

S.O.S IN EASTERN CONGO: MAGIC STICKS, CORRUPTON & GORILLA WARFARE

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Two urgent messages arrived from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in late August 2007—each labeled S.O.S. It is ironic that land-locked Congolese would use the international maritime distress signal S.O.S. to plea for help. As independent journalists, we feel a bit like the captains of the *Carpathian* in their futile attempt to rescue the passengers of the sinking *Titanic*. The irony of the *Titanic* disaster was that the ship *California* was floating ten miles away and capable of rescuing all onboard—but not responding to the visual S.O.S. The *California* analogy fits the mainstream media today, as honest men and women fire rocket flare after rocket flare from the depths of Congo, hoping and praying that anyone will take heed of the ongoing conservation and humanitarian disasters.

The puzzled crew of the *California* watched the *Titanic*'s distress signals until it was too late. Over 1500 people perished in the legendary wreck of the *Titanic*. By some accounts, 10 million have vanished in Congo, with 1,000 people dying daily in North Kivu Province alone. Untold lowland gorillas have vanished along with the iconic mountain gorilla. Congo's Virunga Park is as devoid of life as the hulking wreck of the great ocean liner now rusting on the seabed of the icy North Atlantic.

On August 27, 2007 Congolese national Vital Katembo Mushegezi, a state Conservator and Senior Game Warden in the Virungas National Park, sent out an urgent S.O.S. appeal from the DRC.¹ The second S.O.S. came from a Congolese animal rights organization that has been investigating the gorilla trade and corruption in the ranks of conservation NGOs operating within Virunga Park.

In a stunning revelation, investigators from the *Innovation for the Development and Protection of the Environment* (I.D.P.E.)—affiliated with the World Society for the Protection of Animals and supported by Animal Rights of Hawai'i—describe “a network of people who are in search for sticks that the big apes, such as those the gorillas and the chimpanzees use.”

¹ Vital Katembo is the unnamed corruption informant featured in the KONG series, written by these authors, first published by COANEWS (www.coanews.org) and then picked up by OPED News (www.opednews.com).

The astonishing claim—mysteriously never reported by international primatologists and big conservation NGOs like the Jane Goodall Institute and Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund—is that elderly or handicapped gorillas and chimps use wooden sticks to defend themselves or to support themselves as they walk bipedally. Sorcerers—known as “marabouts”—seek these magic sticks because of the supernatural powers they possess and the sticks fetch a \$20,000 price on the international market.

INTERNATIONAL SCANDAL IN CENTRAL AFRICA

Conservator Vital Katembo came under attack from powerful forces seeking to maintain a long-standing silence about corruption, extortion, and criminality involving international non-government organizations (NGOs) working in the conservation, development and humanitarian sector in Central Africa. While previously concerned for his livelihood and security, Katembo was recently barred from his offices at the internationally renowned Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) and remains deeply concerned for his life and his family's security.

The ICCN was established in the 1970's and it prospered in its early years. A much smaller equivalent of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the ICCN was crippled and incapacitated by decades of graft and corruption institutionalized by international NGOs in the so-called “conservation” and, more lately, “humanitarian” business sectors, as they supported the regime of dictator Joseph Mobutu (DRC/Zaire/DRC) while pursuing their self-perpetuating programs.

“The situation remains terrible and I really fear about myself,” Katembo wrote. “The Administrator Director Technique (ADT), Benoit Kisuki, who is the second in command in ICCN headquarters in Kinshasa, has sent a verbal instruction to many expatriates and to the Provincial Director here in Goma and it's difficult for me to know what he told them. Many rangers are supportive of my cause and all want to see an independent evaluation to probe the facts and punish all involved.”

The “cause” Katembo refers to is an expose' of the graft, money laundering and intimidation that has been business as usual in conservation and humanitarian sectors in Central Africa. In the past year Katembo has been increasingly concerned about “conservation” in Central Africa, and he has shown unflinching courage by publicly challenging organizations and individuals who are profiting from the billion dollar conservation, development and humanitarian sectors at the expense of human suffering and exploitation of the environment. Vital Katembo has been increasingly vocal, notwithstanding the threat and actualization of retaliation over the past several months.

