



**OKAPI**  
CONSERVATION  
PROJECT

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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# MISSION

*To conserve the okapi in the wild, while preserving the biological and cultural diversity of the Ituri forest*

2021

## PROJECT STAFF

**President (US):** John Lukas

**On-Site Director (DRC):** Rosmarie Ruf

**Accountant (DRC):** Mutahinga Mumbere Eleme

**Asst. Accountant (DRC):** Kambale Katsuva Julien

**Program Manager (DRC):** Nsafuansa Disiki Berce

**Program Officer (US):** Lucas Meers

### AGROFORESTRY

- Muvi Yalala
- Enckoto Bameseto
- Makubuli Mwanika
- Masiyiri Mulawa
- Mpinda Tchinkunku
- Muhindo Muliwavyo
- Kasereka Tsongo
- Sambu Mukandilwa
- Lobo Lina
- Nandepa Pierre
- Bangeto Therese

### EDUCATION

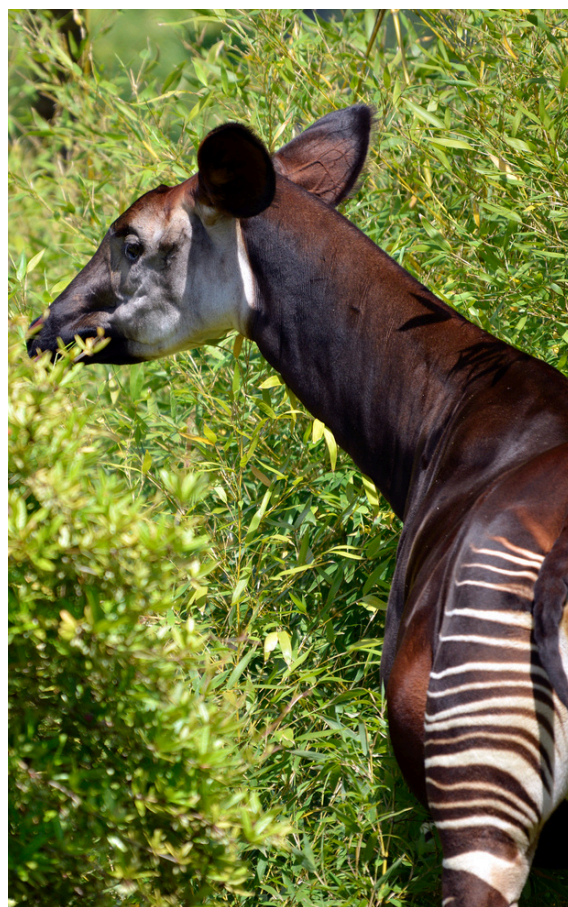
- Jean Paul Mmonga Kiete
- Gomo Akya
- Kasereka Kyove
- Mumbere Kayenga
- Toliba Maseko
- Carine Makonga
- Ozande Roger
- Sivunana Eric
- Kambale Mastaki
- Faustin Mbuza
- Abdoul Arim Kimakima

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- Mbete Nguma
- Kababo Mutubule
- Panga Madro
- Sagbolo Yuma
- Paluku Kakule
- Mbusa Mughanda
- Muhindo Maliro
- Vusike Kiruzi
- Kasereka Katsuva
- Katsuva Kaposu
- Yangunapayi Makasi
- Abdala Morisho
- Baya Gbama
- Alezo Drudo

### HEALTH CARE

- Mulowayi Katalayi
- Anzatepedanga
- Mbambu Mituho
- Yokudhu Alipa Franck



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# LETTER FROM JOHN

## **PRESIDENT, OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT**

Working to conserve okapi in DRC for over three decades has taught us that the unexpected is the norm in this country. The number of armed insurgent groups continues to increase in the mineral rich eastern DRC with many national and international groups financially benefitting from the illegal trade in rare minerals and ivory. We are fortunate that the ICCN ecoguards and the military government of Ituri Province has kept the militia groups away from the Reserve and allowed for OCP staff to travel to reach as many villages as possible in and around the Reserve to provide support of their needs through our education and assistance programs detailed in this report.

Traveling by road to towns in the East has become too risky as attacks on vehicles occur weekly. To obtain funds from our bank and purchase supplies and

materials we share air charters with WCS so that staff can safely travel to and from Epulu. This has significantly increased our operating costs as air travel in DRC is very expensive. We are very thankful to all our supporters especially Tusk Trust and the Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund which provided funds to keep staff employed during the downturn of the Pandemic.

