

Paris [75% of mountain gorillas were killed by poachers]

AFP, March 10, 1993

It was not until 1903 that the world learned of the existence of the giant primates who live in the Kahuzi and Virunga ranges straddling the borders of Rwanda, Zaire and Uganda.

Since then, 75 percent of the animals have been killed by poachers. The gorilla population has been estimated in recent years at 400 at the most.

Digit, a young male gorilla who over the years became friendly with Dian Fossey, was killed in 1977 by poachers who hunt the gorillas for their skulls and hands, which are sold to tourists as ashtrays.

Another male, Mrithi, who "acted" the role of Digit in a film made about Dian Fossey, was cut down by the war last May.

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund in Colorado, which financed the

Karisoke research project, is now placing its hopes on peace talks recently agreed upon by the rival sides in the civil war.

But Richard Block, the Fund's executive director, said they would "wait until a ceasefire and for reassurance that all sides will respect the sanctity of the research before returning", the report said.

"We don't want to make a huge investment in rebuilding Karisoke, if it's just going to get nailed again," Block was quoted as saying.

To save the gorillas, Dr. Jean-Jacques Petter of the French Museum of Natural History recently suggested capturing a small number of mountain gorillas to put them in quality national parks elsewhere.

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