarters of the DFGF-I.

While visiting the Mbingi orphanage, we asked caretakers there if they knew anything about the budget or sources of funding for the orphans. We were told, “It is Pierre Kakule’s secret.”

It was no secret that the only source of food we saw there were several open bags of ground meal, infested by rats. In fact, our surprise visit to Mbingi in February 2007, found half-starved, stunted orphans with distended bellies in a setting reminiscent of the poor house in Oliver Twist. These orphans are touted in DFGF-I’s press releases and on their web pages as one of their “success” stories in Tanya and DRC.

Another of our Mwami’s letters shows that DFGF-I was aware of the orphans’ plight several years ago. *Resiliation Contract ADPBL-RGT*, datelined Goma, April 19, 2004 is addressed to the “Director of Orphanage at Mbingi,” and Pierre Kakule signs it.²⁸ The letter breaks Kakule’s contract with ADPBL, and has Kakule blaming ADPBL for the missing money.

In an attachment to this letter, Kakule’s partner, Mwami Alexandre Muhindo Mukosasenge, from Bamate village, recommends that DFGF-I take responsibility for Mwami’s nephew, who has been admitted, but not funded, to Montréal University. Mwami Stuka, the chief of Batangi, is also mentioned in the letter.

Although Tayna is a community initiative and the land is property of the state, management is the responsibility of the Batangi and Bamate village chieftains.

²⁷ Document 3: “Compte Rendu de la Reunion Du 27 Mars 2003” (Minutes).

²⁸ Mwami’s documents: Goma le 19Avril 2004

Mwami maintains that Kakule turned these two ruling chiefs against him because of the missing orphanage money, and because Mwami made allegations that signatures on land agreements were forged.

Mwami insists that the promise to provide a scholarship for his nephew was made by CEO Clare Richardson and V.P. Mehlman of DFGF-I. Mwami was able to produce his nephew's acceptance letter to the university, but there is no record of the verbal promises allegedly made by the Fossey fund. Would an impoverished Mwami from the remotest regions of war-torn Congo urge his penniless nephew to apply to a Canadian university, with no other possibility of funding, without some sort of encouragement?

Did the DFGF-I offer to trade scholarships for land and then back off the deal when the leading Mwami refused to cooperate under coercion?

The missing \$10,000 from the orphanage turns out to be the tip of the million-dollar iceberg. And million dollar icebergs disappear quickly in Central Africa.

In Goma proper we found a massive, blue-roofed mansion that Pierre Kakule is completing on Lake Kivu. When asked directly, "Are you building a home on Lake Kivu?" Kakule denied it. This is no ordinary African home, but an expensive mansion in the making in the most posh and gated lakeshore community in Goma. In fact, area residents indicated that Kakule is building two mansions, almost side by side—the tip of the funding iceberg rising on the cool shore of Lake Kivu. Kakule has another plot of land with another *modest* compound on it, and this one is near the DFGF-I offices.

According to Mwami, "My area has three fourths of the gorillas in Tayna. When Kakule realized I did not have to sign over my rights and that I could reclaim them after I confronted him about the orphan's money, he chased me out of my administrative job in Tayna."

There is more.

In July 2004, Mwami wrote a letter directly to Clare Richardson of DFGF-I.

"RGT (Tayna) is currently in a structural crisis as a result of the management methods practiced by DFGF-I here in Congo. The member associations have lost respect for the structures of UGADEC (Association Union Gorilla Conservation for Development in the East of DRC) as a result of DFGF-I's activities, which include diverting funds, suffocating innovations and encouraging elitism... there is a tribal bias to the development projects undertaken by DFGF-I, to the detriment of those areas rich in

primate species. The true chiefs and landowners have been excluded from the management of the project, and not one has been placed on the office staff.”

It gets worse.

“A division based on tribal ethnicities has been engineered leaving a portion of land which makes up roughly one third of RGT without any of the agreed financial or structural support.”

The letter was copied to Patrick Mehlman of DFGF-I, and to Conservation International’s Carl Morrison, Juan Carlos Bonilla and Olivier Langrand.

We also presented the letter, in person, to a board member of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International who resides in Africa; the testimony collected from Mwami was also presented. The board member responded dismissively, and was unwilling to raise the issue formally. He/she answered with a terse letter suggesting that the war in the region would prevent anyone from going in to investigate allegations of corruption and threats of murder. He/she has refused to communicate since.

