



# Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas

[www.dzanga-sangha.org](http://www.dzanga-sangha.org)



*Climbing to the top to collect honey (instead of cutting down the tree) helps to preserve the forest ©Nuria Ortega*

## Newsletter May 2023

DSPA receives financial support from:





# Wildlife

## Four generations in one picture: the Echo family

While carrying out their daily task of identifying individual elephants that visit Dzanga Bai, the researchers observed an adult female known as Echo III with her younger offspring. There was also Echo III(II), the first offspring of Echo III, and a mother herself in the clearing. While this observation is not rare, as these females tend to spend time together when they gather in the clearing, it became special when Echo herself made her appearance in the bai. This means that at the same time four generations of one family were together: Echo, her daughter Echo III, her granddaughter Echo III(II) and her great-granddaughter Echo III(II)(II). Four generations coming together points out once again the importance of Dzanga Bai for social interactions.



Four generations in one picture: Echo III (left), Echo III(II) (center, back) and Echo (right, front), with the two youngest family members.  
©ELP for the Yang Center/WWF

. Table with the Echo family tree of the adult members regularly seen at Dzanga Bai

Name	Born in	First seen	# of known offspring
Echo	1967 (estimated)	1990	7
Echo III	1986 (estimated)	1990	4
Echo III(II)	2005	2005	1
Echo V	1999	1999	2





Several members of the Echo family visit the clearing. Not only did we see the four-generations-gathering but a few days before we had seen Echo III with her youngest offspring, her daughter Echo III(II) with her newborn and her sister Echo V also with her own newborn. While the mothers were feeding on the grass, the infants were inspecting each other and playing.



First encounter of the newest members of the Echo family ©ELP for the Yang Center/WWF



Cousins playing ©ELP for the Yang Center/WWF

The Dzanga Forest Elephant Project and the Mbeli Bai Study (Rep. of Congo) established a collaboration two years ago in which the team members meet twice per year, once in Dzanga-Sangha and once in Nouabale-Ndoki. The goals of the collaboration include research on the elephant population that inhabits the forest complex throughout both protected areas, and capacity building of the African researchers involved in both programs.

In May, a team from DSPA visited the Mbeli Bai in the neighboring Nouabale-Ndoki National Park, Rep. of Congo.



The Dzanga Elephant Project team in Mbeli bai (NNNP) © ELP for the Yang Center/WWF






Very early in the month, one of the tracking teams searching for new gorilla groups in the Mongambe area located a group some three kilometers west of the camp, whose silverback could likely be Mayele's oldest known son called Mopangu, who had emigrated from the group in 2018 at the age of about 15. The trackers are confident that it is Mopangu, but we also plan to confirm with DNA analysis through the genetic database of our long-term collaborator, Prof. Shelly Masi at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. Observations at the nest sites suggests that the group comprises at least seven individuals. The silverback allows the team to approach as close as less than 10 meters. This may greatly reduce the time needed for the habituation process as efforts will now be focused on habituating the other group members. The group was contacted on 10 days during the month, with a daily average of seven direct contacts and so far, only three individuals were regularly visible (the silverback, a young female, and a juvenile).



*Mopangu, a Mayele son (probably) © Emmanuel Konnyal*

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Dzanga bai data: based on the number counted every 30 minutes between 11:00 to 16:30 each day of the month.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
	0	74	135
	0	5	34
	0	6	8



## Discover the Biodiversity of the DSPA



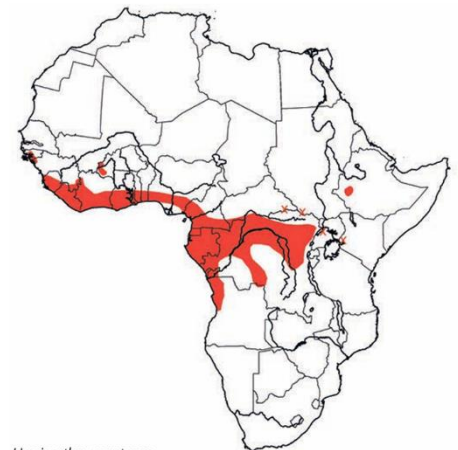
©Luis Javier Barbadillo

**Scientific name** *Hypsignathus monstrosus*

**English name:** hammer-headed bat

**Taxonomy:**

Class : mammalia  
Order : Chiroptera  
Family : Pteropodidae  
Genus : Hypsignathus  
Specie : H. monstrosus



The hammer-headed bat is a megabat widely distributed in West and Central Africa. It is the largest bat in continental Africa, with wingspans approaching 1m and males almost twice as heavy as females.

Males and females also greatly differ in appearance, including several adaptations that help males produce and amplify vocalizations. For example, the vocal cords of males are about three times as large as those of females. Also, males have large resonating chambers on their faces that allow them to produce loud, honking vocalizations to attract females.

The hammer-headed bat is frugivorous, consuming a variety of fruits such as figs, bananas, and mangoes.

It forages at night and sleeps during the day in tree roots. Individuals may roost alone or in small groups.