The ICCN ecoguards, under the leadership of a director employed by WCS and an ICCN assistant director, provide the security so OCP can operate and provide our conservation outreach to as many stakeholders as we can. As restrictions limiting public gatherings were lifted, our educators traveled far and wide to engage with community members face-to-face in their schools, fields and homes to encourage sustainable lifestyles that protect forests and okapi.

To help the ecoguards and their families stay healthy, OCP provides medical care at our clinic in Epulu and at 20 rural clinics around the Reserve. Trekking for 20 days through the forest takes a toll on the ecoguards and staying healthy and







strong allows them to maintain a conservation presence in the most remote areas of the Reserve deterring poachers and evicting miners. Special thanks to Fondation Segré for supporting the rangers and funding the construction of a guest house in Mambasa where ecoguards and OCP staff can rest as they make their way to different assignments in the North of the Reserve.

I cannot say enough of the dedication and fortitude of our staff and the ecoguards, the conditions they work in are some of the most difficult and dangerous in the world for those trying to protect the world's natural treasures for all people to experience. Without your support these treasures are at risk of being lost forever. Thank you from all the teams of conservationists in DRC for giving them the means to protect their natural heritage for future generations.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John Lukas".

John Lukas, President  
Okapi Conservation Project





# INCREASING FOOD SECURITY PROTECTS FORESTS

With the distribution of over 70,000 tree seedlings, the OCP agroforestry program accomplished another productive year in 2021. Agroforestry trees, fertilizer (nitrogen-fixing) trees, fruit, and nut trees as well as trees to provide shade and support for wildlife corridors were dispersed at the five program sites (Epulu, Mambasa, Niania, Biakato, and Wamba) along with tools and other resources. The participation of over 700 farmers in 2021 learned how to successfully increase soil fertility and crop yields, thus reducing encroachment of farmland into old-growth forest.

Rice, peanut, and bean seeds were provided to over 500 farmers from seeds collected and contributed back to the nursery by participating farmers and purchased by OCP. A total of 370 vegetable gardens were set up across all five villages to support over 400 families. These gardens produce cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes, carrots, celery,

leeks, green peppers, and eggplants, further contributing to community health and food security.

These efforts were made possible with funding support from Cheyenne Mountain Zoo. The celebration of Tree Day this November assembled 220 primary school children to plant 494 seedlings and learn about the importance of forest conservation.

Our agroforestry team continued to collect footage of Nembongo, a wild okapi that began visiting a bean field in 2020. When local farmer Mr. Gelo noticed the frequent visitor, he worked with the OCP agroforestry and education teams to set up camera traps to monitor the okapi and in turn, OCP provided additional crops and compensation for any crops lost to the okapi. Mr. Gelo represents many of our participating farmers who are passionate about protecting the okapi's rainforest home through sustainable agriculture methods.



Tomatoes grow easily and help diversify diets

SHOT ON S15



ICCN ecoguard plants a tree with a student for Tree Day celebrations.



# ICCN ECOGUARDS PROTECT THE FORESTS OF THE RESERVE

The Institute in Congo for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) is the government authority tasked with protecting the wildlife and protected areas of DR Congo. Since OCP's inception, we have worked under a Contract of Collaboration with ICCN to implement our conservation programs supporting communities and conservation of the forest, and beginning 2019, ICCN has operated the Okapi Wildlife Reserve in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society.

ICCN ecoguards patrol the Reserve, often spending 20 or more days per month in the forest removing snares, expelling miners, arresting poachers and documenting key wildlife species including okapi, forest elephants and chimpanzees.

The ecoguards are recruited from nearby villages, so they understand the environment and the needs of the people. The Reserve recruited, trained and welcomed 59 new ecoguards in 2021 bringing the total number of ecoguards to 253, including nine women and six Mbuti. We expect the increase in ecoguards provides more frequent patrols and a more secure Reserve as poaching, wildlife trade, and illegal mining are reduced.



This year for World Ranger Day on July 31st the Okapi Wildlife Reserve with support from OCP commemorated the ecoguards who gave their lives in service of protecting the forest. OCP is immensely grateful for those that have, and are willing to risk their lives protecting okapi, and we continue to provide support for the families of fallen ecoguards in hopes to reduce the burden on their families.



# HEALTHCARE IS A CRITICAL NEED IN THE REGION

In February, with support from the Wildlife Conservation Network, OCP hired local carpenters to construct 120 bed frames. These bed frames, along with 120 mattresses and other basic medical supplies, were sent to 20 rural health centers across the Ituri and Haut-Uélé provinces.

These beds improve the capabilities of the maternity wards in each of the centers, providing a safer and more sanitary environment for delivering babies. They also open the door for communication between OCP and community leaders, local chiefs, and the indigenous Bantu, Efe, and Mbuti populations in the area. These connections lead to opportunities that benefit the community and protection of the okapi.

