



Pygmy Chimpanzees in Peril

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So far as is known pygmy chimpanzees, or bonobos, occupy only a comparatively small area in the central basin of Zaire. A large multinational company has acquired logging rights in what is believed to be the core of their range, and the authors, who have been studying the animals, believe that this could mean the end of this major population. A reserve is urgently needed, and they suggest a particular area of undisturbed primary forest where the local people would act as guardians and also continue their traditional uses.

Since it was originally described *Pan paniscus*, the pygmy chimpanzee or bonobo, has been known to have a relatively limited distribution compared to its cousin the common chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes*. Coolidge, using data from specimens at the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, in Belgium, described the species as confined to a small area on the left (south) bank of the Zaire river.² The more recent suggestion that the range extends east to the Lualaba and headwaters of the Zaire remains unconfirmed, and our best evidence is that it ranges eastward only to the Lomami river. Some less reliable and unconfirmed accounts by missionaries and travellers indicate that in some areas the two species are sympatric, but conversations with people who have worked or lived in Zaire, some since the 1920s, all suggest that the two species do not overlap and that *Pan paniscus* has a relatively restricted range south of the Zaire river – the smallest range of the great apes except the mountain gorilla.



One of the captured baby pygmy chimps.

The Threats

There is little doubt that peripheral groups of the pygmy chimpanzee population in the *cuvette centrale*, the central basin of Zaire, are being diminished, eliminated or isolated. The threats that put them in imminent danger of extinction are hunting, illegal trading, encroachment by local slash-and-burn farmers, oil exploration and commercial logging.

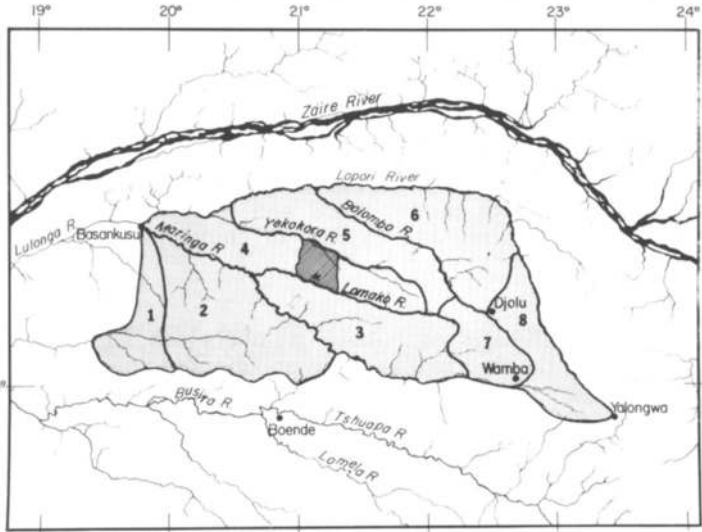
Hunting

Pygmy chimpanzees are hunted and eaten in much of their range⁵ (personal observations), but not everywhere. In some villages the people do not hunt them, while in other areas people hunt them for food, for pets and for sale; there are villages, such as Bolongo, north of Boende, where only certain people eat chimpanzee meat. Even more distressing is the hunting of chimpanzees (and other primates) for sale to outsiders, which we saw frequently. The *grand marché* in Kinshasa is a ready source of live primates. Normally hunters sell the animals to crew members or passengers on river boats that regularly ply the major waterways. These 'middle-men' bring the animals to sell in Kinshasa, where they often make 100 per cent profit or more. On one eight-day river-boat voyage from Kinshasa to Boende we saw for sale pygmy chimpanzee, De Brazza monkey *Cercopithecus neglectus*, red-tail *C. ascanius*, *Colobus angolensis*, black mangabey *Cercocebus aterrimus* and Allen's swamp monkey *Allenopithecus nigroviridis*. We estimate that 700-1000 monkey carcasses, both fresh and smoked, were acquired on this passage for resale in the meat markets of Kinshasa.