And so we have a DFGF-I board member indicating that an investigation of corruption is impossible, that the atrocities and guerrilla warfare in and around these conservation areas leave them inaccessible. A rather remarkable admission from the board member of one of the many conservation BINGOs and DINGOs whose gorilla research, field surveys and land acquisitions for “conservation” in the CARPE landscape program have proceeded virtually unchecked, amidst war and cataclysms in the Central Africa region, for decades.

The DFGF-I board member dismissed the accusations saying, “There are two sides to every story.” Indeed, one side of this story is Kakule’s blue-roofed mansion. On another side are the half-starving orphans in Mbingi—dressed in green prison garb, the Tanya Gorilla Reserve logo on their shirts—known as “Kakule’s orphans.”

There are millions of dollars in elite institutional research projects ongoing—in or around or about—all of these conservation areas; projects involving BINGOs and DINGOs and Universities like Rutgers, U. of Maryland, South Dakota State and Georgia Tech. Huge conservation conferences continue all over the world, involving governments and government departments like USAID and GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation). There are a slew of Western based research centers like the Great Ape Trust of Iowa. Zoo interests also predominate, like the Frankfurt Zoological Society, the Bronx Zoo and the Atlanta Zoo. And yet, with all this activity, with layer upon layer of

new “conservation” initiatives targeting primates, there has been no action taken to date to investigate the illegality and corruption of fifty years of “conservation” initiatives or their structural relationships to perpetual poverty and depopulation in Central Africa.

Professor David Gibbs writes about the relationship between Congolese chiefs and colonialist forces in his book, The Political Economy of Third World Intervention. If we substitute “CARPE” or “DFGF-I” or “Pierre Kakule” for “Administration,” as he uses it, we then have the obvious realities in Central Africa today.

The chiefs “were not always subservient toward the administration,” Gibbs writes. “Administrators complained about the ‘incompetence’ of Congolese chiefs, because the chiefs did not always cooperate with colonial directives...” The colonial administrations solved the problem by creating new indigenous authorities to bypass the chiefs who could not be manipulated, one way or another, into doing what needed to be done. “In other cases, uncooperative chiefs were simply removed.”²⁹

Added to this are the 2005 allegations that Pierre Kakule’s co-founder of the Tayna Project—a man named Jean Claude Kyungu—was threatened with death and pushed out by Kakule in 2001. Kyungu’s involvement in the acquisition of tribal lands is clearly spelled out in the December 1999 issue of the Gorilla Journal, published by *Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe*, an organization “dedicated to the conservation of gorillas, especially the mountain gorillas, and their habitats,” according to their website: “Jean Claude Kyungu and Kakule Vwirasihikya visited the area together to sensitize local chiefs regarding the necessity for biodiversity conservation in that area. On April 8, 1999, the chiefs of Batangi and Bamate signed an agreement to set land aside in order to create a new gorilla reserve.”

The summary of reasons for the creation of a reserve, a document created by Kakule and Kyungu, harks back to the imaginary “threats” faced by KONG.

“The most important threats to the gorillas are now overpopulation in the mountainous part of Lubero territory, and increasing destruction of the forest as a result of immigration, for example in Bapere collectivity where the population density increased from 3.3 people/km² in 1982 to 10 people/km² in 1998,” Kakule and Kyungu wrote.

According to our Mwami, “if you were from the one-third of the reserve that actually had animals, (including the elusive lowland gorilla), you were kicked out of the “university” at Tayna.”

²⁹ Gibbs p.56

Why? Because Kakule wanted to acquire lands that actually had gorillas—and woe to the villagers who would not vacate this territory, first described by Kakule and Kyungu as “overpopulated” in 1999.

We visited Tayna in February 2007 and learned that the gorillas were at least two days walk from the crumbling Tayna compound.

Shortly after our visit, the latest addition to the roster of Femme Fatales, Madison Slate, arrived at Tayna with film crew and crayons in hand. Jason Auslander chronicles Madison’s odyssey into the land of Kong in the April 29, 2007 issue of The New Mexican. In “A Troubled Land,” Auslander describes the total lack of animals, let alone gorillas, and the constant requests by villagers for health care.

A TROUBLED LAND INDEED

Midway through the long interview session with our displaced and dying king, a former student from the “American University” at Tayna joined us. The student, a distant relation to the Mwami, provided additional corroboration and information.

