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Field Research at Parc National de la Salonga, Democratic Republic of Congo

*Jo Thompson¹, Tshobo Masunda², Ilonga Djema Willy³,
and Mvula Lomba Tshina-tshina³*

¹Lukuru Wildlife Research Project, USA.

*²Conservateur Principal, Parc National de la Salonga,
Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature,
Democratic Republic of Congo.*

*³Lukuru Wildlife Research Project,
Democratic Republic of Congo.*

In the interest of protecting and studying bonobos (bilia), the Lukuru Project team has coordinated conservation efforts with the Anga Headquarters Post park guards of Parc National de la Salonga (PNS) since 1994 and collaborated on joint fieldwork research within the southern sector of the park territory since 1997. Prior to the alliance of the Lukuru Project and personnel of the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), no field work had been conducted within the southern sector of the park since a 15-day prospecting mission in October 1969, prior to establishing this national protected area.

In 1997 the Lukuru Project organized and delivered the first shipment of basic household materials and supplies to the Anga Headquarters Post. A mixed Lukuru Project/ICCN team conducted the first-ever reconnaissance and bonobo/large mammal distribution survey in PNS-SS during March/April 1998 and collected data on human activities in PNS-Secteur Sud (SS).

In 2001 ICCN contracted with the Lukuru Project to restore the administrative library and develop a reading, resource, and media room with multi-system equipment in Kinshasa.

The Lukuru Project has continued to work in the South Sector of the Park throughout the war (1). This effort required meeting and gaining official authorization from authorities in both Kinshasa (government) and Goma (rebel) in 2002. In 2002 the Lukuru Project distributed two tons of critical household materials, medicines, supplies, equipment, government paid salaries, and conservation education resources to PNS-SS

(1).

In 1994-1995 the Iyalima people, traditional people living within PNS-SS, invited the Lukuru Project to work with them in their own lands for conservation and wildlife management. They hold a special place on the land, a place they have occupied since the Bantu first migrated into this region. As original forest people, they reside in the area defined between the eight villages from Bokumo (the northwestern limit of the Lukuru Project area) east to Luapa village. Since the 1970 gazettement of PNS, they are living their lives illegally by occupying their ancestral homelands. In recent years they have experienced attrition as their youth move to urban areas for jobs and material goods. They currently number about 800. They have maintained their culture intact with little impact from outside influences. They remain separate even from their closest related ethnic groups, the Isolu and Ikolombe. Working with the Iyalima as partners in conservation, the Lukuru Project is sponsoring the integration of the Iyalima into the park conservation plan. Since 2002 the Lukuru Project has actively been involved in a community attitudes assessment initiative.

In 2002 the Lukuru Project succeeded in clearing the Anga airstrip. This ensures direct access to Kinshasa for park management. The Lukuru Project continues to support this work.

In 2003 a Lukuru Project team traveled over land by foot and along the Luilaka River by pirogue, exploring and mapping the south and east limits of the PNS-SS park frontier (2). This effort was the first attempt to traverse this region. We recorded 759 waypoints and 3,247 track logs (a total of 4,006 locations mapped) (2). This information was integrated into the ICCN database, including habitat description, animal sign, human activity, topography, geography, and photographs. This is the first time such an effort has been conducted and is critical for management planning at the local and national levels. This work revealed that the existing illustrated borders of the park are incorrect according to the legal description. In some cases villages thought to fall within the park boundaries are actually outside. This has implications in conflict resolution issues. The Lukuru team also used the opportunity to

conduct informational meetings and exchanges at every village, clan settlement, and human habitation (2).

In 2003 the Lukuru Project sponsored 11 local nationals for a training workshop based from the Lokofa camp in PNS (1). The training was organized by ICCN in cooperation with the IUCN- MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants) program and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The Lukuru team was trained in standardized field inventory techniques (observation, data collection, taking notes, identifying and reading animal and human sign, describing habitat and vegetation, and collecting plant samples), survey sampling methodologies (reconnaissance walks, line transect distance sampling counts), survey design, basic statistical analysis, law enforcement monitoring, how to use a Global Positioning System (GPS), and first aid emergency wilderness medicine. Jo Thompson taught classes on: Primate Natural History, Primate of PNS, and Other Wildlife Species of Scientific and Conservation Interest (2).

Jointly with ICCN, IUCN-MIKE program, and WCS, the Lukuru Project collaborated to clear the airstrip at Monkoto in 2003, the most central park post for both sectors of PNS and the site whose access is critical to manage the vast park terrain. Further, the Lukuru Project provided Global Positioning System (GPS) units for the personnel of Anga Post to collect data and monitor wildlife in the southern park. These data will also be incorporated into the broader ICCN database.

There are no longer research facilities at the Anga Post. The last structure collapsed in 1999. The Lukuru Project is currently working to reconstruct the accommodations for future use by scientists and tourists. In PNS, the Lukuru Project is actively engaged on the ground in wildlife monitoring (biodiversity surveys and inventory for abundance, distribution, and threats), capacity building, infrastructure rehabilitation, contribution to the ICCN management plan, contribution to surveillance capacity and ability to secure the park, community integration and relations building between the people and ICCN throughout the region, and continued exploration of Parc National de la Salonga.

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