

OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT

SUMMER UPDATE 2011

Epulu, Democratic Republic of Congo



THE MISSION OF THE OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT is to conserve the okapi in the wild while preserving the biological and cultural dynamics of the Ituri Forest. The okapi is an endemic species of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is the national conservation symbol of the country. As a flagship species, the okapi serves as an ambassador representing the incredible diversity of species found in the region. The objective of the GIC Okapi Conservation Project is to protect the natural forest systems of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR -13,769 km²) by supporting and equipping government wildlife rangers; providing training and infrastructure development to improve protection of wildlife and habitats; assisting and educating communities to create an understanding of sustainable resource conservation; and by promoting alternative agricultural practices and food production in support of community livelihoods.

Greetings from the Okapi Conservation Project in Epulu and at White Oak Conservation Center. We are pleased to be able to share news about the okapi and the Project with our partners and supporters.

This year marks the twenty fourth year of the Okapi Conservation Project (OCP) in the Ituri Forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Much has changed following years of civil unrest and the country is making strides to rebuild infrastructure and stabilize the region. For the Project too, we have expanded our partnership with the Institute in Congo for Conservation of Nature (ICCN) to support the work of the wardens and rangers through key capacity building and infrastructure projects. This work, including two recent projects funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service has provided significant resources for ICCN and strengthened their ability to manage the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and protect wildlife (see report details).

Ivory poaching in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve continues to be the greatest challenge for ICCN wardens and rangers. Rangers on forest patrol must be ever vigilant to the great peril of encountering heavily armed elephant poachers and firefights are not uncommon. The recent arrest of soldiers transporting ivory through the Reserve poignantly illustrated the depth of the organized network now involved with illegally poaching and selling ivory in the DR Congo. Our programs to support ICCN and wildlife protection are critical to sustaining the important elephant populations living in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.



Our zoo partners in the Okapi EEP and Okapi SSP play an important role in the operation of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, enabling the OCP programs and directly helping the rangers and their families. Zoos have a unique opportunity to tell the story of the okapi and raise awareness of the importance of the Ituri Forest and the work and efforts you support. We are grateful for your continuing donations to the Okapi Conservation Project and for your efforts to grow and sustain the Okapi SSP and Okapi EEP, introducing millions of people around the world to the wild and mysterious okapi and its wonderful forest home.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Shurter'.

Steve Shurter, White Oak Conservation Center International Programs



Don't forget to visit us on
Facebook, or our blog, and share your okapi thoughts and wisdom.



Okapi Global Conservation

The Okapi Conservation Project (OCP) is pleased to share updates of our work with our partners. We plan to publish this newsletter twice each year, and of course will continue to send out the Project's Annual Report every year. You may also visit us on our Facebook page (<http://ow.ly/1AO8T>), blog (<http://ow.ly/2IiJu>) and Twitter account (<http://twitter.com/@okapiproject>), all dedicated to the Okapi Conservation Project. Please check out the photos, videos, and posts and become a friend of the okapi!



🦋 A joint international meeting of the Okapi SSP and Okapi EEP will take place in Jacksonville, Florida on November 8th - 11th, hosted by the Jacksonville Zoo. Okapi Conservation Project personnel will be attending the meeting and all attendees are invited for an afternoon at White Oak Conservation Center for a tour of our okapi management facilities.

Congratulations to the following OCP zoo partners which celebrated successful okapi births thus far in 2011:

Frankfurt Zoological Society	Male calf	February
Brookfield Zoo/ Chicago	Female calf	April
Wilhelma Zoo/ Stuttgart	Male calf	May
Rotterdam Zoo	Male calf	June
Bronx Zoo/ New York	Female calf	June
Antwerp Zoo	Male calf	July



🦋 The Okapi Conservation Project (OCP) is pleased to continue to share project news and updates of our work in the Ituri Forest. The OCP Facebook page now has over 900 friends and we are regularly publishing reports, photos and videos put together by Project staff in Epulu. We are excited to announce the initiation of the Okapi Conservation Project website in the coming weeks, with unique photos and information about okapi and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. Be sure to visit at www.okapiconservation.org and give us your feedback.

🦋 The Okapi Conservation Project continues to work with Ebay's Global Giving to raise funds for specific projects including preventing slash and burn agriculture through agro-forestry practices and helping to address bush-meat hunting by protecting wildlife in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.

🦋 Through our partners at the Wildlife Conservation Network we were able to secure a grant to study the wild population of okapi in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. Working together with Cardiff University (UK) PhD student Dave Stanton, DNA samples will be obtained and analyzed from wild okapi (feces) living in the Reserve. The study will serve to evaluate the population dynamics and densities of the okapi and provide a basis for evaluating okapi populations in other forests in the DR Congo.



