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News from Budongo Forest

The Budongo Forest Project is now entering its fourth year. We celebrated our third anniversary in September 1993. There are now some thirty people on the project, and this year our staff produced three babies so things are growing fast. If we last another 20 years we might even have our own home-bred researchers.

Andy Plumtre and Chris Bakuneeta are the Co-directors of the project. Andy is busy entering large quantities of data on the tree species, composition of various parts of the forest, primate densities, chimpanzee nest counts etc. on computer. Our first major finding is that the densities of all three of our monkey species (blue and redtailed guenons and black and white colobus) are higher in logged forest than in unlogged forest. Chris also uses a computer to analyse the results of 3 years of data on the Sonso chimpanzees. His main work is in relation to seed dispersal and most days he can be found carefully sieving faeces. He found the hairs of a young chimpanzee in chimp faeces last year, and this September he found the fingers or toes of what appears to be a young monkey, species yet unidentified, again in chimp faeces.

Three of our 11 field assistants are dedicated to chimpanzee research. We have now identified 30 chimps individually. Many of them have injured hands or feet as a result of having been caught in snares set for duikers and other forest animals. We now have some 200 km of transect lines cut in 8 different parts of the forest and are doing comparative studies in these. In addition, Chris Fairgrieve is studying the ecology of blue monkeys, Charles Walaga is studying forest soils, and two students from Makerere University are studying the forest birds and small mammals. Kate Hill is currently in Budongo studying the impact of crop raiding by forest animals on local farmers, and Kirstin Johnson has completed her M.Sc. thesis on the uses of minor forest products by the local population.

We work closely with the Forest Department and hope our findings will be useful to them in the formulation of management plans for Budongo. Our work has core funding from ODA under its Forest Research Programme, and additional support has been received from USAID, National Geographic, and the Jane Goodall Institute, to whom we are most grateful. We are currently working on the effects produced by 60 years of selective logging on the structure and composition of the forest and its wildlife, especially chimpanzees but also a variety of other species. We are also investigating the usefulness of chimpanzees as seed dispersers, the phytochemistry (tannins especially) of chimpanzee foods, and with increased habituation we hope to begin social studies in the not too distant future.

Vernon Reynolds, 5 Nov 1993