Mwami and the student concurred that DFGF-I’s Pierre Kakule has “chased” villagers away from the Tayna area that had gorillas. When we asked how, they said, “Kakule brought soldiers [Congolese] to kick them out by cutting them, killing them, beating them.”

A chief named “Manole” from the village “Ngumba” was murdered in June or July of 2006, they said. The allegedly murdered chief was 70-80 years old, and was a grandfather of the student.

Mwami’s voice rose to almost a shout as he told us that at a conservation meeting in Goma, held in Kakule’s office, Kakule told the assembled chiefs, “If you want to become like me, I will kill you.”

Evidently, in the case of chief Manole, someone did.

We asked Mwami what he wanted and why he was giving us this information. “I want DFGF-I and Kakule out of Tayna,” he said. We then asked Mwami to give us specific instances of why he feels that his life is threatened. He explained in riveting detail and from memory.

The first incident involved a case of mistaken identity, which was a stroke of good luck for the Mwami, since it seems he believes he was the intended target when the “wrong person” was arrested by security forces near his home village.

The second involves Mwami receiving a mysterious phone call telling him to take a car and collect a letter at a certain hotel. The courier refused to come to his home, but Mwami was told the courier would be waiting in a truck. Suspicious, Mwami sent someone else to the rendezvous, but the courier was nowhere to be found, and the letter was never received.

As the *noir* account continues, later the same night at approximately 21:30, it was dark and stormy and Mwami was in bed. His children were doing homework in the living room. They heard someone outside who tripped and fell on the volcanic rock. Then person tapped at the door, saying “hodi” [hello, is anyone there]... and then power came back, lights came on, and the person fled.

After this incident, Mwami was subpoenaed to appear at Lubero, 300 km away from his home. According to his account, the military were stationed on the road and had been instructed to stop him. When Mwami did not materialize, one soldier and one chief went to Mbingi, the Chief of the Collectivity, and asked where Mwami was: he told them Mwami was in Goma. The suspicious chief lubricated the tongues of the military, and they spilled the beans: they said they had received orders to kill Mwami. Mwami’s contacts then sent word that “they are waiting for you on the road to Limbongo.”

Mwami says that another source of the antagonism between him and Kakule is that Mwami went to Kinshasa to inform the Minister of the Environment that the declaration regarding Tayna as a protected area was false. He and other Mwamis insisted that Pierre Kakule had forged their signatures.

We submitted a FOIA request to USAID,³⁰ asking for copies of the original agreements, which can be compared to signatures supplied by the Mwami, but these are reportedly in process and have not been released.³¹

Meanwhile, Mwami says that he knows his life is in danger and he cannot wait much longer for “something to happen.”

³⁰ FOI -074/07

³¹ Email Correspondence with FOIA office, February 26, 2007

Finally, after the original FOIA was filed with USAID on January 1, a FOIA seeking information about DFGF-I funding and the Tayna projects, former students of the Tayna “university”—TCCB—reported on January 25 that Kakule was pressuring them to return their tuition to him. Teachers had not been paid for six months. The students wondered whether Kakule wanted the money, or whether USAID was pressuring Kakule to account for the funding.³²

The results of this harassment of students by Kakule are chilling since they began after we instituted a FOIA request on the status of the university. *We had requested the number of students and the exact funding, since teachers had complained of not being paid.* Was this a coincidence, or had USAID alerted Kakule that questions were being asked?

“We were called by Kakule this Friday, and he wanted money,” some students communicated. “We were students at TCCB before he chased us away.” TCCB, again, is DGFI and Pierre Kakule’s centerpiece “community development” project, the Tayna Conservation Center for Biology.

The students knew that USAID had funded the university and now Kakule was asking them for money to pay back USAID. The students were asking us if it was really USAID that wanted money from them, or Kakule. The students also alleged that the executive secretary of UGADEC, Busanga Changui, was in collusion with Kakule and was planning on killing former students [names withheld].³³

In an email received May 2, 2007, the Mwami gave a list of changes he thinks would benefit the Tayna Preserve. When asked again what he wanted to see from an investigation, Mwami again stated clearly that he “wants DFGF-I and Kakule out of Tayna.” In spite of all he has been through, Mwami said his hope was “that the lands will be reunited in love.”³⁴

Of all of Mwami’s 102 pages of documentation, none ties the players together more closely than “Document 2,” “Presentation de Patrick.”³⁵ On first glance the document seems to be nothing more than notes on talk given by DFGF-I’s Patrick Mehlman that outline the background on the planned CARPE protected areas, the history of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, and a brief mention of an external evaluation of the CARPE program in Tayna. A crudely drawn organization chart shows the flow of money

³² Email correspondence with former student of Tayna

³³ Confidential email

³⁴ Email from Mwami to Georgianne Nienaber, May 2, 2007.

