

African nations commit to saving chimps

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Populations of wild chimpanzees will benefit from the new action plan announced today. Credit: Andrew Plumtre/Wildlife Conservation Society

The nations of East and Central Africa have developed a 10-year action plan to save one of humankind's closest relatives—the eastern chimpanzee—from hunting, habitat loss, disease, and other threats, according to an announcement made today by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The ambitious plan—titled "Eastern Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*): Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan: 2010-2020"—calls for the conservation of 16 core areas which if protected would conserve 96% of the known populations of eastern [chimpanzees](#).

"This effort to assess the status of eastern chimpanzees will help us to focus our conservation actions more effectively," said Dr. Andrew Plumptre, director of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Albertine Rift Program and the plan's lead author. "In the next decade, we hope to minimize the threats to these populations and the ecological and [cultural diversity](#) they support."

In one of the most wide-reaching efforts to assess the status and conservation threats to eastern chimpanzees, conservation practitioners and researchers with experience from all seven range states contributed data on sightings, nests, feeding signs, and vocalizations from the past decade; more than 22,000 GPS-located data points across their range. During a workshop in August of 2009, more than 30 experts from seven countries traveled to Kampala, Uganda to identify priorities for the conservation of the subspecies, and to develop an action plan with specific projects for their conservation. To fill in the gaps in countries currently off limits to research due to conflict, the plan authors formulated predictive models to estimate the density of chimpanzee populations in un-surveyed areas.

In the subsequent range-wide priority setting analysis, workshop participants identified 16 chimpanzee conservation units that, if successfully protected, would safeguard 96 percent of known chimpanzee populations (estimated to total some 50,000 individual animals). However, the total numbers of eastern chimpanzees across their whole range is poorly known and the models estimated that the total population may number as many as 200,000 (almost double the estimates that had been made previously).

"It is clear that we know about the distribution and abundance of only a quarter of the world population of the eastern chimpanzee", said Dr Liz Williamson, IUCN's Species Survival Commission Great Ape Coordinator, "there are large areas of the Congo basin where we know

very little about this ape". The plan identifies key areas for future surveys that are likely to be of importance for chimpanzees using the models developed from the data compiled.

The plan also targets two of the greatest threats to the species— illegal hunting and trafficking—with a goal of reducing both to half of current levels across most of the animal's range. Other objectives include: reducing the rate of forest loss in chimpanzee habitats; filling in knowledge gaps in chimpanzee distribution, status, and threats; improving the understanding of health risks to chimpanzee populations, including human-transmitted diseases; increasing community support for chimpanzee conservation; and securing sustainable financing for chimpanzee conservation units.

"The Plan will require considerable support from the global community —approximately \$315,000 per chimpanzee conservation unit, or \$5 million each year — but will ensure the continued survival of eastern chimpanzees in their natural habitats," said Dr. James Deutsch of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Africa Program. "The conservation of wild populations is important not only for conservation, but also for the survival of chimpanzee cultures in the region that are invaluable to helping us define our own place within the natural realm."

The eastern chimpanzee is currently classified as "Endangered" on IUCN's Red List and occurs in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Zambia. Threats to the subspecies include hunting for bushmeat, the capture of infant chimpanzees for the pet trade, the loss and fragmentation of habitat due to agriculture, mining, and other forms of human development, and disease. Chimpanzees share an estimated 98 percent of the genes with *Homo sapiens*. They occur in a variety of forested and forest-edge ecosystems and have been known to use tools to gather termites, crack open nuts, and other activities. Eastern

chimpanzees are among the best studied of the great apes, due in large part to the work of researchers such as Jane Goodall, who started her fieldwork in Gombe Stream National Park in western Tanzania 50 years ago. The development of the Action Plan was funded by WCS through the generous support of the Arcus Foundation, a leading global philanthropic funder advancing pressing conservation and social justice issues, and the Daniel K. Thorne Foundation.

More information: The plan is available on the IUCN website:
www.primate-sg.org/PDF/ECCAP.pdf

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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