

KING KONG:

Extra, Extra: STOP the Mainstream Press!

Note: This is the ABRIDGED version of the longer story published by www.allthingspass.com on July 30, 2007:

Gorillas “Executed” Stories front for Privatization and Militarization of Congo Parks, Truth of Depopulation Ignored

Published 30 July 2007 by COA News, an on-line portal to independent news.
http://www.coanews.org/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=2009

July 30, 2007

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--Washington Post Correspondent, Stephanie McCrummen

The story began as they all do: DATELINE: Virungas National Park: “IN EASTERN CONGO OASIS, BLOOD AMID THE GREENERY. In Africa's Oldest National Park, Gorillas Are Being Killed and Their Guardians Are Endangered, Too.”

Published July 22, 2007, it is yet “another gorilla murdered” story. This time it was the Washington Post, recycling a month old story about a slain gorilla.

From Africa to China, three days later the headlines of Wednesday July 25 screamed out that three more mountain gorillas had been killed. Not just killed, executed. On the 26th it was up to

four.

“Mass Gorilla ‘Execution’ Discovered in Congo,” announced [National Geographic News](#). “Three female mountain gorillas were found shot dead this morning in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Virungas National Park.” There is a certain moral indignation expected from the public when someone is “executed”—it is the language that should be attached to human beings, but here it is attached to gorillas.

Photos on CNN and at least 100 web pages show the gorilla bodies displayed on stretchers, while seemingly appalled conservationists look on.

Meanwhile, 113,000 people have fled fighting between government forces, rebels and local militias since February 2007 in the same region of DRC. Some human rights organizations count 250,000. On July 20, 2007, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called for action to resolve the crisis in the DRC’s volatile eastern region, where the United Nations on July 20 counted 700,000 people as internally displaced.

At least 1000 people a day die in this region due to war, malnutrition, disease and lack of basic medical care. Some of these deaths are executions by soldiers from varying militias and armies. Congolese journalist Serge Maheshe was executed on the street in Bukavu, South Kivu, on June 13, 2007, but there was no comparable outcry. OPEDNEWS was the only alternative media outlet that published a photo of the murdered journalist. There is little moral indignation for a single dead Congolese person, and usually the victims are blamed for their own suffering. It is the same for Ugandan and Rwandan peasants across the porous border.

[Washington Post](#) reporter Stephanie McCrummen apparently traveled from Goma to the park with security from Richard Leakey’s organization Wildlife Direct, but she refuses to answer simple questions about her relationship with the elite mercenary firm. “I think what is important is the rangers, above all, and the gorilla’s,” McCrummen replied tersely, on July 24. Is this journalism?

According to McCrummen and the [Washington Post](#), the “beleaguered” Congo rangers—who have been blogging from the wilderness to feed Wildlife Direct’s web site and help raise funds abroad—“have not been paid in a decade.”

Why? What has happened to the millions and millions of dollars and euros and pounds and yen pumped into gorilla conservation in the past seven years alone? We were at Rumangabo in February and photographed well-stocked storerooms of food in the rangers’ encampments.

Forget about the onslaught of press releases from Wildlife Direct and Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, or the breathless articles from the [Washington Post](#) and [National Geographic News](#), all blaming local “militias” and “charcoal gatherers,” and “Mai Mai” and “poison bananas” and “rebel leaders” for the gorilla killings.

But there is something else going on here too.

Our February-March investigative visit to DRC revealed a different picture than the one regurgitated by the Washington Post from press releases provided by Wildlife Direct, the mercenary “conservation” organization supporting the “beleaguered” “ranger force.”

Post reporter McCrummen laments about the rangers wielding “rusty machetes,” but is the truth?

Take a look at the accompanying photo, provided to us by Robert Muir in January 2007, when his employer, the Frankfurt Zoological Society, was touting the “success story” of the ranger program. Obviously well fed, well clothed, well-armed, with machine guns ready, and fresh from training by British mercenary and soldier-of-fortune, Conrad Thorpe (see *Guns for Hire: Congo 2006*; www.vonplanta.net) this mercenary army has more than “rusty machetes” as reported by the Washington Post.

There have been at least ten mountain gorillas killed since this publicity photo was taken: indeed, the killings are synonymous with Wildlife Direct’s arrival on the scene. It is obviously a failed policy to have mercenary rangers in Virunga Park. The current Wildlife Direct press releases plea for more money for the suddenly under-equipped rangers.

Wildlife Direct operates under the mantle of the Africa Conservation Fund, a tax-exempt (501-c-3) registered with the Internal Revenue Service. Walter H. Kansteiner III has been a board member since the founding of ACF in 2004. Kansteiner has been a constant presence behind the scenes in Congo’s war since 1996. His background and experience are not in conservation. He has worked on a strategic minerals task force at the Department of Defense and was Executive Vice President of a commodity trading and manufacturing company specializing in tropical commodities in the developing world.

