

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON DISTRIBUTION OF THE TSCHEGO CHIMPANZEE (*Pan t. troglodytes*) IN THE REGION OF LEKOUMOU, REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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ABSTRACT An extensive survey of tschego chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes troglodytes*) was carried out in the south-western Congo from January to March, 1992. The survey was conducted by inquiries at 12 villages and by searching in the forests around 6 villages. The local people confirmed the presence of chimpanzees in all villages. Four parties of chimpanzee were observed directly in the forests around 4 villages, and 100 nests were recorded. Chimpanzee population density was low because of hunting and logging pressures in most of the areas. Higher population density was formed in an area without hunting. This area may be an acceptable location for a new research site if suitable measures for chimpanzee conservation are implemented as soon as possible.

Key Words: Tschego chimpanzee; *Pan troglodytes troglodytes*; Distribution and status; Southern Congo; Nest.

INTRODUCTION

The tschego chimpanzee (*Pan t. troglodytes*) is distributed in the tropical rain forests of Central Africa, Cameroun, Gabon, and Congo. There have been a few reports about the status and distribution of tschego chimpanzees and western lowland gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) in Gabon (Tutin & Fernandez, 1984, 1985). In the Congo, the field studies on tschego chimpanzees and western lowland gorillas have been carried out in the northern area (Fay et al., 1989; Fay & Agnagna, 1992; Kuroda, 1992; Mitani, 1992; Nishihara, 1992). There is little information, however, on the status of chimpanzees and gorillas at other areas of the Congo.

I conducted an extensive survey in the south-western parts of the Congo to search for research sites suitable for studying tschego chimpanzees.

STUDY AREAS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in the Region of Lekoumou of south-western Congo from January to March, 1992 (Fig. 1). A branch office of the Ministry of Forestry, established in Sibiti, the capital of the Lekoumou province, is conducting the deforestation and the afforestation. There is also a station of the Ministry of Forestry in Zanaga, where 4 officers work to protect the wild animals in the northern part of the Lekoumou. The area is mostly covered by tropical rain forests.

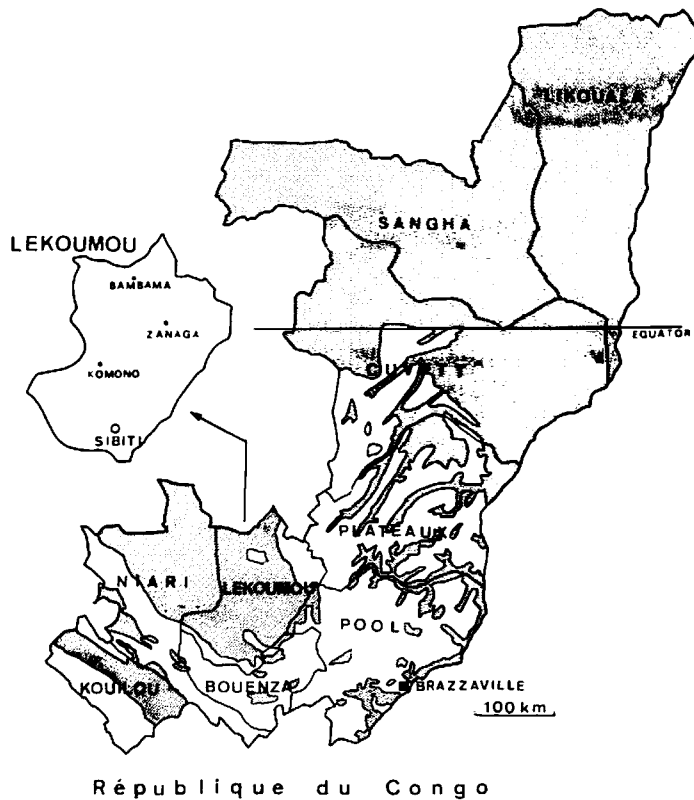


Fig. 1. The distribution of tropical rain forests (shaded parts) in the Congo and the study area, the Region of Lekoumou.

The rainy season is from October to April, and the mean annual rainfall is about 1,800 mm (Tsuchiya et al., 1972).

Information on chimpanzees was obtained through interviews with local people and searches in the forest. I sought information in 12 villages from the inhabitants born and raised there, and I searched for chimpanzees in the forests around 6 villages (Fig. 2). Where I enlisted the services of 1 or 2 men who were familiar with the surrounding forests. In the forests, I also searched for indirect evidence of chimpanzee presence, such as footprints, food remains, and nests.

People inhabiting these areas are the Bateke. The vernacular names for *P. t. troglodytes* and *G. g. Gorilla* were 'njiki' and 'njile.'

RESULTS

The terrain is rough in the Lekoumou forests. The vegetation can be classified into two main types, dry-land forests and swamp forests. The dry-land forests are



Fig. 2. Map of the study area. ● : Villages in which I made inquiries only; ○ : villages around which I actually walked in the forest; * : the villages around which I directly observed chimpanzees in the forest. The narrow solid lines, broad solid lines and broken lines indicate the main road, the boundary of the Regions and the border, respectively.

at altitudes from 500 to 700m, and the swamp forest from 400 to 500m. In the dry-land forest, trees of the Leguminosae and the Annonaceae are dominant. The Marantaceae herbs are common in the under story. There are many streams in the swamp forest, and stands of the Palmaceae, the Pandanaceae, and the Euphorbiaceae are abundant in the forests. The chimpanzees utilize both vegetation types for feeding and ranging.

