



Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas



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Newsletter March 2020



sacharuna



Statement from Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas in response to the spreading COVID-19

In an effort to minimize the potential risk posed by the coronavirus pandemic to the people and great apes living within the Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas, the management of Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas in agreement with the Government of CAR and health experts have decided as follows:

- The Park has been closed to all visitors till further notice
- All tourism activities have been suspended and reservations cancelled
- No external researchers will be allowed in the Park
- Transport reduction between Bangui and Bayanga to the minimum needed to sustain the project
- Strict hygiene measures have been implemented in gorilla habituation camps

In an effort to avoid the potential spread of COVID-19 to habituated gorillas which we know are susceptible to human respiratory diseases, we adjusted our tracking strategy to minimize close contact. Firstly, we suspended the search for new gorilla groups. Secondly, the number of staff going to the habituated groups has been reduced to the minimum needed to protect them from poaching. These groups are being followed at a minimum distance of 15m except once a week when they are approached at 10m for visual health observations. Furthermore, the gorilla tracking teams were retrained to strictly adhere to the IUCN Guidelines that are already being implemented for the past five years, which includes; full operation of hygiene barriers at camps where hands and boots are disinfected before going into the forest, wearing a surgical mask when with the gorillas, using only toilets in camp to avoid contaminating the environment and critically, no individuals from camps where people have symptoms of respiratory diseases should visit the gorillas.

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Keeping the distance © David Santiago



The great ape nests and elephant dung degradation study that we started in November 2019 had its last mission for searching and marking of indices. After 7 missions, we have marked a total of **172 Chimpanzee nests**, **190 Gorilla nests** and **201 piles of elephant dung**. By the beginning of May, we will revisit each of the marked indices and will be able to estimate degradation rates for DSPA. This information will be vital for the estimation of wildlife populations from indices collected during the wildlife inventory.

As for the wildlife inventory, six teams completed 11 missions during the month of March. During these missions, they sampled 58 transects in four different sectors of DSPA, including Dzanga, Ndoki and the community hunting zone. We completed the Dzanga NP sector by mid-March.



© Miguel Bellosta

Interestingly, there were two direct observations of the Red Colobus monkey (*Piliocolobus oustaleti*) on transects. This primate species, though present in DSPA, is not frequently observed.

The survey teams had tough missions in the forest with heavy rains, getting charged by elephants and forest Buffalos and crossing rivers as high as themselves

Additionally, we de-installed the first camera traps that were set at the beginning of February, with some very nice footage. Each camera trap had a minimum of 35 days in the forest. They were de-installed in order to be re-used on other.



The survey team © David Santiago



Discover the Biodiversity of the DSPA

Scientific name: *Syncerus caffer nanus*

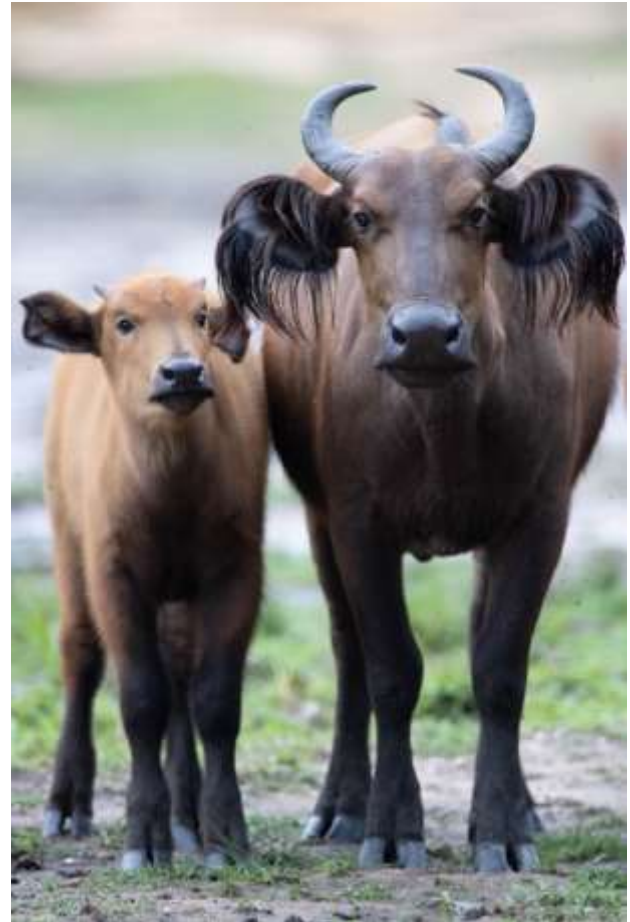
English name: African forest buffalo

Class : Mammal

Order : Artiodactyla

Family : Bovidae

Genus : *Syncerus*



© Miguel Bellostá

The African forest buffalo is the smallest subspecies of the African buffalo and is the only subspecies that occurs mainly in the rainforests of central and western Africa with an annual rainfall around 1,500 mm

The adult weighs between 250 to 320 kg (550–705 lbs) and has a reddish-brown hide that is darker in the facial area. The shape and size of the horns distinguish African forest buffalo from the other subspecies as they have much smaller horns

Even if it lives in the rainforests, their home ranges typically consist of a combination of these forests with marshes and grassy savannas

Savannas are the area where the buffalo graze, while the marshes serve as wallows and help with the insects. Their diet is primarily made up of grasses and other plants that grow in clearings and savannas.

