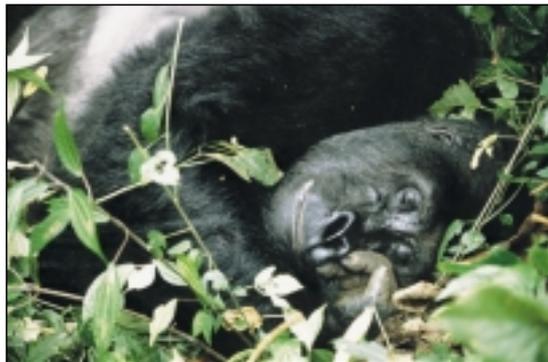


In the mid nineties, about 17,000 Eastern Lowland Gorillas were left. The majority lived in the 6000 ha-large Kahuzi-Biega National Park/DR Congo, which in 1981 was classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. There was a well functioning infrastructure and the park was looked after by the German Society for Technical Co-operation (GTZ). Four gorilla groups habituated to humans could be visited by tourists and there was a lot of research activity.

The war and problems resulting from this put a lot of pressure on this region over the last years. Refugee camps were built near the park border and rebels were hiding in the woods. Since the rangers had to give up their weapons during the war, they could not stop the growing illegal activities (poaching, deforestation) in the park area. By the middle of 2001, only 10% of the park was under the control of the authorities; the rest was occupied by military units.



Nindja taking a nap.

In 1999, there was alarming news of a drastic increase of human encroachment. Around 350 ha of forest in the National Park were illegally sold to 10 wealthy Congolese. This area lies on a road through the park and has now been completely deforested or burnt down to sell the wood and to open up agricultural land. Experts fear that this break is too big to ensure a sufficient, natural exchange of animals between the two park zones.

Poachers and persons responsible were not prosecuted.



Ninja, who was habituated to visitors, with his family.

Due to the political situation, tens of thousands of people had to be resettled in an agricultural zone near the park, which now houses 3000 persons per sqkm. Those people were previously defenders of the park but now they may have no other choice but to get their food and wood from the protected area.



Friendly Nindja was shot dead in 1998.

Gorilla meat was sold on the markets in such vast amounts that it even became cheaper than the meat of domestic animals. The gorilla groups habituated to tourists were split up, the silverbacks killed. Only a few females survived and transferred to other groups. Latest reports show that around **80% of the former gorilla population was killed** in Kahuzi-Biega during 1999-2000, mainly for their meat. The remaining population will probably be reduced just as rapidly.