

Project 2

Research in the Dja Faunal Reserve, Cameroon



"Great apes ecology, bushmeat hunting, logging and community based management around the Dja Faunal reserve, Cameroon: rethinking conservation issues in non protected areas."

Why fund a research project and why fund this research project?

Scientific research is fundamental for conservation and if this research is to proceed, funding is essential.

Only a small fraction of forest in Africa is protected, so a great area of forest is open to exploitation, either by industries or local people. Conservation of many endangered species depends on the capacity of disturbed forests to support populations of these species, so it is essential to research and assess this capacity. This is one example of the importance of research to conservation. This research project aims to assess the capacity of unprotected forest to support great ape species.

In the past, logging and other extractive industries have fought against forest conservation. Many groups are involved in the bushmeat trade, directly or indirectly: private companies; state agencies, international and local NGOs and local communities. Effective conservation projects must consider all of these people. People from various sectors are now working together to produce alternative solutions to the antagonistic traditional approaches. This project takes this inclusive, multi-disciplinary approach, working with, for example, local people, logging companies, research institutes and zoos. Such an approach should facilitate further community-based conservation action after the project is completed.

Why a research project in Cameroon?

Cameroon has:

- highly diverse forests;
- intensive logging activity (the third most intensively logged forests in Africa);
- the 1996 Forestry Law provides tools for a better management of the natural resources;
- an intensive bushmeat trade;
- political stability;
- wide-ranging populations of chimpanzees and western lowland gorillas.

Why study great apes?

Cameroon has two species of great ape: the western gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla*) and the chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*). It is important to research these species because:

- Little is known on the status of gorillas and chimpanzees in the protected areas in Cameroon, and nothing is known of the status outside protected areas. However, a recent survey in a logged and highly accessible area estimated high densities. Time, energy and money are essential to conduct comprehensive surveys, and these resources are often unavailable.
- Logging activities affect the great apes' food availability and thus may have serious, immediate effects on these species.
- Where contact between humans and gorillas/chimpanzees increases, risks of disease transmission and conflicts increases and this is an essential area of study.

What are the projects aims?

To discover:

- The population status of chimpanzees and gorillas in the study area
- How chimpanzees and gorillas which live in the same area interact
- The capacity of unprotected forests to support great ape species
- The implications of humans working and living in increasingly close proximity to other great apes
- The final goal will be the creation of a Communal Wildlife Zone which will benefit both people and wildlife.

Who will work on this project?

Philippe Auzel and Jef Dupain are the principal researchers. Existing collaboration with Dschang University (Cameroon) will be built upon: a PhD student is already involved in the project and two more students will be selected. Further collaboration will involve the University of Madrid (Spain) and the Primate Research Institute (Kyoto University, Japan). Locally, approximately 30 people will be involved. Volunteers from Belgium and Austria will work in this project in 2001.

Contacts:

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