White Oak Conservation Center had the distinct opportunity to host Joel Sartore, author and renowned National Geographic photographer. Mr. Sartore took time from his busy schedule to spend a few days at the Center photographing some of the unique wildlife, including the okapi. Keep a look out for possible future articles and photos by Mr. Sartore, including unique wildlife portraits for which he is well known.



Okapi Conservation Project Highlights

The Director of the Okapi Conservation Project is Rosmarie Ruf, a Swiss national who has been working with Project since its inception in 1987. She works closely with Assistant Director and Education Program Coordinator Marcel Enckoto, and Eleme Mutahinga who serves as the Project Personnel Manager and Accountant. There are currently 46 full time workers, 17 part time workers and 45 Mbuti pygmies who gather the daily leaf diets for the managed okapi in Epulu.



As the Okapi Conservation Project Education team continues to develop their program, they now focus on northern sector of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. This remote portion of the Reserve is very difficult to reach with nearly impassable roads (only navigable on foot or bicycle). The focus in 2010 and 2011 is to work with customary chiefs to help them form community conservation committees. The OCP agro-forestry and education teams work along with ICCN rangers to inform the local communities of the importance of wildlife and forest conservation and encourage their participation in control of natural resource exploitation. The agro-forestry component assists the communities with techniques that improve subsistence farming methods. The northern region has extensive populations of people many who are dependent upon the forest for their livelihoods. The improved dialogue through the conservation committees provides an arena for sharing information, for improving livelihoods and partnering with communities to reduce human related threats to the the Ituri Forest.

In the first quarter of 2010 the OCP education team worked with the ICCN community conservation team to evaluate the community conservation committees in the northern sector towns of Wamba (right) and Watsa. The committees are provided with resources such as information booklets and flyers, and technical support in areas such as agro-forestry and school rehabilitation, as well as bicycles and basic office supplies to help them travel and distribute information throughout their constituencies. This program is financed by a grant from UNESCO in support of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve World Heritage Site.





Five conservation committees were initiated in Wamba (57 participants) and Mungbere (28 participants) in 2010. The education team's recent mission conducted an evaluation of the effectiveness of the conservation committees. Three of the committees had done a good job of internal organization, rehabilitating school infrastructure, and agricultural tasks and will now also focus on curbing illegal activities associated with the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. Leadership problems with the other 2 committees were resolved and efforts will now be focused on getting them up to speed. The committees suggested they would like regular contacts with ICCN leadership to help their progress and to conduct special lobbying with military officials based nearby in the city of Isiro to help solve poaching problems.

During the last 3 years, the Okapi Conservation Project has been working to empower local people in the Ituri region and is internationally recognized for our efforts. The Project's work focuses on training and providing more than 62 women with knitting and sewing material (*below left*), improving community agriculture, supporting soccer teams, and providing educational tours for the group at the okapi breeding facility in Epulu.


Embroidery (*below, right*) produced by the women has been distributed to orphans in the towns of Mambasa, Niania and Wamba. Vegetables were grown and distributed among association members and more than 10 women are now able to make a living from tailoring. The Okapi Conservation Project women's soccer team won tournaments in Niania and Mambasa and women are able to disseminate conservation messages during the soccer matches (*below, center*)



 The OCP continues to build upon the powerful film media and recently produced a film clip on the impact of mining in the Mongwalo sector (outside the OWR). The film will be used in education programs to illustrate the destructive techniques and poor working conditions associated with mining in the region. Additional education materials were produced and distributed including the 2011 wildlife calendars, as well as a Wildlife of the Ituri poster soon to be printed and distributed. Radio programs with conservation messages were again produced for stations in the towns of Mambasa, Bunia, Nepoko and Wamba.

 The OCP agroforestry team planted new varieties of cassava (manioc) of the Liyayi variety which are disease free and received very good yields of 50 tons per hectare. The team also distributed 400 kg of rice seed and 325 kg of peanut seeds to participating farmers to start their crop production. The team was also active monitoring the demonstration gardens in the nearby towns of Bapukeli, Ekwe, Molokai, and KeroZanzibar and a new community garden was started in the town of Ekulungu. The OCP agroforestry program was formally recognized by the government seat in Bunia to facilitate landscape level agroforestry projects and the OCP teams may now also work in towns outside the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. *(right, drying cassava in Bapukeli)*



 The Project's medical dispensary continues to treat families of the rangers and people living and working in Epulu. In the first quarter 1075 cases were treated by the OCP nurses including malaria, parasites, burns, trauma, and child births. Nurse Bavangala also recently participated in a training program at the hospital in Nyankunde.