It is almost impossible to spend a night in Dzanga Sangha without hearing their loud honking vocalizations.

## Antipoaching

In May 2023, we presented the results of the Bayanga market study (which lasted a year) to the Bayanga market women's association (wali Gara) and the local authorities. This study documents the quantity and price of products in circulation on the markets of the Commune and more particularly wild meat. It provides information on the number of individual species, kilograms of meat sold, trade patterns, hunting methods, etc.

This study increased our understanding of the local wildlife economy at the market level with particular attention to the economic resilience of the women involved.

To provide an idea of the past year, 39,203.3 kg of hunting products passed through the Bayanga markets. These consisted of 26 different species including 4 protected species and hunting products represent 77% of the products on the market.

These data are very important as we are in the process of developing a participatory management plan of the community hunting zone



*The Bayanga market women association helped us to make the study © Christian Bassoum*

42 regular patrols and 31 patrols from the tri-national anti-poaching brigade were conducted. In total 1.677 ranger/days, 2.216 km traveled on foot to cover an area of 2.518 km<sup>2</sup>. This resulted in the seizure of 3 manufactured 12-gauge 19-gauge cartridges and 292 kg of meat. In addition, 1.775 metal snares were dismantled.

15 people arrested, sensitized then released

One fresh elephant carcass was found in the Park.



# Community Development

The Ndima Kali Association continued organizing summer camps, for young people to learn the ancestral way of life of the Ba'Aka, as part of their mission to promote the transfer traditional knowledge from the older to the younger generation.

After two years of collaboration with the CURE project, <https://projectcure.org/> we have been informed that the container with all the medical equipment for our hospital, as well as for the health centres in Monasao and Belemboke, has already left the USA. We hope that this equipment will be installed and operational before the end of this year.



*A physiotherapy session at the Belemboke health center © Melania Gimenez*

<i>Main DSPA Health Data Number of patients</i>	
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Number of patients</b>
Monasao Health Post	469
Belemboke Health Post	497
<b>Total</b>	<b>966</b>



## Park Administration

With much more delay than initially planned, mainly due to COVID 19, the stands of the new Bayanga stadium are completely erected.



*The new stands © Stef De Bethune*



*Ready to host the next AfCON © Stef De Bethune*





## Tourism and Marketing

Tourists continue visiting DSPA. This month, we received the visit of Filippo Saracco, (Director of the Environment and Natural Resources program at the EU in the DRC) who has fought for many years for conservation in Africa, mobilizing funds to support a lot of Protected Areas (including DSPA).



© Anne -Christine Kaufman



© Anne -Christine Kaufman





For the last 40 years, Phil Agland, a filmmaker has been making a series of films for television, and since the mid-1980s a series of films on a Baka family in southeast Cameroon.

Three years ago, a young baby was born into the family and named after his grandfather who was a 'ntuma' (Aka name for a traditional elephant hunter prior to conservation and holder of deep knowledge of elephants). The birth of the baby generated a discussion among the family of a place they knew, where one could observe many elephants, Dzanga, and how they wished to take the child there to see what he's missing from the forests! They journeyed from their village in southeast Cameroon, across the Sangha River, into Dzanga Sangha and ended up at Dzanga bai.



A 40-year journey! The Baka finally reaching Dzanga, many seeing elephants for the very first time. A long trek from their forest home in Cameroun, where filming of Ali and his family first started 40 years ago" © Phil Agland

An article about Dzanga Sangha was published on one of the classic and older Spanish magazines called Querqus.

**CONSERVANDO**  
que es GERUNDIO

**Ver gorilas = proteger gorilas... y personas**

Las visitas organizadas para observar gorilas en un parque nacional de la República Centroafricana contribuyen, no solo a conservar la gran fauna africana, sino también a mejorar la calidad de vida en las comunidades humanas que comparten el mismo territorio.



Primer plano de una hembra de gorila de montaña en el Parque Nacional Dzanga Sangha (República Centroafricana).

Hace ya décadas, en una visita al Zoo del Bronx (algun día tendremos que hablar de zocos en esta sección), me sorprendió un mensaje contundente: "si quiere usted ayudar a los gorilas, vaya a verlos en su hábitat natural" (cito de memoria). Conviene añadir

que George B. Schaller, el primer zoológico en estudiar a los gorilas y director su biología (1), fue director del programa de conservación internacional de la Sociedad Zoológica de Nueva York, entidad responsable del Zoo del Bronx. Dice Schaller en su célebre monografía:

"Nadie que mire a un gorila a los ojos... enteligente, gentil, vulnerable... puede permanecer indiferente ante la realidad de que la diferencia entre humano y gorila desaparece, que el gorila vive aún dentro de nosotros. ¿Los gorilas reconocen también esta antigua relación?"

