



Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas

www.dzanga-sangha.org



First ever Dzanga Sangha Day © Stef de Bethune

Newsletter November 2025



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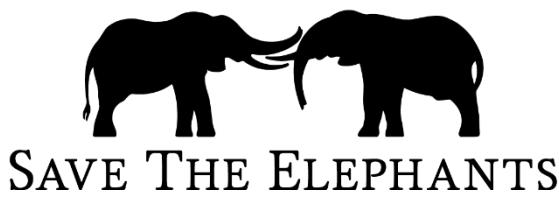




DSPA collaborates with



NDIMA KALI



Planète radio

Special Events in November

Dzanga-Sangha Day in the Central African Republic

Last month, as you may already know, we celebrated the first-ever Dzanga-Sangha (DS) Day, highlighting this UNESCO World Heritage landscape and living One Health model. We were honored by the participation of the President of the Central African Republic and a delegation of senior government officials, alongside the European Union Ambassador in CAR and other international partners, including HIOH and the Pasteur Institute. DS Day highlighted the vital role of protecting biodiversity while promoting sustainable development and community resilience.

Link to DSPA website article: <https://dzanga-sangha.org/stories/first-ever-dzanga-sangha-day/>

Link to DSPA youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuiMDRcoN-c>



Following the official launch in Bangui, the European Union Ambassador to the Central African Republic, Diego Escalona Paturel, accompanied President Touadéra to Bayanga. Together with ministers, traditional leaders, and partners, they spent two days in the field engaging with local and Indigenous communities and seeing first-hand how conservation investments are generating tangible benefits through eco-tourism development, access to solar energy, and One Health approaches that strengthen disease prevention and improve overall health outcomes.

Radio Ndjoku Celebrates 10 Years

Founded in 2010 by RFI Planète Radio and supported by WWF and the European Delegation, Radio Ndjoku was officially inaugurated in November 2015 with a grand celebration bringing together all communities of Bayanga. Over the years, the team has received ongoing training in radio and video production, making it one of the most professional media teams in the country. By giving local and indigenous populations a voice to support collaborative management of protected natural reserves, Radio Ndjoku has become a unique example in environmental conservation worldwide.

To celebrate its 10th anniversary, we are planning a special local event near the station, open to everyone. The photos below are cherished memories from the inauguration ceremony ten years ago.



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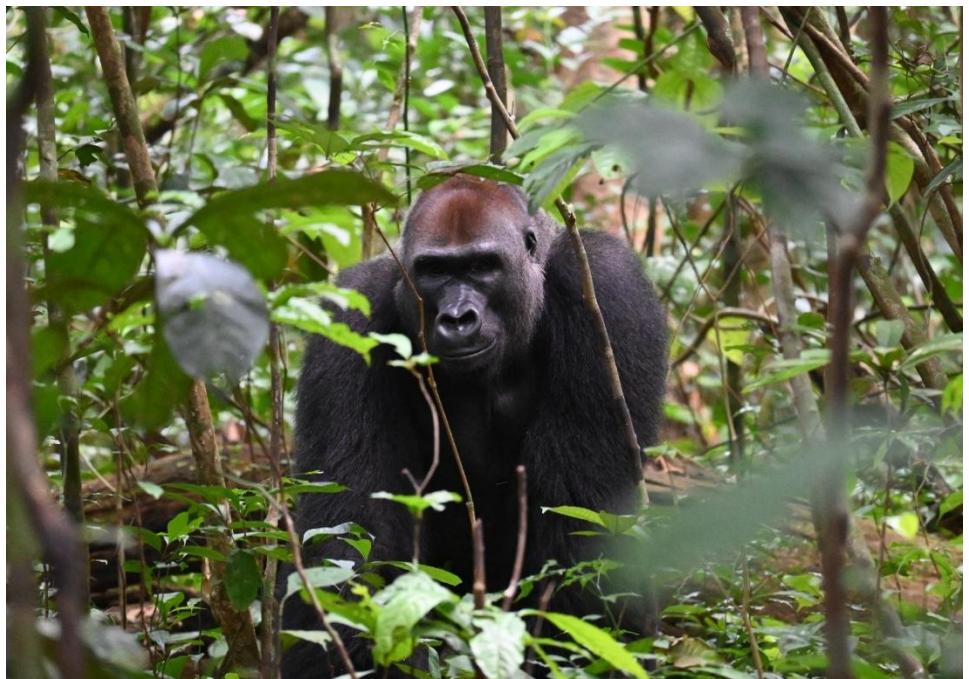


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Wildlife

PHP Highlight, Introducing Our Third Gorilla Group: Missiki

We are honored to introduce our third gorilla group, led by the dominant male Missiki.



© Andrea Sotto MAyor

Following the opening of Limo's group to visitors in July, the habituation process of our two new groups has progressed rapidly. After introducing Bokala, whose group now experiences daily visual "contact" with our teams, we are pleased to present this third group.



From the very first encounters, the behavior of the dominant male surprised our teams. After brief displays of charges and vocalizations, he would often sit calmly about twenty meters away to observe us before retreating with his group into dense vegetation. This unusual behavior suggested he was already familiar with habituation teams.

