

A new international programme for mountain gorillas and their habitat

Regular readers of *Oryx* will be well aware of the sound conservation work achieved by the Mountain Gorilla Project in Rwanda over the past 12 years. As a result of its efforts the gorillas are no longer attacked, the park boundaries are secure, gorilla-based tourism is one of Rwanda's highest sources of foreign exchange and there is broad support among local people for the park and its wildlife.

The Society was alerted to the plight of the mountain gorillas by the late Dian Fossey, who had been studying them for 11 years. Gorillas were being killed to make trophies out of their heads and hands, and in December 1977 poachers killed Digit, one of Dian Fossey's study animals. Dian Fossey wrote a distressed letter to the Society saying that this attack (on a gorilla in a group under a certain amount of protection) could signal the beginning of the end for the 200 or so that remained. Having raised £8000 for emergency anti-poaching work, the FFPS decided to set up the Mountain Gorilla Project to help Rwanda to guard the gorillas and the Parc National des Volcans.

The Society sent a mission to Rwanda to assess the situation and discuss with the Rwandan authorities, especially the Office of Tourism and National Parks, what needed to be done. The mission's recommendations formed the basis of the MGP, which for the last 12 years has been run by a consortium, the FFPS, the WWF and the African Wildlife Foundation. Today it is clear that the project's original aims have been achieved.

Gorilla numbers have increased from about 250 to almost 300 in the Virunga mountains, and are still increasing, but there are continuing problems with illegal poaching. Although the gorillas are no longer attacked directly there is a danger from illegal snares set for game. The Rwandan sector of the volcanoes is well protected; this is not the case for parts in Zaire and Uganda.

Conservation action must proceed until the gorillas are secure in their entire current range in the three countries. The FFPS is pleased to

report that the MGP is now evolving to address that task. At a meeting in Nairobi on the 7–8 February 1990 a delegation from the Government of Rwanda and members of the consortium of the MGP, including Roger Wilson for FFPS, unanimously agreed to set up a new International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP).

The huge success of the MGP was recognized and the Rwandan delegation reaffirmed the will of the government to conserve the remains of its natural resources and to maintain the activities started and developed by the MGP. The primary aim of the new programme is to protect the mountain gorilla and its habitat throughout its range. It was agreed that tourism, which supports this effort, must be developed in ways that do not jeopardize this aim.

The IGCP will be based in Rwanda and will continue to be supported by the consortium. The FFPS remains committed to this conservation approach and will have a continuing advisory role. It is also actively seeking additional funds to contribute to its success.

Editor.

A new move for bats

At the start of 1989 the Bat Project, started by FFPS in 1984, found a new home at The Vincent Wildlife Trust. There the project continued under a partnership agreement between the Nature Conservancy Council and the VWT. As the long-term future of the project remained uncertain, bat workers across Britain decided at a meeting in January 1990 that it was essential that the immense amount of bat conservation work still to be done needed a permanent base and structure. Regional representatives of the 75 local bat groups in Britain voted unanimously to set up a new membership organization under the umbrella of the Conservation Foundation. The Bat Conservation Trust will be launched in April 1990. Details from the Conservation Foundation, Lowther Lodge, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR.

Editor.