

Protection of a recently discovered population of bonobos and their habitat in the DR Congo

First report to the Woodtiger Fund

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Funding (80,000.00 USD) received in January 2010.
Report submitted by Terese Hart, project director
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In the proposal update submitted in December 2009, I stated that a final report for the first year of funding would be prepared seven months after the project was started. The grant was operational by the end of January 2010.

In this final report, we are pleased to report excellent progress on all objectives of the first proposal.

CONTEXT:

In this project period we were particularly anxious to protect the important population of the Congolese Great Ape, the bonobo, that lives along the southern forest border in Maniema province. When we discovered these previously unknown bonobos, we also discovered that they were being hunted for the commercial bushmeat market, along with all the other mammals in the forests of the Lomami Basin.

An urgent priority of this project was out-reach to the surrounding villages that can serve as caretakers to these bonobo forests. At the same time we had to reach the authorities at all levels : sector, territory, province and nation.

By the end of this project period we had prepared a proposal for a national park to be submitted to Maniema's provincial administration and the national Parks Administration (ICCN)

in Kinshasa. In addition, the two ethnic groups of Maniema Province affected by the park proposal, had held major traditional ceremonies to officially express their willingness to turn part of their lands into national park for bonobos. And local initiative was taken to arrest poachers that continued to hunt bushmeat inside the zone declared by the villages and provincial administration to be a local protected area until the national government could declare it a national park.

The progress is given in more detail with photo documentation below.

PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES :

a) Development of Project Base Camps in Villages of Maniema



A TL2 team walking into the village of Bafundo where we now have a permanent base.



A large camp used for commercial hunting found in the forests around Bafundo. This is why a permanent base is necessary – to allow monitoring of the hunting.

b) Lobbying. We have finally been able to work closely with both local village chiefs and the national parks institute (ICCN) to educate the population and work against illegal poaching. Together with these key collaborators we are giving a clear message for conservation and a call to create a national park in Maniema Province.



The ICCN warden (left) talks with a hunter about species that are totally protected and cannot be hunted. The fire was to burn forbidden colobus carcasses that the hunter had killed in the area of high bonobo density.



Village meeting in Olangate to discuss the future park.

c) Participatory delimitation. We worked with the communities to come to an agreement on the protected area: How big will it be? Whose land will be included? Three large traditional ceremonies were held that together included all the clans who are in anyway affected by the proposed protected area. Below is one of these “tambikos” held by the Bangengele ethnic group.



Village chiefs of the Bangengele ethnic group gather for a Tambikio ceremony which is a traditional rite essential to ceding land, in this case for the national park.

The ceremony which lasts two days starts with all the chiefs singing, clapping and dancing. Through their songs they speak for their villages.



The mayor of Maniema's capital city, Kindu, is a Mungengele and attended the ceremony. Everyone was delighted when he, too, stood up to sing and dance.



The official part of the ceremony was very solemn and occurred in the early morning. Locally made liquor was mixed with certain leaves and spat on the ground by each chief as he gave an incantation.

d) Buffer Zone projects are a very important way to win the hearts and minds of the people whose traditional lands will be included in the park. We had good fortune to be able to do some simple road repairs in the territory of both concerned ethnic groups of Maniema Province during the last six months.



Although the Wood Tiger fund did not pay for projects in the buffer zone it paid the salary of TL2 experts working in the communities which allowed us to accept USAID funds. USAID was impressed by our work and funded reparation of two roads to allow easier bicycle and motorcycle traffic.

On the left is a bridge before repair work.



The same bridge as above after it was repaired. In all twelve bridges were repaired along this road. Now travel by bicycle and motorcycle is easy and much quicker.

e) Monitor and control hunting.



A TL2 agent on the left explains to poachers in a forest camp why killing pigeons at a protected mineral lick is illegal. This is the second warning and he came with military to clear them out.

Skewers of smoked pigeons sit in the front of the picture.



The chief of the Bangengele (red shirt) stopped a merchant of illegal pigeons. She explains again the illegality. She is with the warden of ICCN (right) and TL2 workers (left). The whole load of pigeons was burned.



The most common way to carry most bushmeat (monkeys, antelope...) to market is on the back of a bicycle. Here, in June of this year, a bicycle merchant (or Tchondiste) is stopped and his load searched for totally protected species, such as bonobo.