Human Encroachment

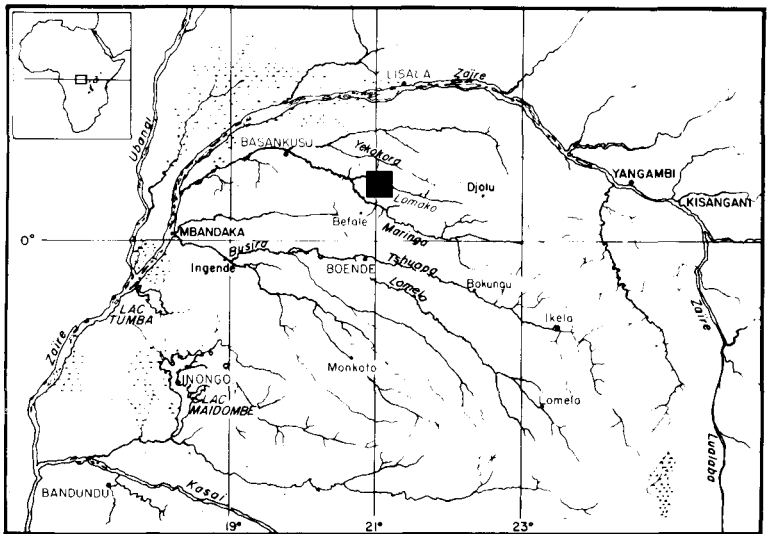
Throughout Equateur, where the products of shifting root-crop agriculture may provide as much as 95 per cent of the people's total calorie intake, the forest is continually being destroyed to provide new land for cultivation; new fields are constantly being cleared because the sandy soils lose their minerals relatively quickly.⁴ When land is disturbed the chimpanzees leave. In only a very few isolated places (such as Wamba) do they co-exist with humans.

The grey area, the heart of the range of *Pan paniscus*, has been assigned to a West German timber company. The dark part in the centre is the study area.



Commercial Exploitation

In the 1970s the commercial forest exploitation and oil exploration operated on a relatively small scale. In recent years, however, licences for both have been granted to multinational corporations to exploit resources in the *cuvette centrale*. This basin contains roughly 100 million hectares of forest, but only a small portion contains bonobos, and one major multinational company, Karl Danzer Furnier-Werk has acquired the rights to log in an area that largely corresponds to their range.² Moreover, SIFORZAL (the company’s Zairean acronym) has started operations in the very tract that contains our study site and, perhaps also, the central core of the bonobo’s range. The only other area in which a long-term bonobo study is being done is at Wamba, which also lies within SIFORZAL’s concession (tract 7). We do not know when work is scheduled to begin in tract 7, but any activity would have serious implications for further field work there. Exploitation of these and the other six tracts, designated by the company as commercially desirable, would undoubtedly spell the end of the major existing concentration of pygmy chimpanzees and



The Cuvette Centrale, showing study area – the black square

almost certainly preclude further studies under natural conditions. Time and again it has been shown that the introduction of workers and heavy equipment, and the building of camps, roads and transport facilities, result in the displacement, hunting and capture of chimpanzees, monkeys and other animals.

Conservation

No reliable estimates of bonobo numbers can be made without more censusing. In the next two years, as an adjunct to our study in the Lomako Forest, we plan to survey in the area of Basankusu and to the north, in the area south around Oshwe (where oil exploration is presently underway), and to the east in the area between the Lomami and Lualaba Rivers. This will add significant information on the present range of *Pan paniscus* and, for the first time, allow a reasonable estimate to be made of the existing population. On present data we are not optimistic about their future. In the last five years elephants and other large animals have been virtually eliminated in the Lomako forest. Along the Tsuappa River monkeys are being hunted for food at an astounding rate. The future of the pygmy chimpanzee appears tenuous unless steps are taken to establish a protected area for the species. At present there is no protected area within their range which might ensure the future of a viable, natural population. The Salonga National Park to the south is outside the bonobo's range, and surveys by Japanese scientists failed to find any there.