He demorado seguir su consejo hasta hace pocas semanas. Pero, al fin, lo he hecho. En compañía de buenos amigos, elegimos Dzanga-Sangha, un magnífico parque nacional del sur de la República Centroafricana, cubierto de selva ecuatorial intacta, para cumplir mi postergado encuentro con los gorilas. Allí, la eficaz gestión de un equipo del WWF, bajo la batuta del español Luis Aranz, ha conseguido asegurar la protección de la fauna y acoturar a varios grupos de gorilas de montaña a la presencia humana. Un proceso que requiere, literalmente, años de habilidad y esfuerzos por parte de guardas y rastreadores. Desgraciadamente, en los meses previos a nuestra visita murieron por causas naturales dos de los machos de espaldas plateadas que lideraban sendos grupos habitados. Así que confirmamos nuestra suerte a una sola muestreadora, acompañada por una decena de ejemplares y cohesión por Makumba, un espléndido espiador al que se le calcula un peso de 200 kilos. Los responsables del parque aseguran que las probabilidades de observarlos en un día concreto son del 90%.

Cita en la selva. Así pues, ver gorilas requiere una pequeña dosis de buena suerte. Pero, sobre todo, infunde la profesionalidad del equipo del parque. Llegamos en avioneta desde Bangui, la capital del país, y la aventura arrancó junto a una veterinaria: antes de acercarse a los animales (con mascarilla), hay que asegurarse del buen estado sanitario de los intrusos (o sea, nosotros), con una revisión que incluye la prueba del Covid. A continuación, un espléndido recorrido por una pista entre los gigantes árboles de la selva te conduce a un campamento base donde hacen turnos semanales los guardas y rastreadores. La visita se desarrolló en pequeños grupos de cuatro personas, guiados por dos expertos. A menudo, otro de ellos ha iniciado previamente la aproximación para incrementar las posibilidades de éxito.

Hay que andar varios kilómetros en las sendas abiertas por los elefantes de selva, muy abundantes en el parque, hasta conseguir situarse a pocos metros de los primates, que te ignoran absolutamente. En nuestro caso, los descubrimos en el interior de la selva, dispersos aunque a escasa distancia. Makumba, el gran macho, no sólo se inmutó ante nuestra emocionada proximidad, sino que se dejó caer de espaldas y levantó sus brazos, poderosos como las columnas de una catedral, para seguir alcanzando hojas que comía parsimoniosamente. Cerca de él, una hembra mantenía a su pequeño



Un numeroso grupo de elefantes de selva se reúne en un claro del bosque rico en agua mineral, donde congregan su día. Durante todo el día audiré haber más de diez elefantes a la vez.

bebé en el regazo, mientras también se alimentaba.

La magia de estos minutos de proximidad es indescriptible. La sensación de poder que emana de los animales contrasta con su agilidad para moverse. El gran macho, en un momento dado, se levantó, cruzó la senda a pocos metros de nosotros y se encamionó con aparente ingravidez a uno de los árboles desde el cual alcanzaba más hojas apetecibles. Acabó por romper espontáneamente una gran rama para seguir alcanzando sus hojas. Los minutos pasaron con demasiada rapidez y nuestros gulis dieron la visita por terminada. Fue efímera, sí, pero de recuerdo imborrable.

El claro de los elefantes. También fueron memorables las horas vividas al día siguiente en la gran planicie de Dzanga Bai, un observatorio que permite asomarse a un enorme claro del bosque cuyo suelo es rico en sales y donde se concentran diariamente más de cien elefantes de selva, junto a búfalos, bongos y aves diver-

sas, para asegurarse la ingesta de minerales. El seguimiento del encave por profesionales africanos ha permitido comprobar que son del orden de 4.000 los elefantes que visitan en algún momento esta singular localidad. Para ello han tenido que identificar a los individuos por detalles particulares de sus colmillos y de sus pabellones auditivos.

Los gorilas y toda la gran fauna acompañante son sin duda el principal atractivo para los pocos centenares de visitantes que acuden anualmente al parque. Los servicios que requieren a guías y rastreadores, responsables del alojamiento, conductores y demás profesionales constituyen una nada desdeñable fuente de ingresos para la comunidad local. En la República Centroafricana el sueldo medio anual es inferior a los 100 euros, o sea, menos de 30 céntimos diarios! Un gorila o un elefante vivos son inmensamente más rentables que el valor de su carne o su marfil. Los ingresos generados por las visitas contribuyen a garantizar asimismo a la guardería del parque e incluye programas similares y educativos para las comunidades locales, cuyos detalles pueden conocerse mejor en su página web (2).

El mensaje del Zoo del Bronx es muy cierto: visitar a los gorilas es colaborar decisivamente con su supervivencia y multiplica a los aliados locales interesados en conservarlos. Así que, modestamente, uno mis palabras a las de Schaller y recomiendo viajar a cualquier día de los parques que ofrecen esta oportunidad, en beneficio de los gorilas, de las comunidades humanas que comparten su hábitat y de la propia e intensa experiencia personal. ■

Bibliografía  
(1) Schaller, G.B., Year of the Gorilla (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1968).  
(2) <http://www.dzanga.org>





## Arrivals and departures

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© Luis Arranz

Felix Safouet, who has been to DSPA several times to install solar power plants, will now stay with us for a year to ensure the maintenance of all solar installations as well as to train national technicians.

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