

THE IMPACT OF BUSHMEAT HUNTING ON BONOBO PRESENCE

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Spatial models estimate potential bonobo populations for an area, but current and past hunting pressure often decide actual population size. This information cannot be assessed remotely. Recent inventories fail to find bonobo in areas where they were previously recorded. This is true south of Kisangani and in the western half of Sankuru Reserve. Ethnic groups in both areas have strong hunting traditions. A sector of Salonga National Park under intense hunting pressure shows a sharp decline in bonobo numbers over only two years between successive inventories. Taboos on eating bonobo meat were lost in areas where they existed prior to civil wars of the 1990s. Within the TL2 landscape there is still an important bonobo population, but under escalating hunting pressure due to commercial hunting. We monitored all road traffic for 49 days over three months at the two ferry crossings into Kindu. Of 394 recorded bushmeat loads, 387 were examined and contained a total of 13 bonobos. Based on mean number per load and mean number of loads per day we extrapolate to 99.8 bonobos per year entering Kindu bushmeat markets. This comes from a catchment of about 12,000 km². A program to control hunting of bonobo and other bushmeat based on a diversity of methods, resulted in a marked decrease in hunting, but may have limited long term success due to lack of enforcement. There were few arrests. True protection for bonobo will need an enforceable model. Protected areas and no-hunting seasons could both focalize and facilitate protection.

Keywords: bonobo bushmeat, monitoring, local extinction