³⁵ Mwami’s Documents: “Presentation de Patrick.”

from USAID to CARPE and then to DFGF-I. From DFGF-I, money also goes to a player named Innovative Resources Management (IRM).

IRM is another USAID funded community “development” project in DRC run out of Washington, D.C. Active all over Congo, IRM’s particular niche and marketing strategy for winning big conservation funds centers around one of the other pivotal leveraging schemes used to exploit foreign lands and people today: “participatory mapping.” IRM has used USAID funds to purchase a sizeable boat that plies the Congo River conservation areas from Kinshasa to Kisangani, just like the steamers did in the bloody heyday of Henry Morton Stanley.

IRM comes armed with millions of dollars and satellite mapping technologies and the maps they generate, and they go into villages and win the hearts and minds of locals. They promise Congolese people—the poorest most isolated people in the world, often illiterate—a chance to map and control the resources around them. They promise them something they have never in their entire lives known to exist: agency.

They work with the chief, or the Mwami, and they throw a lot of cash around, and at the end of the day—many months or even a year later—they walk away with their satellite generated map which now can be overlain with all the newly gathered communal knowledge about local resources, hunting wisdom, agriculture, fishing rights, mining discoveries, forest secrets—and even popular trails.

This is no crumpled and disintegrating map held of the kind wielded by producer Carl Denham in Kong. This is intellectual property theft.

This is the future of Congo.

FREEDOM OF MIS-INFORMATION

The Freedom of Information request, filed on January 1, 2007 with USAID, has yet to be answered. This information would at least answer the allegation that signatures were forged on documents that committed tribal lands to the Tayna Landscape Project. It would also shed some light on missing funds. Recalling Part One of this KONG series, the USAID, CI and DFGF-I monies were subjected to an Audit by the U.S. Department of Defense Audits Agency. And the results of the audit are today a guarded secret.

Meanwhile, on May 1, 2007 “revisions” were made to the “Official” report on the Tayna Landscape Project by none other than Patrick Mehlman, the real life Monkey Smuggler

in Part One of our series: KONG.³⁶ Both Mehlman and CI's Juan Carlos Bonilla are listed as authors on the "revised" Tayna report which was posted on the CARPE website.

The Mwami's Tale has been making the rounds for at least two years with no takers. Kill a gorilla, though, and the world-wide press goes haywire with unvetted stories of the Mai Mai and other "rebel troops" hatching a plan to murder every last remaining gorilla in Northern Kivu. The savage villagers in King Kong would be no matches for the specter of tribal warriors drummed up by the mainstream press.

From Reuters to the BBC to obscure gorilla discussion forums, the lead paragraph from the latest model story in this saga, datelined Kinshasa, May 21, 2007, read EXACTLY the same in every venue: "Congolese militia are threatening to slaughter rare mountain gorillas in Congo's Virunga National Park after they raided the eastern reserve at the weekend, killing a wildlife officer, officials said."

Jean Claude Kyungu, the former partner of Pierre Kakule, is now Project Manager for the Mt. Tshiabirimu Gorilla Project, in the Virungas, where the gorilla incident occurred.³⁷

The saga repeats itself, like the epic King Kong film, in all its manifestations, repeats itself. Conservationist-cum-mercenary Robert Poppe summed it up succinctly after an attack on the Virunga gorillas in January. The killings began around January 5, he wrote, but there were NO denials by anyone, and there was NO world outrage, until the photos of a dead gorilla came out. Robert Poppe is working in a fairly high-level capacity on the ground in Central Africa today.

