

Good news for Republic of Congo chimpanzees

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The Republic of Congo has formally expanded Nouabale-Ndoki National Park to protect an increasingly rare treasure: one of Africa's most pristine forests and a population of "naïve" chimpanzees with so little exposure to humans that the curious apes investigate the conservationists who study them rather than run away.

Known as the Goualougo Triangle, the 100-plus square-mile dense swamp forest and its unique great ape population was first reported in 1989 by WCS conservationists.

The expansion of Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park completes the legal process of the commitment made by the Republic of Congo in 2001 to protect the Goualougo by annexation to the park, boosting the size of the protected area from 1,492 square miles (386,592 hectares) to 1,636 square miles (423,870 hectares), an increase of more than 8 percent.

"We commend the Republic of Congo for finalizing this critical process to extend the borders of Nouabalé-Ndoki to include the Goualougo Triangle, one of the great wonders of [Africa](#)," said WCS President and CEO Steve Sanderson. "In a world of human use, this extraordinary forest is a reminder of Eden, an untouched gem teeming with chimpanzees, gorillas, and forest elephants. It is the definition of wild nature and must be protected."

Following the discovery of the Goualougo Triangle and concerned about growing poaching pressures in surrounding areas, the government of the

Republic of Congo entered into an integrated partnership with WCS and Congolais Industrielle des Bois (CIB), a private logging company. The partnership implemented an effective buffer zone program in the timber concessions surrounding the Nouabalé-Ndoki Park while protecting the pristine forest. Consequently, CIB gave up its legal right to harvest timber from the Goualougo forest in the interest of leaving the wildlife undisturbed.

Subsequent studies of the Goualougo Triangle's "naïve" chimpanzee population by WCS conservationists Dave Morgan of the Lincoln Park Zoo and Crickette Sanz of Washington University have produced another major discovery—a diversity of tool sets used for foraging by this population of [chimpanzees](#). Rather than using one type of tool for collecting termites from insect nests, the chimps of Goualougo used two distinct types of tools, a short stick to perforate the nest, and a long "probe" to extract insects for consumption. This tool specialization discovery was the first of its kind in wild chimpanzee populations.

"This invaluable insight into the sophisticated minds of Goualougo's chimps would have been lost forever if not for the commitment of the government to safeguard the wonders of this forest," said WCS Executive Vice President of Conservation and Science John Robinson. "These chimps have greatly expanded our knowledge of chimpanzee culture. Continued work to study and protect this undisturbed [population](#) is essential."

With the apes of the Congo Basin facing increasing pressure from hunting, habitat loss, and the potential outbreak of devastating diseases such as Ebola, the protection of this area represents a major step towards ensuring their protection.

"Bringing the Goualougo Triangle into the borders of Nouabalé-Ndoki will help conserve this landscape's unspoiled richness and provide a safe

harbor for these unique apes," said Dr. James Deutsch, Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Africa Program.

Chimpanzee conservation efforts in the Republic of Congo have been supported by the U.S. government through the U.S. Agency for International Development's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Great Ape Conservation Fund and Wildlife Without Borders-Africa Program. Columbus Zoo and Aquarium has also provided support. The U.S. House of Representatives is currently considering H.R. 1760, a bill sponsored by Rep. George Miller (D-CA) that would extend the FWS Great Ape Conservation Fund for an additional five years.

To draw attention to the plight of the greater Congo Basin rainforest ecosystem, WCS's Bronx Zoo opened the Congo Gorilla Forest exhibit in 1999, which has raised millions of dollars from its admission fee for WCS conservation work in Central Africa. CIB and the Government of Congo first agreed to protect the Goualougo Triangle at a press conference held at the Congo Gorilla Forest in 2001.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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