An August 16 communication by Mr. Katembo, challenging the activities and agenda of international NGOs in Central Africa, prompted direct retaliation because of a mis-directed email that mistakenly reached Wildlife Direct.

“I have now worked in the Virunga for almost 15 years and my experience of the last 2 years is of deception,” Vital Katembo wrote on August 16, 2007, responding to communication exchanges from Wildlife Direct director Emmanuel De Merode. “Are we saving wildlife or are we trying our best to save so called Wildlife Direct managers and experts? You are not new to learn that good people can do evil and this is so obvious in the conservation arena... Conservation in the Virungas is the last stand of oppression, corruption and colonialism.”

The above statement provoked an attack against Katembo organized by Pasteur Cosma Wilingula, Executive Director of the ICCN in Kinshasa. Katembo's email was a mild enough comment made off-handedly to Wildlife Direct director Emmanuel De Merode, and to these authors.

Emmanuel De Merode is a Belgian born primatologist married to Louise Leakey, Richard Leakey's daughter, who has years of association with Congo/Zaire. Richard Leakey is the founder of Wildlife Direct, a non-profit organization registered in Washington DC that operates under the mantle of the Africa Conservation Fund: ACF is affiliated with former U.S. State Department and National Security Agency officials. Wildlife Direct has been at the epicenter of the controversial gorilla killings in Virunga Park, Democratic Republic of Congo.²

Within a week of Katembo's comments the Executive Director of ICCN, Wilingula, was apologizing to and reassuring the international conservation sector; Vital Katembo was suspended, ostracized widely, and threatened.

It is the classic smear campaign to discredit the whistleblower and shoot the messenger.

"By suspending me and not allowing me to work," Katembo wrote on August 30, 2007, the Executive Director of ICCN "is trying his best to stop me from telling the truth about the weaknesses and failure of management of protected areas in DRC during his tenure and make sure that all goes into silence."

With nothing more to lose and an eloquent plea to take care of his beloved daughter if anything should happen to him, Katembo, in a courageous move, named those principally responsible for misappropriating funds, skimming, bribery and corruption.

These allegations, leveled by Katembo, need scrutiny. We have sent these charges and others directly to the United States Department of Justice, which has oversight responsibilities on USAID and other grants, including the non-profit status of conservation organizations operating on African soil, but registered as non-profits in the US. It is obvious that the Congolese officials named will not investigate themselves, and there is no other system in place to investigate corruption in DRC.

At the top of the list of alleged corrupt Congolese officials Katembo names are:

- [1] Pasteur Cosma Wilingula: ICCN Executive Director;
- [2] Djomo Ngumbi: ICCN finance assistant (Wilingula's brother-in-law);
- [3] Georges Mwamba: Cabinet Director and Personal Assistant in Charge of International Cooperation;
- [4] Benoit Kisuki: Technical Director and Interim Finance Director or ADT;
- [5] Numerous Chief Technical advisors for the EU, GEF-World Bank and UNDP.

"Today the Executive Director of ICCN Cosmu Wilungula can use his power and position to say anything about me," says Katembo, "but if he was not satisfied of my services and contributions in

² See: Keith Harmon Snow & Georgianne Nienaber, KING KONG: EXTRA! EXTRA! STOP THE MAINSTREAM PRESS!: Gorillas "Executed" Stories front for Privatization of Congo Parks, Truth of Depopulation Ignored," <http://www.allthingspass.com/uploads/html-210Gorillas_Executed_Final_July30_2007.htm>.

the Virungas he could have sent me out before—not after—I revealed that he is the master of a corrupt system.”

In Congo there is no national whistleblower protection organization or even the most basic of court systems to assist an honest man like Vital Katembo (journalists routinely disappear or are murdered). Both of the authors of this story have been either detained or briefly imprisoned due to the machinations of corrupt interests. Corruption is widespread, imported and institutionalized by Western power brokers. Katembo’s story will never make 60 Minutes, as did the story of Jeffrey Wigand who exposed the scandal of BIG TOBACCO in the United States or FBI agent Coleen Rowley who exposed the inadequacies of the FBI in the aftermath of 9/11.

