

Reports from the Central African Republic indicate security has returned to Dzanga-Sangha National Park

May 21 2013



Forest elephants congregate at the Central African Republic's Dzanga-Sangha National Park, where security has been restored after a period of upheaval.
Credit: Andrea Turkalo/WCS

The following statement was released today by the Wildlife Conservation Society President and CEO Cristián Samper in response to the news that Gabon has agreed to help improve the management of the

Central African Republic's protected areas, which are currently threatened by large-scale elephant poaching for ivory, and that security has returned to Dzanga-Sangha National Park.

At least two dozen elephants were killed in Dzanga-Sangha National Park in the Central African Republic, part of the Sangha Trinational World Heritage Site, earlier this month. The Dzanga-Sangha National Park contains "Dzanga Bai," a spectacular forest clearing, where between 50 and 200 elephants gather daily to ingest mineral salts present in the soil.

Samper's statement is followed by the full news release issued by Gabon.

WCS's Dr. Cristián Samper said:

"The good news from Dzanga-Sangha National Park after reports of extensive elephant poaching comes as a huge relief, along with the agreement that Gabon and the Central African Republic have agreed to work together to improve management of CAR's [protected areas](#). We offer our appreciation to the leadership being shown by acting president of the Central African Republic transitional government, Michel Djotodia, and to President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba. I want to extend appreciation and congratulations also to a team from Gabon Parks led by Dr. Mike Fay, Senior Conservationist with the Wildlife Conservation Society and Special Adviser to the President of Gabon, for working with partners to secure the area and its world-famous elephants. WCS stands ready to assist the government and people of CAR, our partners in Gabon and the United States, and our long-term partner in Dzanga-Sangha, WWF, in working for a better future for the people and wildlife in [Central Africa](#)."

The following is the news release from the Gabon government:

Subject: Agreement between GABON and the Central African Republic for support by the National Parks Agency of Gabon (ANPN) for the establishment of legal, institutional and operational management of protected areas of the Central African Republic.

(Libreville, May 17, 2013) – Upon arrival in Gabon on Wednesday, May 14, 2013, the President of the Central African Republic transition, SE Michel Djotodia was received by the President of Gabon, HE Ali Bongo Ondimba. Among other important issues discussed, including the important role of Gabonese troops in the regional peace keeping force, Michel Djotodia sought and obtained the support of Gabon to improve management of Central African Republic's protected areas system, which is currently threatened by large-scale elephant poaching for ivory.

At least twenty-six elephants were killed in Dzanga Sangha National Park earlier this month in the forest of Dzanga Bai, a World Heritage site in the south-west of the Central African Republic. The Dzanga-Ndoki National Park contains the "Dzanga Bai", which is a large forest clearing, unique in the world, where between 50 and 200 elephants gather daily to drink mineral salts present in the soil.

"The first time I visited Dzanga Bai, I was immediately captivated by the wonders one of the most fascinating natural wonders of the world," said Professor Lee White, the Executive Secretary of ANPN. "This is one of those places that every human being should be able to see in his or her lifetime. It is officially recognized as a [World Heritage Site](#), and our world would not be complete should we lose a global natural treasure such as the Dzanga Bai", he continued.

In recent weeks this area drew intense poaching pressure as law and order in the country broke down. Some of these attacks may also have been the result of local poachers who took advantage of the situation.

A delegation from the ANPN led by Dr. Mike Fay, Special Adviser to

the President of the Republic, a Senior [Conservationist](#) with the Wildlife Conservation Society and Explorer in Residence at National Geographic Society, who participated in the classification of Dzanga –Ndoki [National Park](#) 30 years ago, was dispatched on Thursday 16 May to Bayanga, Central African Republic, to work with the government on a strategy to secure the area and restore conservation activities. The Last Great Ape Organization (LAGA), The Aspinall Foundation and [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) (WCS) also participated in the mission.

The delegation reported this morning that security has returned. Government authorities in Bayanga are monitoring the situation closely and working with conservation staff to ensure no further poaching occurs.

"Now the work of restoring protection and augmenting capacity must be undertaken in earnest" said Dr. Richard Ruggiero of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. "It is clear from our experience over the years that protecting elephants also protects people, since conservation hubs become islands of improved governance. International cooperation helps both people and wildlife."

Share the experience of the National Parks Agency of Gabon

Cooperation between Gabon and the Central African Republic is intended to promote protected areas management and will address:

The establishment of a legal and institutional framework to respond to the challenges posed by protected area development and management.

- Development of a National Parks Agency in CAR
- Training of staff working for the conservation and management of protected areas.
- Establishing improved relations with conservation programs in other countries of the Central African Region to share

experiences, address cross-border poaching threats, and to develop beneficial collaborations with the global conservation community.

"This agreement is a great example of a 'south / south cooperation'" said Professor Lee White. Africa has lost 70% of its forest elephants in 10 years and even in Gabon, where we have been less affected, 30% of our [elephants](#) have been killed during this period. We hope that we can help our colleagues in CAR to preserve Dzanga-Sangha, which is one of the most important protected areas in Africa and to restore the other protected areas that were once the countries pride and joy".

Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba expressed the hope that regional institutions (ECCAS, COMIFAC, RAPAC) and Conservation NGOs will accompany Gabon and Central African Republic in responding to this challenge. "There is a clear link between blood ivory and civil instability in Africa, making this much more than just an environmental issue. We should all work together to restore sound governance in CAR, which will protect both its people and its spectacular wildlife".

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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