We can provide agricultural and educational support through our respective programs and work with leaders to understand their communities' needs to limit the impact humans have on the surrounding Ituri Forest.

With conditions making it almost impossible to use trucks to deliver these beds and supplies to health centers, M'monga and his team had to think of a new solution. It was determined that the only way these beds are getting delivered is by using motorbikes. Motorbikes are better able to navigate the muddy terrain of roads and can maneuver around the large trucks that are often stuck in the middle of the tract. The team, along with a small fleet of hired motorbike drivers, loaded up bed frames and mattresses, two to a bike, and set off to fulfill their mission.



Each motorbike carried two bed frames and mattresses to the rural health clinics.



Over 20 days OCP delivered all 120 beds. These weary travelers were overjoyed to be met with appreciative nurses and village leaders, who endorsed OCP's effort and reaffirmed their commitment to protecting the okapi and the forest home they share.

These 20 health centers are now all successfully outfitted with all 120 beds and improved maternity wards.

The Okapi Dispensary, where we added a new wing in 2019 (left building in photo), has a staff of eight, with four added just in 2021, served over 4400 patients during the year, and tens of thousands more were treated at the centers all around the Reserve. In 2022, we plan to renovate the old wing (right in photo) to bring that building up to the same quality as the new wing.



The Okapi Dispensary, located in Epulu, is operated by the Okapi Conservation Project.







# THE FIRST PROTECTORS OF THE FOREST

Considered the ‘first protectors of the forest’, the indigenous Mbuti have resided in the Ituri forest for hundreds of generations, uniquely able to maintain their distinct culture and traditions. As nomadic sustenance hunter-gatherers, they take only what they need with great respect for nature. Frequent migration within the forest allows their hunting grounds to remain sustainable, allowing previous locations wildlife and plants to repopulate resulting in a symbiotic relationship between the Mbuti and the forest. The Mbuti take great pride in their ability to navigate and protect their forest home, making them OCP’s front line allies in the protection of the Ituri Forest and critical okapi habitat.

OCP continues to incorporate indigenous knowledge into our conservation initiatives and programs including Team Okapi, a collaborative group of OCP staff, ICCN ecoguards, and indigenous Mbuti that deploy

camera traps to collect images and videos of okapi and other forest wildlife.

The Okapi Dispensary in Epulu, which is run by OCP, provides free healthcare for Mbuti that is mindful of traditional practices, including providing open-air fire pits for overnight stay. Each year, OCP celebrates World Okapi Day and International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples where Mbuti share presentations highlighting their cultural and generational knowledge and deep connection to the forest. In 2021, OCP educators spent time with chiefs from many Mbuti tribes to record an oral history to be translated into several local languages (Swahili, French, and Lingala) and broadcast across five radio stations reaching the over 50,000 residents throughout the region. The broadcasts aired during the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples and were met with an outpouring of support and interest from community members in the Mbuti culture.



Mbuti participating in the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples.

# WORLD OKAPI DAY REACHES THOUSANDS

The cheers and songs of celebration were heard around the Reserve on October 18th as eight villages celebrated World Okapi Day in 2021. There are few days as exciting around the Reserve as this one. We estimate over 15,000 people participated in the celebration recognizing their national animal and the namesake of the Reserve.

In 2021, two more villages were included in the festivities, Dingbo and Ndyue, thanks to the generosity of our zoo sponsors. These villages are critical for our outreach, as they are population centers where it is important to reach the communities with information about okapi and our programs.

The day began with crowds gathering to hear chiefs and leaders in each of the eight villages speak on the importance of okapi and protecting the forest for the benefit of the animals and people. We were thrilled by the outpouring of support from community leaders, and the presence of Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR) Chief Warden, Tom Muller, along with our very own Program Director Rosie Ruf, brought a massive crowd to Epulu. In Nduye, local chiefs from neighboring villages joined the celebrations along with ecoguards stationed in each village.



Mbuti participating in World Okapi Day in Epulu.



Jean Kamana, Chief of Epulu Village speaking at World Okapi Day





Women's Group posing for a photo in wearing World Okapi Day shirts

In Mungbere, the local Police Commander gave an endearing speech on his passion for nature conservation. In Watsa, we were happy to have the territorial administrator make an appearance to discuss the importance of protecting the okapi's rainforest home despite a physical disability making travel difficult for him. Having an official held in such high regard speak on conservation left a lasting impact on attendees. As the presentations came to a close, the street processions began. The crowd marched through each village spreading their excitement through music and cheer and grew larger as more and more people joined the parade.

