

Papers from the
BONOBO WORKSHOP
 2003

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**Introduction: Toward the
 Resumption of Bonobo Study
 and Conservation**

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Because the civil war moved toward ceasefire in Democratic Republic of Congo, the long awaited field study on bonobos was resumed in many sites. Some researchers returned to their study sites where they had been carrying out research and conservation activities until the war broke out, and other researchers established new study sites (Figure 1).

At this new start line for bonobo (bilia) studies, we are faced with two major issues. One is the conservation issue. During the war, the number of bonobos in the wild seemed to have greatly decreased. Soldiers killed and ate them for survival, and village people, who fled into the forest to avoid the fighting, had to open new fields in the primary forest and to hunt bonobos. Because the war mobilized people between areas, people who have the custom of eating bonobos moved to areas where people had been coexisting with bonobos while following their traditional taboo against killing them. Now we need to make a survey on the current distribution of bonobos and undertake effective activities to prevent their decrease. We also have to be conscious of the danger of commercial logging in the Congo Basin. Many companies or

organizations have acquired concessions for logging in large areas of the bonobo habitat. Though their activities have also been interrupted by the war, now they may resume logging activities, much earlier than the researchers or conservationists reestablish activities for conservation.

The other major issue is the necessity to coordinate the research. During the war when bonobo research was not undertaken, enormous progress was made in the ecological and behavioral studies of chimpanzees and other great apes. Those studies posed new, crucial questions in relation to bonobos, which have never been answered. Because bonobos inhabit the central part of the rain forest in Africa, we cannot neglect bonobos in the global studies on the evolution of the great apes. As do chimpanzees or gorillas, bonobos inhabit a variety of habitat: from the dense rain forest to the patchy vegetation of forest and grassland savanna. Therefore, we need to make comparative studies between different study sites to acquire better knowledge of the ecology and social behaviors of bonobos and to make comparisons between bonobos and other great apes. Now that many researchers are to resume study using new methods, it is a great opportunity to develop methods that can be commonly used at different study sites.

On July 21-23, 2003, we had a workshop in

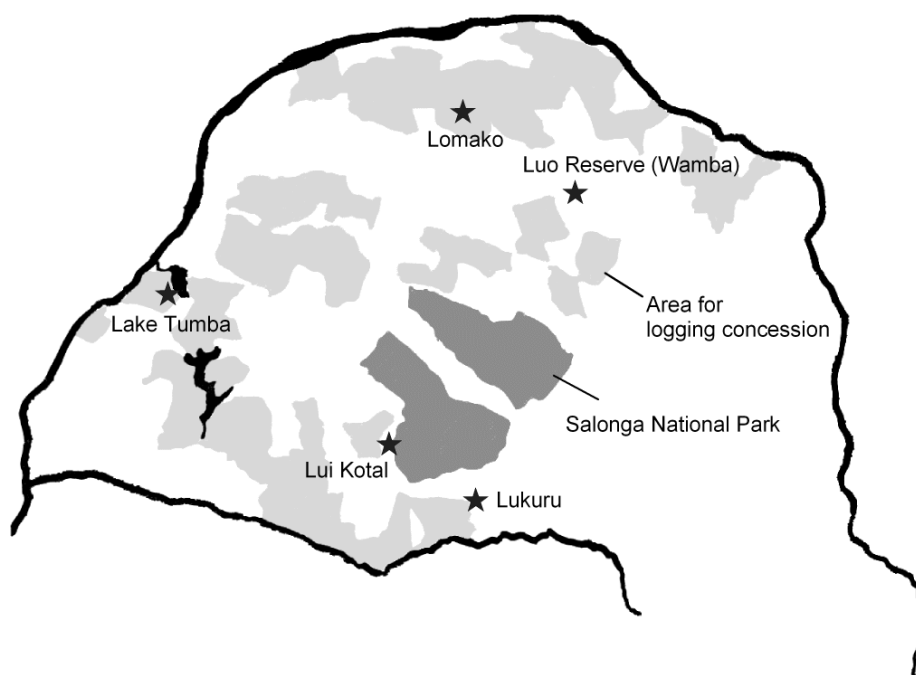


Figure 1 Study sites of bonobos.

Inuyama, Japan, entitled “2003 Bonobo Workshop: Behavior, Ecology and Conservation of Wild Bonobos.” Researchers working at all of the active study sites, including Salonga National Park, Luo Reserve (Wamba), Lomako, Lukuru, and Lake Tumba, came together and had enthusiastic discussions on 1) comparative methods for ecological studies, 2) behavioral diversity and local traditions of bonobos, and 3) current situation of bonobos and action plan for conservation. A detailed report on this workshop is available at <http://homepage3.nifty.com/bonobo/workshop>. At this website, we carry brief updates on the current situation of bonobos and the research/conservation activities being conducted at each study site.