"Agreed, we are in the backwater of the world here," he wrote, in January 2007, "the Belgians (sic) managed to kill 10 million [people] here and no one batted an eyelid; the Rwanda genocide, one million in 100 days; not much has changed. There is nothing humanitarian NGO's like better than a good famine and some starving kids, that's what brings in the publicity and the cash. Pictures of a dead Gorilla will do the same for DFGF-I, WWF, the Gorilla Organization, etc. To be honest the killing of the gorilla will be forgotten in a month and sadly it will not have changed much here, but we will continue to do what we can and continue the fight."³⁸

³⁶ Conservational International CARPE USAID Final Technical Report for Monte Alen-Monts de Cristal Landscape and Maiko Tayna Kahuzi Biega Landscape by Patrick MEHLMAN — last modified 01-May-2007 13:54: Contributors: Patrick MEHLMAN, Christopher KERNAN, Juan Carlos BONILLA, CI

³⁷ Gorilla Journal, No. 20, June 2000

³⁸ Private communication from Goma, DRC, Robert Poppe, January 20, 2007.

There is an important point to make as we consider the Mwami's Tale. A study was recently completed in Garamba National Park, DRC. Unsurprisingly, research revealed that local social institutions and tribal leadership play a key role in regulating and preventing wildlife killing for the bushmeat trade. The authors of the study concluded that anti-poaching patrols were peripheral to successful intervention to stem illegal activities. What really mattered were local people and local institutions.³⁹

In other words, instead of publishing unvetted press releases submitted by the BINGOS and DINGOS, blaming everything on the locals, the victims one way or another, perhaps the international press should step up and interview tribal leaders in North Kivu. Alas, under the current terms of engagement, it would be yet another manipulation if they did.

Veritas vos liberabit. The truth shall set us free. Maybe.

Our Mwami, other tribal chiefs, and the people of DRC do not have massive publicity machines to tell their sides of the story. They have no administrative assistants and press offices, no travel budgets, no legions of attorneys, Congressional lobbyists, or contacts in the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa or the Washington D.C. beltway. Public relations and propaganda for primate protection remain the private terrains of BINGOs and DINGOs and their corporate funders. Indeed, the hundreds of thousands of dollars and pounds likely spent on the lawyers for the DFGF-I and DFGF-E legal battle over the Dian Fossey name could have built a school or a clinic in Walikale or Tanya, and this would have done far more to arrest the decline of the great apes in Central Africa.

The gorillas have become celebrities, and with their rising stardom, comes the inevitable exploitation by conservationists, militias, zoos, scientists, and anyone who sees that peddling a primate can make them a pretty penny and perpetuate their profession. Dian Fossey said it best when she wrote that she was concerned that the media coverage of gorilla deaths promoted by the fledgling but opportunistic DINGOs of her day would cause people to “evangelistically” (sic) climb aboard the “save the gorilla bandwagon” without thinking clearly where the money was going. She called her African staff the “backbone of Karisoke,” and used her own meager inheritance to pay them. Meanwhile, even then, the funds that were solicited in her name and in the name of ‘Digit’—her favorite but martyred gorilla—disappeared.⁴⁰ Fossey realized that without the heart-felt support of the indigenous people, the gorillas did not have a chance.⁴¹

MERCENARIES IN THE MIST

³⁹ E. de Merode *et al.*, “Armed Conflict and Protected Areas,” Biology Letters, 2007.

⁴⁰ Fossey Archives, McMaster University

⁴¹ Ibid

The Mwami's tale was the final impetus that drove us to the far reaches of the Tayna Gorilla Reserve to investigate the reality for ourselves. Our journey resulted in video corroboration and interviews gathered with the assistance of Robert Poppe, former employee of the London Zoological Society and former Special Forces operative (SAS) from Britain. Poppe set up the logistics and security to travel and gain access to potentially dangerous and still war-torn areas. As another indication of how funds are gobbled up with little or no benefit to the people or primates, we spent \$1000 just to rent the 4x4 vehicle: that is more money than many local villagers could dream of earning in their short lifetimes. In the end, Robert Poppe stole our video interviews, equipment and notes.

Robert Poppe is today working as a paramilitary agent training rangers for the Congolese government and its conservation clique in the Virungas. Poppe has some as yet unqualified responsibilities for operations in the gorilla areas of the Maiko, Tayna and Kahuzi Beiga conservation areas—CARPE landscapes No. 10, 11 and 12. He is a professional soldier, Special Forces—he says so himself—and his story exemplifies the jungle of private interests involved in the King Kong landscapes. Poppe likes guns, lots of guns. He also worked “in Rwanda for several months during the civil war in 1994,” he said, but that is a remarkable admission for a white Special Forces soldier, because the mythology of genocide in Rwanda, we have been told, over and over, involved only those bloodthirsty killing each other, savagely and mindlessly—Hutus and Tutsis with machetes and macabre axes and hoes... butchery re-enacted by the Skull Island *zombies* in King Kong.

