

Landscape program for Conservation in DR Congo and the significance of Bonobos

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The Congo basin forest, along with many other regions in Africa, is recognized as crucial for conservation activities because of its significant role in global oxygen production and great biodiversity. However, increasing threats from rapid population and economic growth make conservation activity difficult. Many conservation activities, therefore, try to protect forest by supporting the sustainable development of local populations. Many government and non-government organizations have formed consortiums to achieve this common goal, and in 2003 succeeded in launching the CARPE/CBFP Landscape Program. This program set up 12 important landscapes depending on their particular importance and unique contribution to forest and biodiversity conservation. In each landscape, several activities for conservation and sustainable development have been carried out by various consortiums along with local NGOs. Bonobos (*Pan paniscus*) occupy a significant position in the Landscape Program as an umbrella species, especially in the Maringa-Lopori-Wamba landscape, which is mainly managed by the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF). Each bonobo group needs a large home range and females immigrate to other groups to avoid inbreeding. If forests are fragmented and disconnected from each other, bonobos therefore become vulnerable to extinction. The AWF therefore selected bonobos as a critical species - to make the public recognize problems of forest fragmentation and isolation - and have exerted great effort to maintain the forest and keep its connectivity among fragments using the forest corridor concept. The bonobos at Wamba in the Luo Scientific Reserve provide a valuable perspective because they were the only known bonobo population to have co-existed successfully with a local human population for at least several decades, although conflicts related to anthropogenic disturbance such as illegal poaching and deforestation persist. These ongoing conflicts also raise questions about the effects of concentrating on certain charismatic species such as bonobos.