 There are 13 okapi in Epulu at this time and all seem to be well. Project staff continues to provide fresh cut browse for the okapi and their daily diet usually includes 30 or more leaf species fed daily and up to 30 kg per animal per day. The browse is freshly gathered by a team of skilled Mbuti pygmy leaf cutters who range through the nearby forest to supply the captive okapi with their daily fare.



photo by LuAnne Cadd



photo by LuAnne Cadd



photo by Molly Feltner

Okapi Wildlife Reserve - Institute in Congo for Conservation of Nature (ICCN)

The ICCN Okapi Wildlife Reserve is managed by ICCN Director J.J. Mapilanga with the help of Conservator Principal (Warden) Gishlain Somba. They oversee the 110 ICCN Okapi Wildlife Reserve Rangers and manage the wildlife protection and security in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, and work in close partnership with the Okapi Conservation Project with the community conservation program.



During the first quarter of 2011 Okapi Wildlife Reserve rangers made 279 patrols representing 777 ranger days covering 58,484 km, mostly on foot. During the patrols the rangers arrested 13 poachers and 17 miners and released 67 hunters and 64 miners. They confiscated 5 guns, 4 pieces of ivory, 28 shovels and 3 gold extraction machines. While on patrol rangers saw 2 okapi, 5 forest elephants and 19 chimpanzees.

ICCN Okapi Wildlife Reserve Assistant Warden Gishlain Somba and Patrol Team Leader Dugira Abaka (right) graduated from the Southern African Wildlife College wildlife conservation management courses in December 2010. Dugira and Somba each reported that the course was valuable for them and are busy working with their ranger colleagues in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and sharing their new-found knowledge and conservation management techniques. As a result Somba was recently promoted and currently serves as the Principal Warden of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. This valuable training opportunity was made possible through a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife Without Borders program, with support from the Southern African Wildlife College and White Oak Conservation Center.



The Okapi Conservation Project completed work on the construction of permanent ranger housing (right) at the Zunguluka Patrol Post located on the main road of the eastern border to the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. This patrol post is a critical entry and exit point for all vehicle and pedestrian traffic through the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, as well as a base for forest patrols in the eastern portion of the Reserve. This project was made possible through a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service African Elephant Fund.



Okapi Wildlife Reserve rangers recently arrested soldiers traveling in an SUV through the Reserve, carrying 160kg of ivory in suitcases (representing 10 forest elephants killed). An undercover investigation revealed the soldiers conducted the ivory transaction with an elephant poacher in the town of Mambasa. The group was subsequently apprehended as they attempted to transport the ivory back to their base in Kisangani. The ivory was confiscated but the soldiers were released following the intervention of Kisangani military officials. The incident illustrates the very complex and high level network involved with ivory poaching in the DR Congo. The ICCN conservators, rangers and local officials involved with the investigation and arrest are to be commended for their work and bravery.



Distribution of bikes to Wamba CLSCNs members



Molokay community field devastated by elephants; afterwards we changed field location



Participation in Melebe agricultural zone inauguration

The staff working for the Okapi Conservation Project and ICCN continues to dedicate their lives to the important conservation work at hand. The Ituri Forest is a stronghold for okapi, elephants, chimpanzees and myriad other species, all dependent on the protection of ICCN. In addition to our support for wardens and rangers working to protect the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, we continue to invest in the various programs of the Okapi Conservation Project working with communities in the region to create awareness and engage them in wildlife conservation activities.



We are extremely grateful to the zoos participating with the Okapi SSP and the Okapi EEP for your unflinching support of these great programs, for the conservation of the okapi and to safeguard their incredible home in the Ituri Forest.

We would like to express our thanks to the zoos of the global okapi conservation community who have contributed to the Okapi Conservation Project thus far in 2011.

Cheyenne Mountain Zoo
Columbus Zoo and Aquarium
Copenhagen Zoo
Koln Zoo
Leipzig Zoo
Lowry Park Zoo
North of England Zoological Society

Saint Louis Zoo
Sedgwick County Zoo
Zoo Miami
Zoological Garten Berlin
Zoological Parc de Beauval
Zoological Garden Wuppertal

Theo Westenberger Estate
AAZK Columbus Chapter
Deborah Ames
Beagle Foundation
Heather Carpenter
Jane Eads
Susan Ford
Matthew Geske
Global Giving
Kathryn Goldsmith
Shereen Gunn
Connie Harlan
Barbara Jones

Lori Monska
Danessa Morrow
Joy Pietkiewicz
Julie Ream
Tom Sachs
Cheryl Speer
Donna Stevenson
US Fish and Wildlife Service
UNESCO
Marsha Vaughn
Kelly Vineyard
Wildlife Conservation Network
Wildlife Conservation Society

A sincere thanks to Okapi Conservation Project donors who provided significant support in 2011.



If you would like to support the work of the Okapi Conservation Project, please contact us at
info@okapiconservation.org
or write to us at

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www.okapiconservation.org