Football is the preferred sport of the Reserve and the national sport of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The football matches were played by the women's groups in each village, and for the first time, Mbuti players were included on the teams.

Both teams, winning or losing, received cash prizes that they use to supplement their family's income. Children participated in races, with first, second, and third receiving corresponding levels of funding to cover their school fees and uniforms. During the award ceremonies and celebrations that close out the day, the Mbuti share their traditional dances and songs, sharing their culture and history of their relationship with the forest, and their cultural and spiritual relationship with okapi.

Special thank you to our zoo sponsors for each of the villages:

- Antwerp Zoo - Epu
- Dallas Zoo - Watsa
- Roosevelt Park Zoo - Wamba
- Chester Zoo - Niania & Mungbere
- Jacksonville Chapter of the American Association of Zookeepers - Dingbo
- Sacramento Zoo - Mambasa
- Rotterdam Zoo - Nduye

# WOMEN ARE CRITICAL FOR CONSERVING FORESTS

Women living in this region of the world have a close relationship with the forest, utilizing it for the collection of food, timber, medicinal plants and other resources. This makes women one of the most important stakeholders in conservation, yet they are often marginalized and excluded from decisions made within their communities. OCP supports the empowerment of women through five women's groups strategically located across the Reserve supporting over 260 women. The evolution of these groups is firmly based on collaboration with local women to address improving livelihoods, stewardship of natural resources, and empowering their voices within the community.

OCP-supported women's groups help generate independent, sustainable income and provide a supportive space for women to convene, share their needs and concerns, and work together to produce items and crops to sell. Women can approach opportunity gaps with increased economic independence and community support.

In 2021, we celebrated the grand opening of the Epulu Women's Center, kindly funded by a Wildlife Conservation Network donor. On International Women's Day in March, Rosmarie Ruf, OCP's In-country Director handed over the newly constructed center to the Epulu women's group. The building provides an enclosed, secure space with ample room for sewing machines, work tables, and storage of materials. OCP staff observed the women's centers in Epulu and Mambasa promote engagement, confidence, leadership and action within their communities. Funding from Tusk Trust also supported the construction of a new outdoor pavilion next to the Mambasa Women's Center so the women have the option to continue working outside in pleasant weather. OCP regularly receives acknowledgment letters from women's groups for the benefits the centers have provided. In the coming years, OCP hopes to secure funding to construct two additional buildings for the Women's Groups in Wamba and Niania.



Niania women's group at a community garden.



Women generally meet twice per week to produce items to sell in the local markets to generate income, including school uniforms, women's clothing, masks, napkins, and embroidery. Each woman contributes money each month to a shared Village Savings and Loan Agreement (VSLA) account which is managed by the women's group lending committee of eight democratically elected individuals. Funds in the VSLA are used to support all women in the group as needed.

With the support of the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden and supplemental crowdfunding, OCP was able to provide 12 women's group members from Epulu, Mambasa, Niania, Wamba and Mungbere to attend a 3-week workshop on embroidery, sewing and related skills led by expert seamstresses that focused on increasing quality and diversifying the products the women can make.

After the training, the women shared the new techniques they acquired with their respective groups. These types of alternative income generation

opportunities can provide women with sustainable income not dependent on activities that may be destructive to forest habitat.

OCP educators regularly attended meetings to collaborate with women on their goals and give presentations on biodiversity, sustainable stewardship, okapi conservation, and other OCP conservation initiatives and programs. These sessions are followed by in-depth, respectful discussions where women have the opportunity to express their opinions, share concerns, and ask questions. These meetings further serve as an opportunity for women to broaden their participation across OCP programs and adopt leadership roles in their respective communities.

Women are empowered to be active advocates of the forests they rely upon and act as role models for their children, the future generations of forest stewardship.