Katembo charges that ICCN officials approve budgets and sanction monitoring missions in the field. He lists all the big World Heritage sites in Congo as targets of corruption: Virunga, Salonga, Kahuzi-Biega, and Garamba National Parks and the Okapi Faunal Reserve in Congo’s Ituri region. According to Katembo ICCN bosses “do business” with high-level officials and military in hotels and restaurants in Goma, Kisangani and Bukavu. These associated costs could pay for a group of rangers deployed at strategic field outposts within the park, Katembo says. The “mission reports” by these individuals who never leave the hotels always read the same—“the evaluation mission went on well but problems remain.”

The ICCN “big bosses” and their international collaborators forever justify the need for “capacity building,” which never occurs, prompting more calls for “capacity building,” which never occurs. This institutionalized system of graft perpetually cycles funding back to the international gatekeepers: expatriates with big salaries, GPS equipment, shiny new SUV’s, international travel and conferences, and, increasingly, weapons and other “security” and “logistics” equipment.³

Cementing the system in place are the public relations articles and documentaries that peddle white supremacist mythologies in the Smithsonian and National Geographic magazines and films, in Jane Goodall IMAX extravaganzas, and in short pithy fictional “news” pieces by Anderson Cooper on CNN.

It is important for readers not familiar with the Democratic Republic of Congo to understand that most of the city of Goma is overrun with solidified black lava, garbage and human misery, while the relatively untouched embassy row along the shores of Lake Kivu resembles a spa by Congolese standards. There is electricity, Internet access, hot running water and charming colonial era hotels with a 1940’s European flair.

In regional and provincial ICCN offices, directors are appointed to serve the strategic interests of the bosses in Kinshasa to whom they are accountable. “That pleases the bosses above them in Kinshasa,” Katembo wrote, “and oppresses the staff below them without considering the impact on the efficiency of the institution and work.”

³ See, e.g., the series of articles by Keith Harmon Snow and Georgianne Nienaber under the title King Kong: Scoping in on the Curious Activities of the International Monkey Business, <<http://www.allthingspass.com/journalism.php?catid=45>>.

International “consultants,” colluding in the “conservation ‘clique,’ gather “like hyenas at the kill” of gorilla conservation. We have been provided with the names of individuals associated with well-known international conservation organizations and descriptions of illicit activities of these organizations, some of which are funded through US tax dollars. We are holding them back until DOJ completes its own investigation.

“These people manipulate and handle money from donors on the ground, and the budgets are set accordingly so they remain in good eyes of the Administrateur Directeur General (ADG) and Technical Director (ADT) and their accomplices,” Katembo charges.

Katembo also alleges that UNESCO funding has been expropriated.

Salaries for expatriates, often paid by international donors, are between 5000-6000 Euros (\$6850-\$8500) per person per month. A measly \$200-500 US per month is allocated for Park Operations (includes food, fuel, medicine, logistics needs and equipment purchases). And the Congolese rangers themselves are paid a pittance. Ranger’s bonuses and salaries top out at \$20-30 US per person per month—hardly a life-sustaining wage.

In a BBC news opinion piece of September 10, 2007 titled “Conservation Alone is Not Enough,” Wildlife Direct founder Richard Leakey referred to “ludicrously small government salaries” in DRC, where “a ranger earns about \$5 a month.”⁴

Richard Leakey’s opinion piece should be addressing the institutional racism inherent in a system which pays (mostly) white expatriates \$6000-\$8000 per person per month—with all kinds of travel, health, lodging and vacation perks—and \$5 per person per month for black rangers living and dying in squalor. Leakey’s comments are further rendered obtuse when we learn that board members of the Africa Conservation Fund backing Wildlife Direct are involved with multinational corporations plundering gold from eastern Congo.⁵

The disparity between salaries of Congolese rangers and those of conservation expatriates parallel those of Congolese nationals employed by the Western “humanitarian” sector: For one poignant example, national staff on the United Nations Observers Mission to Congo (MONUC) payroll went on strike in August 2007 to protest the \$10 a day wages MONUC’s black nationals receive, compared to lucrative salaries of the international staff. Congolese nationals who protest at private NGOs like Doctor’s Without Borders or CARE risk retaliation for the mildest complaints about conditions or salaries. Congolese nationals working at a Medicines Sans Frontieres/Doctors Without Borders supported hospital in Basankusu, DRC, who complained (in solidarity) about wages and conditions were abandoned as MSF closed the program and pulled out.