African forest buffalo arrange themselves into herds, which help in defense against predators; however, they are not immune to assault. Among predators, the African leopard is the most common, but is generally only a threat to young buffaloes and will feast on them only when they have the opportunity.

These herds are as small as three and rarely over 30. And typically consists of one or occasionally two bulls and a harem of adult females, juveniles and young calves.

In DSPA, it is relatively easy to observe buffalos in most of the bays, especially in Dzanga bay, where they can be observed at almost any time.



Anti-poaching

The anti-poaching patrols have been implemented normally throughout the month, although bi and tri national patrols were suspended in agreement with the Lobéke and Nouabalé Ndoki Parks. The tri-national anti-poaching brigade (BLABB) base in Nyangouté will be occupied by just DSPA ecoguards during the crisis period considering that it is on Central African soil.

The Chengeta Wildlife trainers who were due to arrive in March couldn't do so and given the current situation it is difficult to tell when they will. All trainings have therefore been delayed.

Alain Ononino, Head of Policy, Central Africa Wildlife Crime Programme for WWF, was in DSPA this month to see how we are working



Rangers will continue working for protecting animals and people © Miguel Bellosta

Main DSPA Patrols data:

42 regular patrols, 2 BLAB patrols, in total 1,227 men/days, 1.659 km traveled on foot and covering an area of 1,640 km². This resulted in the seizure of 3 manufactured 12-gauge shotguns, 2 homemade 12-gauge shotguns, 125 manufactured 12-gauge cartridges, In addition, 1.702 metal snares were dismantled. 5 people were arrested for minor infraction and released. No fresh elephant carcasses and 0.3 kg of pangolin scales were found in the month

Community Development



Caterpillar brochette © Miguel Bellosta

We suspended most of the activities planned for this month, like trainings, visits to the Park, seminars etc. and we concentrated our efforts on sensitizing the staff and the population about the COVID-19 disease. We passed out messages through the community radio and met with village chiefs. The main message has been that villagers must avoid traveling in and out of DSPA.

Furthermore, with the agreement of the authorities, we are preparing a plan which will permit the Baaka to spend a long period in the forest with minimum contact with the rest of the population.

Health

We suspended the visits of the mobile clinic, just evacuated urgent cases to the hospital, but continued treating patients in the fixed health posts and center. In an effort to avoid the propagation of COVID-19, we introduced extreme measures in order to remain isolated as much as possible. We ensured social distancing by prohibiting all meeting of more than two people on site, keeping a distance between people, and also installed hand washing posts in all offices and obliged people to use them every time they go into an office.

We will be able to test for COVID-19 in our field laboratory once we receive reagents that are being sent to DSPA by the Robert Koch Institute in German

Main DSPA Health Data Number of patients March 2020

Structure	Number of patients
Lindjombo Health Post	52
Monasao Health Post	207
Belemboke Health Post	181
Bayanga	99
Total	539



Park Administration

Despite the current circumstances, the EU continued working with us on the contract for the new grant and finally it has been signed. On the other hand, the FTNS has offered us a special grant to help fight against COVID-19. With these funds, we'll try to manage the impact of COVID-19 in the area. We are really grateful to both of them.

The antenna tower of the community radio (radio Ndjoku) fell down during a big storm. The damage was bad but could be repaired, even if now is a little bit shorter.



© Didier Yetendji



© Didier Yetendji



© Luis Arranz

We had earlier cut off the access of cars to the offices to avoid noise and especially dust, and this month we completed the construction of pavements between the offices.

We had already also started preparing the ground for the future soccer field in Bayanga but had to suspend all the infrastructures works. We also cancelled all planned missions

As we had communicated in the month of January, this year marks the 30th anniversary of the creation of the DSPA and we wanted to organize a series of events to celebrate it. Unfortunately, the current circumstances will not allow it as a lot of preparation time is required. As a result of so much uncertainty, the whole program will be suspended.



Tourism and Marketing

Tourism was the first thing we stopped of course, to avoid the spread of COVID-19 from other countries to DSPA. We had almost a 100% reservation for the period from mid-March to the end of April. We cancelled all of these reservations.

However, many people preferred to push forward their trips to wait to see what happens in a few months rather than recovering the money paid in advance.

Two journalists from Agence France Presse (AFP) were in DSPA at the beginning of the month to make two reports; one on the current situation of pangolins and the other on the transmission of Ba'aka culture and traditions.

A WWF US communication team that was in DSPA last December has published an article about our work with the Ba'aka. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/good-conservation-means-human-opportunity-and-human-rights>

Another article was published by the WWF communication office for Africa who also visited us last month. https://africa.panda.org/our_news/latest_news/?uNewsID=31421

Good conservation means human opportunity and human rights

In Africa's Dzanga-Sangha Reserve, birth certificates are a key step in a diverse effort to protect the people who protect the land





Arrivals and departures

As this month we have not had a lot of visits, we introduce you some of the habitual residents in DSPA



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