Since the forest between the Lomako and Yekokora rivers represents an area of undisturbed primary rain forest,* we suggest, as have Kabala and Badrian and Badrian, that a central portion of this area be set aside as protected.^{1,3} It should be accessible to the indigenous people for their continued use as a fishing and hunting reserve, using traditional hunting methods, with firearms prohibited. Such a designation would entail no expenditure of financial or human resources by the Zaire government, as the 'management' of the area could be left in the hands of the local Mongo inhabitants, who only visit the forest here for short periods while hunting and fishing, and have no impact on the primates. The nearest local settlement or village is well south of the Lomako River at Bundolo.

*We base this on the preliminary report of Mr Roger Dechamps, Dept. of Wood Anatomy, Musée Royal de L'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, Belgium.

POSTSCRIPT

The pygmy chimpanzee has been included as a highest priority species in the upcoming WWF Tropical Forest and Primates campaign, to begin in 1982; contacts have been made with German conservationists to approach SIFORZAL and involve them in the conservation effort. A letter-writing campaign aimed at alerting Zairois officials to the urgency of the situation is planned by the IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group.

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Acknowledgments

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Concern over Primate Research in Threatened Species

Lemurs, silvery and cotton-top marmosets and chimpanzees are among the threatened primates still being used in research projects in Britain. The Primate Society of Great Britain has expressed concern at this and has called on the institutions and individuals involved to ensure that no more imports of threatened species are made from the wild without good conservation reasons; no new research programmes using such species are started unless specifically concerned with alleviating a particular human suffering, and any existing experiments are phased out unless the animals can be obtained entirely from self-sustaining captive-bred populations, or species not threatened.

Hawk Moth Exterminated by Spray

In summer 1980 the whole of one county in Colorado, was aerially sprayed with malathion to control grasshoppers. Many entomologists believe this is unnecessary because the periodic build-ups of grasshoppers on range-lands collapse naturally, and that the costs of spraying often exceeds the value of forage saved by not waiting for the collapse. Despite great care drift from the spraying operation covered the small habitat of a recently rediscovered hawk moth, *Euproserpinus wiesti*, and totally destroyed the moth above ground. The only hope was that some caterpillars had already pupated underground and would be able to reestablish the population. But Weld County planned to spray again in 1981.

Reports

The Solent Estuarine System is an assessment of present scientific knowledge by several scientists, with introductory chapters on geology, archaeology and history, published by NERC (Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon SN1 1EU).

The Proceedings of the Melbourne Herpetological Symposium of May 1980, edited by Chris B. Banks and Angus A. Martin, are available from the Royal Melbourne Zoological Gardens, PO Box 74, Parkville, Victoria 3052, Australia, A\$12.00 (including postage).

International Trade in *Ornamental Shells* and in *Corals* are two publications from the IUCN Conservation Monitoring Unit, both by Susan M. Wells (219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL). Both are summaries of reports deposited at the Centre and show the centres of trade and the trends.

IUCN has published a revised edition of the UN List National Parks and Equivalent Reserves (£4.00).



Protection in the Falklands

In 1979 FIF – the Falkland Islands Foundation for the Conservation of Wildlife, Wrecks and Places of Historic Interest – was founded. Its Chairman is Sir Peter Scott, who also drew the albatross head that is the FIF emblem. In January 1981 a sister organisation, FIT, the Falkland Islands Trust, was founded in Stanley, in the islands, with Mrs Jessie Booth Hon. Secretary. The Falklands in the South Atlantic, west of the southern tip of South America, have large colonies of seals, sealions, albatrosses, five species of penguins including king, and other seabirds. The FIF is a registered charity in the United Kingdom with an office in the ffPS office in the London Zoo. Together the FIF and the FIT have financed a small project by the senior school in Stanley to stabilise the vegetation at Hooker's Point, where the temporary airstrip has removed all ground cover and caused extensive erosion. A study of the important tussock grass *Poa flabellata* is an early priority. Other Officers of FIF are Professor David Moore, Convener of the Executive Committee, Peter Mould, Hon. Treasurer, and Richard Fitter, Hon. Secretary. For a free explanatory leaflet write to the ffPS office. The photograph of fur seals on New Island is by Ian Strange.

