

African park's mammals make a comeback

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Scientists say they believe several species of large mammals are recovering from a decade of civil war and poaching in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A recent wildlife census conducted in that nation's Virunga National Park revealed elephants and other species have increased in number since the last census.

Officials of the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation say the increase is due, in large part, to anti-poaching efforts of park guards who patrol the World Heritage Site at great personal risk.

"The results of the census are encouraging, and proof that protecting the park's wildlife can be done in the most turbulent conditions," said WCS researcher Deo Kujirakwinja.

Established in 1925, the park remains the most species-rich in Africa. The park's once abundant elephant population -- estimated at 4,300 during the 1960s -- had been reduced to only a few hundred by 2003.

Guards at the park receive only \$1 a month as a salary from the government, although that amount was recently increased to \$30 per month with U.N. funds.

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