The presence of chimpanzees was affirmed by the local people of 12 villages. However, I suspect that the chimpanzee population densities were much reduced because of high hunting pressure. The local people in many village who often use the forest for subsistence and other activities but not hunting rarely have had an encounter with chimpanzees. Chimpanzee meat is eaten locally, although there is a taboo restricting women from eating such meat. In Zanaga and Kengue, located in the north-eastern part of the region, the custom of eating chimpanzee meat has de-

Table 1. Number and age-sex classes of chimpanzees observed in the forests around 4 villages.

Villages	AM	AF	J	I	UK	Total
Moetche	0	2	1	2	1	6+
Bambama	2	3	1	1	2	9+
Zanaga	3	5	3	3	3	17
Kengue	2	1	3	1	5	12+
Total	7	11	8	7	11	44+

AM: Prime adult or adolescent males; AF: prime adult or adolescent females; J: juveniles; I: infants; UK: unknown; +: unconfirmed all members.

creased, since the Zanaga station of the Ministry of Forestry was established to protect the wild animals in the northern Lekoumou areas.

I surveyed the forests around 6 villages. The environs of the villages were mostly composed of secondary forest. The primary forest was 3 to 4km away from the center of most villages. Chimpanzees were directly observed four times at 4 villages (Table 1). The party size of these was larger than chimpanzee's one in other study areas. There was no direct observation in Komono and Mbomo.

In the forests around Moetche, 6 chimpanzees were observed at about 5km from the village. After a few minutes into the encounter, they retreated immediately after they noticed our attention.

A party of 9 chimpanzees was identified in the Bambama forests, over 8-hours walking-distance from the village. I finally lost sight of them after following them for about 1 hour. Food remains of *Panda oleosa* stem, and fruits of *Uapaca heudelotii* and another species (unidentified, vernacular name, *Lonyonyo*) were found at this site.

In the forests around Zanaga, I encountered a party of 17 chimpanzees at about 2-hours walking-distance from the village. They were feeding on *Talfairia occidentalis* fruits and the larvae of two insect species (Lepidoptera and the *Cerambyx* spp.).

When I stayed in Kengue, I frequently heard pant-hoots by chimpanzees from forests surrounding the village. Although a party of 12 animals was observed in the forest 40-minutes walking-distance from the village, they silently climbed down the trees and fled on the ground as soon as I was detected. There were food remains of *Treculia obovoidea* fruits.

During the study period, 100 nests were recorded in the forests around 6 villages

Table 2. Number of nests and distance from the villages to nest sites in 6 study areas.

Villages	< 2 km	< 4 km	Number of nests			Total
			< 6 km	< 10 km	> 20 km	
Komono	0	0	—	—	—	0
Moetche	0	5*	4	—	—	9
Bambama	0	0	2*	4*	17	23
Mbomo	0	2*	—	—	—	2
Zanaga	0	21	8	—	—	29
Kengue	7	16	14	—	—	37
Total	7	44	28	4	17	100

*: Old nests.

(Table 2). Near the villages of Moetche, Bambama and Mbomo, there were 9 old nests in which the leaves had turned brown. There were 17 new nests (perhaps nests of the previous night) at Bambama and 21 new nests at Zanaga. All 37 new nests recorded in Kengue were found surrounding the village.

Although chimpanzees used 17 species of trees for nests, only 6 species were identified: *Dialium pachyphyllum*, *Gilbertiodendron dewevrei*, *Panda oleosa*, *Telfairia occidentalis*, *Treculia obovoidea*, and *Uapaca guineensis*. Nests constructed at heights of 6m to 15m accounted for 71%, below 5m for 22%, and 7% at a height above 15m.

DISCUSSION

The minimum requirements for a long-term study site for chimpanzees are high population densities and the absence of hunting. In the Region of Lekoumou, however, people habitually hunt and eat chimpanzees in many villages. I encountered many hunters in the forests, and chimpanzee meat was bought and sold in these villages. There were few nests in the forest near these villages, and I had to walk a long distance in the forest to directly observe chimpanzees. The party size of those chimpanzees observed was not large. I suspect that chimpanzees have shifted their home ranges far from the villages in these areas and also that their population tended to decrease.

On the other hand, chimpanzee meat is rarely eaten recently in some villages such as Zanaga and Kengue. In these villages, a direct observation was easy, and many new nests were recorded near the villages. The party size was also larger. It is possible that the forests around these villages have a higher population density than other areas.

The Congo government has enforced a seasonal hunting ban from November to April. Chimpanzees, gorillas, and elephants are specially protected all year-round. Slaying these animals without a permit is also forbidden. However, these law are rarely obeyed by the local people and others. Most of the forest fauna, e.g. *Cercopithecus* spp., *Cercocebus* spp., bushpigs, and duikers, are often depleted because of heavy hunting and deforestation. Although the establishment of a station of the Ministry of Forestry effectively discouraged poaching near Zanaga, the 4 officers are not enough to protect such a wide area. If some suitable counter-measures against poaching and deforestation are taken, the areas which still have a relatively high population density of chimpanzees may serve as new research site.

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