Humanitarianism, like conservation, is the big international scandal in Africa.

⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/6983914.stm>

⁵ See: keith harmon snow & Georgianne Nienaber, KING KONG: EXTRA! EXTRA! STOP THE MAINSTREAM PRESS!: Gorillas “Executed” Stories front for Privatization of Congo Parks, Truth of Depopulation Ignored,” <http://www.allthingspass.com/uploads/html-210Gorillas_Executed_Final_July30_2007.htm>.

GREASING THE GORILLA SKIDS

In the Virungas, Field Station Senior Staff, including the chief warden and financial managers, are appointed according to favors they can supply either to the ADG, ADT or Director Mwamba. “They are selectively and strategically appointed in areas and positions where they have easy access to finances and all logistical support and other facilities from funded projects—provided that they remember to report regularly to the bosses.”

It is in this capacity that Paulin Ngobobo, who is from the same village as the ADG Cosma Wilingula, and without any previous experience in National Park management, was appointed in the southern sector of the Virungas National Park—where the world recoiled in horror at the record number gorilla killings in recent months.

Anyone who read the regurgitated press releases of Wildlife Direct in the Washington Post or Newsweek will recall that ranger Ngobobo was touted by the mainstream Western media as the gentleman savior of the Virungas—silhouetted against the African sky, nattily attired in spit-and-polished uniform and boots.

Katembo charges that Mr. Ngobobo had other duties as well.

Evidently Ngobobo was tipped by the ADG to report straight to the board members in Kinshasa and ignore Katembo, whose role became that of protocol only. The same situation exists in Kahuzi Biega, “for the same reasons,” Katembo says: the top brass in Kinshasa, who benefit from connections with Western elite organizations and greased the skids for the conservation and humanitarian programs that do not serve Congo, have key gatekeepers positioned to insure that their self-serving agendas are met.

Mysterious wire transfers and money laundering round out the picture, leaving little room for the survival of the mountain gorilla. According to Katembo, a man named Djomo Ngumbi connects the old fashioned way via phone with the ADG in order to trade pin numbers attached to wire transfers using “Mistercash” or Western Union through regular ICCN finance channels. (Mistercash is an online money transfer method, developed with the support of Belgian banks.)

Additional eyebrow-raising ICCN behaviors include:

- [1] Issuing phony filming permits to international media and pocketing the cash;
- [2] Issuing contracts directly to communication networks for cash or favors;
- [3] Off-the books purchases of equipment and vehicles not disclosed to the public and/or without public tender.

Katembo charges that those who do the bidding of the big conservation and humanitarian NGOs from Europe, Japan and North America—are rewarded with exit visas and full tuition paid college educations for their children at top colleges in the donor countries. The end result is that expatriate agents of big conservation and the humanitarian misery industry open all the doors for the chosen few at the expense of the excluded many.

“Virunga National Park has a long tradition of being funded and supported,” said Katembo. “For example by the European Union, World Bank, USAID/CARPE, United Nations Development Program, UNESCO, all have been giving and helping in terms of conservation in Virungas. But if we look at the situation now, in 2007, we have to ask where have all the millions and millions gone? ICCN people in Kinshasa, where all these contracts are negotiated, have never been in the field, they don’t know anything about conservation. The members of the Western conservation clique go to Kinshasa and they charm the bosses. It is impossible to question a project after it has been approved in Kinshasa. You will find the Executive Director of ICCN driving a car that is beyond his budget and his salary. Pierre Kakule—the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund big chief from Tayna Conservation Area—has five cars in Goma and a mansion on Lake Kivu. You will find big gaps between what they earn and what you find in their houses. How do these people send their children to America? To Paris? To Yale or Harvard? It is the clique that intervenes now. They get a spokesman, a representative, a *bonafide* African voice, and in turn he will get gifts. Not a bicycle or a computer, but \$50,000 to build a house on Lake Kivu, or a scholarship for their sons and daughters. Everything is greased. The entire process of the application, for example, to an elite college—it’s all insured, it’s all organized for them, and they are protected.”