What was professional soldier Robert Poppe doing in Rwanda in 1994?

“The world must really see what is really going on here,” wrote Robert Poppe, January 18, 2007, just a few weeks before our rendezvous in Goma, where Poppe would serve as our security and transport logistician to facilitate access to Tanya and the Virungas. “It’s strange, the term Gorillas in the Mist is often used to promote the magnificence and mystery of the gorillas and the region. The problem now is that the mist that surrounds the Gorillas is misinformation, hyperbole and downright lies being promulgated by many “conservation” organizations.”

Privately, Robert Poppe repeatedly complained about conservation run amuck in Central Africa's gorilla territories. That is why we contacted him, and how we came to be working—we thought—in the interests of truth and cooperation on behalf of the people and biodiversity of Central Africa, the stakeholders and their birthrights, and for the gorillas.

Publicly, Robert Poppe pressed a different, more expedient line, one that would hopefully serve his private interests as a conservation *liaison* with what amounts to a private fiefdom working for the “clique” of elite conservationists in Africa. Protecting the status quo turns out to be more important than presenting the truth and standing up for the most downtrodden people in the world.

“The DFGF does fantastic work,” Robert Poppe wrote, explaining his plans, in an email which appeared on a gorilla groups website. “But it has a huge income concentrated in a small area and it is obviously not working as it should, demonstrated by the loss of three gorillas this month. I think it’s about time to question where the DFGF spends its money. I am a former intelligence officer and trained anti-terrorist expert. And as such I would intend to target the money men in the far east and the U.S. who fund the hunters in Africa.”⁴²

[I] “want to really hit the gun and hunting lobby,” he wrote another time, giddy with ideas. “Did you know DRC has twice as many hunting areas as national parks? All out of operation but a really good selling point to get the hunting industry interested in conservation here!! Yes, sounds a bit warped, I know, but they have what the rangers need: camouflage clothes, quads, outdoor stuff in general! (Oh and guns! Lots of lovely, shiny guns!!! Sorry must stop listening to [musician] Toby Keith, and [I] spent too long hanging around with rednecks in Iraq!”⁴³

But Robert Poppe didn’t like what he heard local people telling us—complaints about the matrix of conservation and corruption, emotional outpourings about suffering—and he had never heard it before, because no one ever bothered to ask. After confiscating our interviews and testimonies, Robert Poppe told us that if the videos were ever viewed, “Some of the footage we have has the potential to do immense damage to [conservation] organizations and individuals and we both must protect ourselves.”⁴⁴

We demanded return of the stolen tapes and equipment and we were told, “It will ruin conservation in the Virungas.” When we persisted we were threatened. But our tale of hired British mercenaries running amuck in Virunga Park is yet another story. We still have a hanged man and a trip to the Tayna Gorilla Reserve to explain. And for that we will need... *THE MAP*.

Next:

⁴² Public correspondence between Robert Poppe and Birgitte (?), <mountaingorillas/dianfossey@yahoogroups.com>.

⁴³ Private communication, Robert Poppe to Georgianne Nienaber, January 18, 2007.

⁴⁴ Email from Robert Poppe to G. Nienaber, February 15, 2007. Copied to Robert Muir, Frankfurt Zoological Society

KONG: Part Four

THE MAP AND THE MAD SCIENTIST

“I’m talking about a primitive world,” film producer Carl Denham tells the thugs bankrolling his enterprise in King Kong, “never before seen by man.” Denham waves about his faded map, and the cinematography repeatedly zooms in on the sketchy details of the crusty old thing. In reality, the “conservation” community is today heavily invested in sophisticated, high-resolution mapping technologies. We are talking about a lucrative world, never before seen by the general public. Hundreds of millions of dollars are annually funneled into the scientific mapping industry under the banners of “conservation” and “development” and the now prominent buzzwords of “capacity building” and “participatory mapping.” With the introduction of the Mad Scientist, this tale takes a new twist of, well, *cartographic* proportions.