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EXPLORATIONS OF A THREATENED CHIMPANZEE MEGA-CULTURE IN THE NORTHERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) traditions are now considered by many researchers to be cultural. However, across most of Africa, the distribution of these traditions is idiosyncratic and follows no clear pattern. I present evidence for the first chimpanzee cultural complex (*Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*), or Mega-Culture, which is spread across tens of thousands of square kilometers in the Northern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Direct and indirect evidence for the existence of the culture was gathered systematically over a four-year period to the north and south of the Uele River. This proposed cultural complex consists of a set of behaviors: frequent ground-nesting, the construction of leaf cushions, ant-dipping, the smashing of snails, termite mounds, and tortoises, and the absence of termite fishing. Intriguingly, the cultural uniformity spans both sides of a major river, The Uele. Whereas my evidence comes from a 35,000 km sq area, there is growing evidence that this Mega-Culture spreads all the way across Northern Congo to the border with Uganda. Implications for the evolution of cultural systems and conservation are discussed. In addition, I describe the expanding bushmeat trade that threatens the survival of this unique cultural complex.

Key words: *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*, Mega-Culture, ground-nesting, Uele River