Regarding this allegation, we have photo documentation of Kakule’s mansion, having been initially tipped by a US embassy official as to its existence.

In other words, Dian Fossey was right when she charged in private correspondences that most money donated to her Digit Fund went directly into private coffers and shiny new vehicles for government officials.

Katembo charges that the same corrupt practices—what we call institutionalized white supremacy—are occurring with the hoardes of Western NGOs descending on war-torn Congo in search of contracts for “relief” and “post-conflict resolution.”

“There is money from Brussels for post conflict resolution,” says Katembo. “There is a lot of money for that. Soon we will have EU and USAID and UNESCO and UNDP and World Bank and Norwegian People’s Aid flags flying everywhere. Since January there have been five EU missions where consultants fly into Congo looking for “priority” projects. An expert comes in and says: ‘You need this, you need that, they target the money, they get the money, and when the money is gotten—then its time to eat—everyone comes together to divide up the money like hyenas at a kill. They bounce from donor to donor, you see them circling and circling, and whoever gets the money first you see all of them displaying the EU flag. Next time it will be USAID or the flag of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife. It’s the same culture with the humanitarian organizations. But they are not doing what Congo needs, and they don’t include Congolese people.”

We personally witnessed SUV’s from the Norwegian Refugee organization packing bar parking lots in Goma, but saw no evidence of them in the villages we visited, or along the roads through Virunga Park.

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

Carefully orchestrated conservation public relations pitches to the world revolve around seeming concern for the flora and fauna of the Virungas World Heritage Site, especially the mega fauna and

flagship species: the embattled and endangered mountain gorilla. But perhaps this public concern masks motives and manipulations from a more sinister master.

In a bizarre twist to a compelling story in which the truth shifts and shapes to fit the motivation of the tellers—big conservation from Western countries and their agents on the ground in Congo—the most recent investigation charges that the sensational gorilla killings of July 2007 were not due to the elusive “charcoal gatherers” fingered by Emmanuel Demerode of Richard Leakey’s Wildlife Direct and the UNESCO investigators flown in from Paris, nor were they due to the trade in infant gorillas or the bushmeat trade that, being the usual suspects, are forever indicting starving African people for their own miseries.

The real reason for gorilla killings may be as old as the soul of Africa—a quest as compelling as that for the Holy Grail—the acquisition of magic “gorilla sticks” fetching up to \$20,000. These gorilla sticks are reportedly used as walking sticks or canes for elder gorillas and elder chimpanzees, and according to the recent S.O.S. they are thought to hold supernatural powers. The question that goes hand in hand with the old gorilla walking cane story is why the existence of magic walking sticks has not been raised by either the Congolese rangers—who most certainly understand local customs—or the gorilla organizations that are quick to capitalize on and spread media and academic frenzy over the “tool-using” practices of great apes.

Why haven’t gorilla and chimpanzee primatologists reported on the tool-using capabilities that revolve around magic gorilla sticks?

Meanwhile, the regular Congolese army, in its supposed zeal to rid Virunga Park of an alphabet soup of militia—including Mai Mai, the Interahamwe and the Forces for the Democratic Liberation of Rwanda—not to mention villagers who only want to find a way to survive in the hell that has overcome North Kivu Province—has eaten anything and everything that moves. Virunga has become a “Ghost Park” in the words of the Congolese animal rights’ investigators.

To get these sticks the primate must be killed. According to the Congolese investigators the local militia and soldiers “are engaged in the dirty business.” After the ape is killed, the meat is either taken as a by-product of the kill or left to rot in the bush. Any orphan gorillas are left behind too.

