

DISCOVERY & PROTECTION OF BONOBO POPULATIONS: BONOBO SURVEYS, INFORMATION EXCHANGE, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LINKED CONSTELLATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED RESERVES

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Between 2002 and 2008, as part of the strategy for establishing a constellation of community based bonobo reserves linked by forest corridors (the Bonobo Peace Forest), the Bonobo Conservation Initiative and its Congolese partners surveyed bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) distribution and numbers, and conducted information exchange with local communities in bonobo habitat. Before 2002, bonobos had only been studied at a few field sites and little was known of their distribution. Conservation and research activities were curtailed during the Congo wars (1996-2003), which exacerbated hunting pressure on bonobos by soldiers and displaced people. As the war abated, the priority for bonobo conservation was to identify significant populations of bonobos and to develop the means to protect them and their habitat. Bonobo surveys utilized standard methodology for line transects and reccees; information exchange employed a variation of the Rural Participatory Appraisal technique. We confirmed the existence of bonobo populations at 11 important new sites and verified their survival at a former study site, within an area spanning from west of Lac Tumba through the central Equateur region, and south into Kasai province. This approach has resulted in the establishment of locally-managed zones of protection where communities have become actively engaged in the conservation of bonobos and their forest habitat and has led to nationally gazetted reserves at Kokolopori and Sankuru. The work was funded by the US Fish & Wildlife Service Great Ape Conservation Fund, the Global Conservation Fund, Margot Marsh Biodiversity Foundation, and USAID/CARPE/CBFP.

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