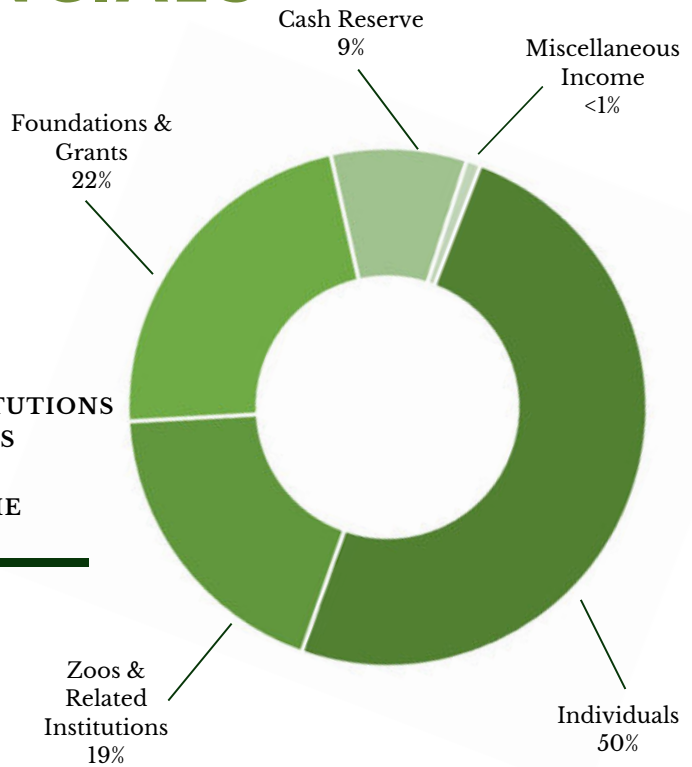


# 2021 FINANCIALS

## REVENUE

\$438,956	INDIVIDUALS
\$166,240	ZOOS & RELATED INSTITUTIONS
\$198,300	FOUNDATIONS & GRANTS
\$76,000	CASH RESERVE
\$7,916	MISCELLANEOUS INCOME

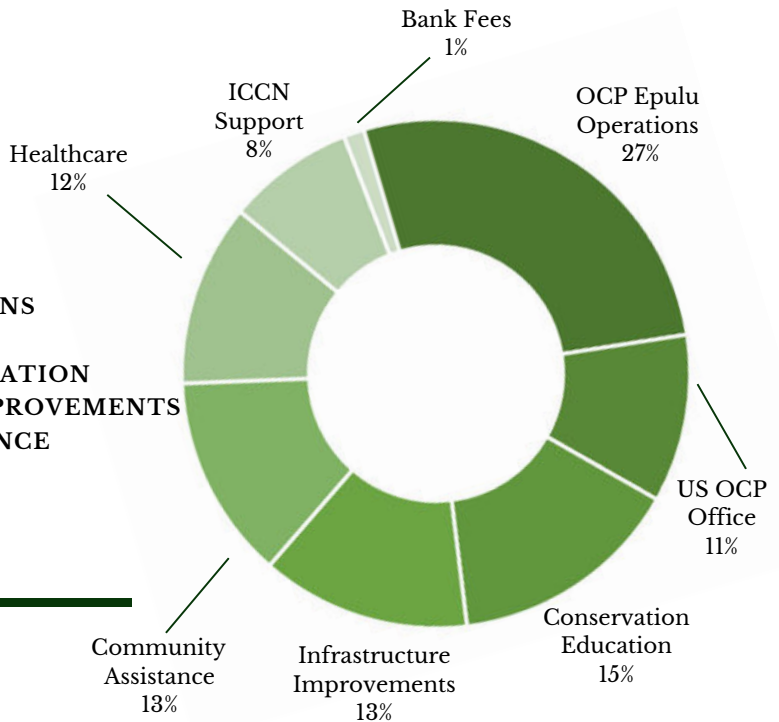
**\$887,412 TOTAL**



## EXPENSES

\$240,601	OCP EPULU OPERATIONS
\$94,832	US/OCP OFFICE
\$131,581	CONSERVATION EDUCATION
\$118,259	INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS
\$115,277	COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE
\$102,991	HEALTHCARE
\$72,000	ICCN SUPPORT
\$11,483	BANK FEES

**\$887,024 TOTAL**









# DONORS & SUPPORTERS

## ZOOS & RELATED INSTITUTIONS

AAZK - Jacksonville	Houston Zoo	Stichting Wildlife
AAZK - Memphis	Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens	Ueno Zoo
Antwerp Zoo	Maryland Zoo at Baltimore, The	Wilhema Zoo
Beauval Nature Foundation	Mulhouse Zoological & Botanical	Wroclaw Zoo
Bioparc de Doué-la-Fontaine	Garden	Wroclaw Zoo Foundation DODO
Branféré Zoo	Nashville Zoo	Wuppertal Zoo
Chester Zoo	Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo &	Yokohama Zoo
Cheyenne Mountain Zoo	Aquarium	Zoo Basel
Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden	Potawatomzi Zoo	Zoo Berlin
Columbus Zoo & Aquarium	Roosevelt Park Zoo	Zoo Leipzig
Dallas Zoo	Rotterdam Zoo	Zoo Miami
Dublin Zoo	Sacramento Zoo	ZooTampa at Lowry Park
Fort Worth Zoo	Saint Louis Zoo	

## FOUNDATIONS & GRANT ORGANIZATIONS

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