The trade in rhino horn—coveted for its believed aphrodisiac qualities—has eliminated the White Rhino from Virunga and nearly completed the extermination in Garamba, another national park in the north of Congo. The power of the magic gorilla stick is even greater in a region where life and fate turn on a dime.

According to field reports and interviews conducted by independent Congolese investigators who gained the trust of village women by posing as gorilla smugglers, “the stick used by the big apes is supposed to carry magic power useful to protect someone in his job so that he can keep it as long as possible, he must be feared and [can] exert authority on the other workers.”

Local investigations independent of any NGOs or park authorities report that since January 3, 2007, eleven chimpanzees have been killed at Tongo and three mountain gorillas at Rumangabo, two sites in the Virungas landscape. Six of these chimps were reportedly killed on March 19, three on April

16, and two on June 16 by the forces under command of Congo's resident Rwanda-backed warlord General Laurent Nkunda.

Rubiga, the female mountain gorilla of the Kabirizi Group (family) was killed in Rumangabo on June 8. The baby, Ndakasi, left feeding at its breast was hauled off to Goma amidst much media attention by the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGF-I) wasted no time in issuing a press release about its own involvement in the "rescue."⁶

The Rumangabo location in the Virungas is noteworthy. We visited Rumangabo in February 2007, and the place was crawling with rangers affiliated with both ICCN and the Frankfurt Zoological Society. The FZS project is run by conservationist Robert Muir, and both projects are closely tied into Richard Leakey's "elite" Congo Rangers. The Rangers are either operating with rusty machetes or well-oiled machine guns: those who believe the story peddled on July 22 by the Washington Post's Stephanie McCrummen can buy the "rusty machete" descriptions; those who saw the photos supplied by Robert Muir have to place their bets on a well-trained and incredibly well-equipped mercenary army.

Rumangabo also has a sophisticated communications tower, well stocked food storage areas and, according to local investigators, a lively ongoing trade in gorilla and chimp orphans.

During the course of an investigation regarding the disposition of one baby gorilla, the investigative team brought an interpreter proficient in Kinyarwanda (Rwandan) to "Camp Vodo," a location a scant fifteen meters from the ranger station at Rumangabo.

Instead of one infant gorilla, the team found a two-month old and a four month old. Price was discussed. The two month old was being offered for \$3,000 US and a \$5,000 price tag with a special "discount" would nab the second gorilla. Investigators had a digital camera and suggested that their "buyer" would like a photo or two before the price was agreed upon, but "a man who had a soldier's attitude, but dressed in civilian clothes," prohibited any attempts at photo documentation.

The investigators recommended that the sellers come with the sting team to Goma to obtain the money for the gorilla, but the sellers and the military spokesman in civilian clothes opposed the plan. It was either turn over the money, or head out, since it was already getting dark and there is no twilight in this part of equatorial Africa. The Rwandan guide, doubling as interpreter, drove the group to a third dealer—this one a woman. The baby gorilla in her possession had a severe wound on its right thigh. The woman appeared to be in close collaboration with the soldiers whom she said would always provide her with as many gorillas as she wanted. The gruesome process was always the same—slaughter the mother, take the baby. The team suggested that the life of the proffered baby gorilla was in danger because of the severe wound, but the woman reassured the team that the baby was under the care of a veterinarian.

The woman then said she had another gorilla at a location eight kilometres away, but this one was older than the others, she said, and the team needed to choose which gorilla it wanted to purchase.

⁶ http://www.gorillafund.org/about/press_item.php?recordID=54

Refusing to buy sight unseen, the woman eventually produced a bag of hair and excrement that she said came from the older gorilla.

Investigators reported that the woman appeared confident and said she collaborates with a Ugandan businessman who often arrives in Kiwanja, a village in North Kivu province 10 miles west of the border, from Uganda. While in Kiwanja, the Ugandan teams up with a local businessman by the name of “Bahati” who is connected with a young man called “Kakule.” (We confirmed that this is not the Pierre Kakule of DFGF-I and the Mwami’s Tale “Henchmen and Heartbreak in the Heart of Darkness.”⁷)

A Rwandan businesswoman named Rose Musabuwera controls another network—she is a big provider to the gorilla trade, according to local insiders and investigators. This Madame of the gorilla trade is colourfully referred to as the “motor brain that nourishes the networks.”

