

A conservation park ranger was killed during an attack by armed men this weekend in eastern Congo's Virunga National Park, the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation said on Sunday.

According to reports, Chief Brigadier Etienne Mutazimiza Kanyaruchinya, 48, was killed Saturday evening when 100 heavily armed men, presumed to be former members of the M23 rebel group, attacked a patrol post near the village of Bukima in Congo's North Kivu Province. The rest of the rangers fled unharmed.

The institute said it was the second attack in two weeks by the same group, which operates along the Rwandan and Ugandan borders and is trying to establish bases in the park. The previous attack was repelled by the Congolese military but several soldiers were killed.

Virunga Park is home to some of the world's last mountain gorillas, but armed groups such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, known by its French acronym FDLR, the Mai-Mai and the M23 regularly vie for control of eastern Congo's natural resources.

Earlier this year, gunmen killed six rangers. In addition to Kanyaruchinya, 22 rangers have been killed by armed groups in the park since last year, park spokesman Olivier Mukisya told The Associated Press.

Kanyaruchinya had been working with the institute for more than 25 years and left behind a wife and four children. The conservation institute said it will "spare no effort" to seek justice for him.