The World Policy Institute found Kansteiner’s 2001 appointment into the Bush Administration troubling. “Mr. Kansteiner's appointment is disconcerting, particularly with respect to the evolution of US policy towards the war ravaging the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

The Democratic Republic of Congo has the world’s purest and largest deposits of strategic minerals, such as gold, coltan, niobium, cobalt and columbite. Kansteiner is on the Board of Directors of Moto Gold, now operating in the killing fields of the bloody Ituri district.

The late (2006) board member of ACF, Paul Van Vlissingen, had been working for years to privatize all of Africa’s national parks for tourism. Kansteiner was a major force for privatization in the Clinton and Bush governments, and his work continues in this vein with think tanks and policy institutes.

The BBC reported in 2003 that Van Vlissingen’s company “planned to take over a string of national parks throughout Africa.” The scheme was to found a private company, African Parks Management and Finance Company, to take them over.

At a press conference, Zambian Member of Parliament, Sakwiba Sikota, called for an investigation, saying the scheme “borders on theft and plunder of the resources of the people of Barotseland and should be thrown out.”

But the Washington Post did not even bother to take a look at the machinations behind the “Congo Rangers.”

One critical glance at the “Congo Rangers” promotional materials or board of Directors would have been welcome journalism by the Washington Post.

On the Von Planta video, the white mercenaries and their elite Congolese “rangers” can be seen terrorizing the local fishermen—whom they call “poachers”—forcing them to “confess” their crimes or face death. The video clearly shows the poorest women in the world running for their lives from armed gangs otherwise defined as “rangers” and their white Wildlife Direct “trainers.” The Virunga rangers are on videotape committing human rights violations against innocent villagers who have a few wire snares in their meager huts—their only means to feed their families.

The “Guns for Hire” video also makes it clear that the white mercenaries believe that Congolese officials are fanning the flames of the violence, encouraging local people to cultivate inside the park, because park officials receive “payoffs”—albeit pitifully meager—for each cultivated plot. Congolese government soldiers are blamed with running a charcoal operation offering incentives for peasants to make charcoal or collect wood inside the park. Poor Congolese communities rely on charcoal as a staple energy source, and while they are the victims of an unjust international system exploiting and forcing them off their lands, they are blamed for trying to survive.

White British SAS forces give smug interviews in the video and share lofty ideals, based in privilege and backed by the badge of their skin color, and sneak around in the bush—wearing flak jackets and carrying automatic weapons—peaking through tall grasses and spying on peasant fishermen in old rickety boats and skinny boys on rusty pedal bikes. The video is a stupidly made propaganda tool that catches the real criminals in the act(ing).

The Congolese people are not stupid, and someone is sending a very clear signal with the gorilla killings: we don’t like what you are doing, and we don’t want you here. The local people want the white mercenaries and their elite first-world agenda—with all the dishonesty, corruption and vested interests behind it—gone. Period.

That is the sad, hard truth, never mentioned in mainstream media. Why?

Consider this: Washington Post director Barry Diller is a director of Conservation International and the Coca Cola Company, one of the big partners of the aid organization CARE International, and the defense company IAC/Interactive. Diller’s wife, Diane von Furstenberg is also an IAC/Interactive director.

CARE is a USAID partner involved in “conservation” and “humanitarian” projects in Congo, Uganda and Sudan. USAID has funded scores of millions of dollars in big conservation projects in the Great Lakes region in the past decade.

Oracle Corporation—a big intelligence and defense contractor—is another partner of CARE.

Oracle's CEO, Lawrence Ellison, is on the board of directors of Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund-International. Three IAC/Interactive directors are directors of Oracle Corporation. One is Washington Post director Alan Spoon, and another is General Norman Schwarzkopf.

Bullet holes riddle the entrance signs to Virunga Park. The locals are not happy with elite private militias limiting their already minimal options for food and survival, or forcing them out of the only shelter they have in eastern Congo. Most want only a few hectares to grow maize for their sick, emaciated children.

“We drove from Uganda to Congo through the Virungas,” said Oscar Kashala, the Congolese medical scientist from Harvard who ran for president in Congo's 2006 elections. “This is a very celebrated park. Everything was green but there are no lions in Virunga. No gazelles. People here have eaten everything. We didn't even hear any birds singing. We were seeing half naked kids coming out of the bush. For me—a doctor—to see malnutrition like that is very hard. The kids all have wounds on their feet, and their bellies are swollen. They are all sick.”

The gorillas have become hostages in a propaganda war, the people have become irrelevant.

On the other side of the fence—quite literally, the park boundary—the well-fed Congo Rangers and their families rely upon a sympathetic Western public for donations to keep themselves supplied and protected in former colonial encampments within the Virunga Park. In fact, Wildlife Direct recently put out a plea for more funds. The rangers were supposedly running out of food and an infusion of funding would certainly help.

Or, perhaps the fingers of blame should be pointed closer to home?

It's a jungle out there, and the monkey and money holes run very deep.