When asked the source of the infant gorillas, “motor brain” said the babies are taken from a forest named BUKIMA, within Virunga Park and in collaboration with “armed soldiers.” When asked if any bushmeat was sold, she replied it was sold to the wives of soldiers being integrated into the ranks of the Congolese army at Rumangabo. This could possibly mean the Mai Mai troops or those of Laurent Nkunda. Wildlife Direct has a patrol post in this area, but seems surprisingly ignorant of this ongoing and public trade, and remains silent.

The Congolese investigative team identified the three-pronged “axis” of the trade route: [1] Sake to Goma; [2] Goma to Kiwanja and Rumangabo; and [3] Kibumba. Sake is 25 km from Goma, and Congolese army soldiers control this “axis” with support from MONUC.

Militia and regular Congolese army officers and soldiers are believed to be involved in the hunt for magic gorilla sticks. “All the network of the traders and their facilitators are at work in search for the magic sticks,” reported I.C.P.E. “This business has interested every social class including the responsible at every level as the price is very attractive and can go up to 20,000 U.S. dollars.”

The Kibumba route is especially porous, in spite of the number of check points erected on this main route through the Virungas. Kibumba is 30 km north of Goma, the site where some 300,000-350,000 Rwandan refugees were herded during the Rwandan genocide. Smugglers are either complicit with authorities or the guards at the roadblocks are accomplices. A motorcyclist told the team that he had transported baby gorillas in cardboard boxes on the Goma road, that is, the Kiwanja-Rumangabo route. He is paid by the hour and considers it “a good job.”

Whether or not one believes in the fantastic tales of magic gorilla sticks imbued with supernatural powers, or attributes the horrific loss of mountain gorillas in July 2007 to human greed, revenge or hunger, several key questions have still not been answered.

After all of the time, money, suffering and blood that have been poured into the World Heritage site known as Virunga National Park since Dian Fossey gave her life in 1985, why has the slaughter of mountain gorillas suddenly been escalated to a degree that Fossey herself did not witness?

⁷ Keith Harmon Snow and Georgianne Nienaber, KONG PART THREE: A Mwami's Tale: Henchmen and Heartbreak in the Heart of Darkness, <<http://www.allthingspass.com/journalism.php?catid=45>>.

Why haven't primatologists reported the use of walking sticks as tools by the aging patriarchs and matriarchs of the great apes? Why haven't the big primate protection organizations like Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and the Jane Goodall Institute and the Gorilla Organization reported the rise of the illegal trade in magic sticks that is reportedly behind the recent gorilla killings? This is the stuff mainstream media latches on to and spreads like plague.

Why did the recent spate of mountain gorilla killings begin in perfect coincidence with the January 2007 appearance of the mercenary forces known as Wildlife Direct? The same thing happened in Kenya when Richard Leakey organized mercenary forces there: elephants were slaughtered in record numbers. In a review of Leakey's book, Wildlife Wars The respected East African writes:

“When Leakey embarked on a full-scale war against elephant poachers, he was up against well-trained bandits from Somalia. He writes that everyone—the public, the rangers themselves, journalists and even the international press—were so afraid of the poachers that when he made the famous remark that he would invite the press to take snaps of dead poachers, he was seen by reporters as a sort of ‘Clint Eastwood character running amok in the savannah.’ ”

The mountain gorilla is not alone in paying the price for the Western “conservation” and “humanitarian” industry operations in Central Africa. With all the bloodshed, with all the killings come new markets for the Western charity/misery industry, new jobs for white expatriates, new sales of shiny new SUVs for Toyota and Nissan—and the ongoing devastation and death of Congolese people.

Congo today is a humanitarian disaster that makes the Titanic look like a speck in an ocean of blood. Magic gorilla sticks indeed. The people of Congo get the shaft, no matter how you look at it. It is no wonder the local sorcerers and marabouts need a little magic.