During this project period of January-July 2009, great progress was made in the southern part of the protected area that the Woodtiger Fund supported. In fact so much momentum was generated that we feared that a national park could be declared in Maniema Province, leaving

out the northern half of the critical region (Orientale Province) entirely. We contacted one funder in Kinshasa that we thought could support an effort in Orientale, the German aid organization, GTZ. They sent a consultant to Maniema in May-June to see the progress that we have made. As a result they have promised to support work in the Orientale Province to allow us to start this August, 2010, the same process that has been successful in Maniema Province.

Although very glad that there is support to move conservation ahead in the north, we now are worried that as the momentum moves to Orientale Province, the initiatives that started so well in southern Maniema Province, may be neglected, our collaborators become discouraged and, worst of all, noting that the TL2 team is greatly reduced, hunters will think no one will notice and they will start poaching again, including the killing of bonbos.

We are therefore asking if Woodtiger Fund can help us – as soon as possible – to keep up conservation pressure and to strengthen conservation collaboration in the south of TL2 – in the Maniema province.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE SECOND PHASE :

a) Protect the area of highest bonobo density in Maniema Province. We built a base camp (one mud-wattle house and tents) near the area of highest bonobo concentration. This is part of the area that will eventually be in the national park and that surrounding villages have agreed to protect. We feel that it is urgent to maintain regular monitoring of the entire area as we know that hunting snares continue to be found. If we reduce the regularity of our observation patrols, it will be noticed immediately. We propose adding temporary (tent) camps and hiring local people to work with an experience TL2 team.

b) Continue to develop the new bases at Kakongo and Bafundo. Kakongo is in the buffer zone to the west of the future park and Bafundo is to the east of the future national park. We have been given by the Territory Administrator and the Sector Chief an abandoned Belgian way-house that we have fixed up to be our base camp at Bafundo. At Kokongo we have nothing but a tent camp. In order to discourage outside poachers, it is important that both of these camps be seen as permanent project sites that will eventually become ICCN guard posts when a national park is declared. We propose adding a mud-wattle house at Kakongo and hiring local people at both bases.

c) Expand conservation activities across the Lomami River (Kasai Oriental). Many of the poachers are not local people but rather come from different ethnic groups, often travelling a long way to set snare traps and kill monkeys. They smoke the carcasses right in the forest, and carry them to where they can be moved to market by bicycle. It is important that we have a good observation system and strong collaborators on the left bank of the Lomami River in Kasai Oriental.

d) Work closely with communities to define the borders of the national park to be. Through the traditional “tambiko” ceremony we have agreement for the national park, but now it is

essential that village chiefs accompany a team that includes TL2 workers and the national conservation institute (ICCN) to place markers along the proposed limits of the national park. We propose working two teams at a times one in the north (Balanga territory) and one in the south (Bangengele territory).

e) Submit a proposal for a national park to the Congolese parks agency. We have started working with the ICCN warden and provincial administration to write a “note technique”. This is the first stage of official legal declaration of a national park. We must maintain an active role in the process, as when we are absent other political priorities push the “note technique” to the background. We also propose that once this note is submitted, at the level of the national capital, we promote the next steps which mean moving it to the National Environment Minister and making it as much of a priority as possible. This we will do through our national office in Kinshasa (Terese is based in Kinshasa) in coordination with our Kindu office.

TIMELINE :

Objectives	2010					2011
	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Protect area of highest bonobo density						
Continue to develop new bases						
Expand conservation activities west						
Work with communities to define park borders						
Submit a proposal for a national park						

Note about timing: Ideally, the second phase would start as soon as possible. At the end of June many top employees were dismissed – end of contract. Our sincere hope is to bring back top people and keep the park process moving forward. We know that delays only mean loss of wildlife including bonobos.

BUDGET AND JUSTIFICATION :

Activity	Budget	Explanation
Protect area of highest bonobo density	20,000	Salaries for local hires, tents, compasses, GPS units, fuel for motorcycles, rations in field, medical supplies
Continue to develop new bases	15000	Salaries for local hires, building materials, rations to run bases, thurayas for communication
Expand conservation activities west	10000	2-day meeting in Kahodi with transport and rations for participants, funds for local collaborators
Work with communities to define park borders	20000	Per diem for missions along park limits, fuel for motorcycles, salary for 2 TL2 supervisors
Submit a proposal for a national park	15000	Salary for TL2 point people in Kindu and Kinshasa