Over time, trackers named him Missiki, meaning “*to sit*” in the Ba’aka language. He may have grown up in the first gorilla group monitored by PHP between 1997 and 2004, though his identity remains unconfirmed.

Daily contact time with the group continues to increase, and more individuals are allowing themselves to be observed, encouraged by Missiki’s calm leadership. This marks another promising success for the Primate Habituation Program in DSPA.



© Andrea Sotto Mayor

Newborn at Phaedra IV

The adult female known as Phaedra IV, estimated to be 28 years old, was born around 1997 and was re-identified in 2022. Since this first observation, she has been a regular visitor to the saline.

Phaedra IV was observed to be pregnant. However, due to the lack of detailed information on pregnancy stages in forest elephants, it was not possible to predict an exact birth date. Elephant gestation lasts approximately 22 months, and long-term data have been collected on this subject.



On 19 November 2025, Phaedra IV was observed for the last time while still pregnant. Seven days later, on 26 November 2025, she returned to the saline with her newborn calf, a male.



Phaedra IV at the Bai – Nov 2025 with Newborn © ELP for the Yang Center/WWF



© ELP for the Yang Center/WWF

Dzanga Bai data collected in collaboration with the Elephant Listening Project: presence of mammals at the clearing based on the number of individuals counted every 60 minutes from 11:00 to 16:00 each day of the month.

Species	Minimum	Average	Maximum
	22	86	205
	0	0,2	40
	0	8	13

Antipoaching

In November, the Dzanga-Sangha Protected Areas stepped up their operations with 40 patrols covering a total of 3,537 km on foot. These patrols led to the seizure of 2,615 wire snares, 05 firearms, 40 rounds of ammunition, and 3537 kg of bushmeat. five individuals were arrested (five awaiting trial), and 23 awareness-raising sessions were held.

Community Conservation

End of Back-to-School Awareness Campaign 2025–2026 – 11 APDS Villages

The campaign, featuring football matches, contests, and quiz questions, reached over 2,400 people across 11 villages (1,100+ men and 1,300+ women) in addition to 50,000 Radio Ndjoku listeners. In some villages, it helped stimulate the start of the school year. Data collected show that 7,073 students (3,863 boys and 3,210 girls) have enrolled and resumed classes in the 19 schools mapped and supported by DSPA.



Sensitization session in Belemboke ©Epoua Lassy

A rural electrification project in partnership with Barefoot College International is under preparation in Dzanga Sangha. This month, we exchanged with the communities of Babongo and Nguengueli on how they wish to organize the project in their village, and surveys on energy use were conducted to better understand local practices. More than 90 households were surveyed, around a third of which Ba'Aka.

The information is crucial to help us collectively understand how energy is being used in the area, and how the project can truly improve access to better lighting. For example, a very common head torch holding three non-rechargeable batteries, is calculated to cost around 18 500 FCFA per year! We suggest households save similar amounts in village savings association while building capacity on financial literacy. Meanwhile, four solar mamas will be trained by Barefoot College Zanzibar on electrical maintenance and solar equipment. To be continued...



Some examples of higher capacity lighting equipment in Dzanga Sangha, these can cost around 50 000 FCFA annually ©APDS/WWF



Community sensitization on the project in Nguengueli and Household Survey in Babongo ©APDS/WWF

Renewal of Community Committees of the BâAka Union (UCB) : November 13–27, 2025

A joint mission with the UCB central office was conducted in 10 target villages (Monasao, Nguengueli, Kanza, Koundapapaye, Yobé, Babongo, Mossapoula, Yandoupé, Lindjombo, and Bomandjokou) to hold community consultations and renew local committee members ahead of the general assembly in mid-December 2025. A total of 396 participants attended (191 men and 205 women), resulting in 69 elected committee members across the villages (47 men and 22 women).

Special Children's Awareness Sessions in 4 DSPA Periphery Villages

A special session was conducted in Beya, SCED, Belemboke, and Salo1 under the theme “Living in Harmony with Nature.” The activity had two phases: first, in classrooms with children and some parents; second, visits to the homes of village elders to gather testimonies on the state of nature over time and stories about how grandparents used natural resources in the past.



Educational Exchange Between Elders and Youth ©Christian Bassoum

Agroforestry

The agroforestry project has seen significant progress in the past month, with the number of plants currently in cultivation surpassing 75,000. The project's water storage capacity has reached 8,500 litres. The residence for the agroforestry manager has been completed, and a container has been converted for use as the project's office and storage facility converted for use as the project's office and storage facility.



©APDS/WWF



Main DSPA Health Data Number of patients

Structure	Number of patients
Monasao Health Post	275
Belemboke Health Post	505
Community consultation	
Total	780

One Health

On 18 November 2025, alongside Dzanga-Sangha Protected Areas (DSPAs) Day, a One Health workshop was held in Bangui, co-organized with the Helmholtz Institute for One Health (HIOH) and attended by key national and international partners.

The workshop highlighted WWF and HIOH epidemiological surveillance projects in the DSPA and marked the official launch of the INFORBIO project with government partners. Participants also engaged with ALERTE, an educational tool developed by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), strengthening collaboration and communication within the disease surveillance system in the Central African Republic.



©F. Singa



©F. Singa



From October 14 to November 26, three HIOH scientists visited DSPA to launch zoonotic pathogen surveillance in bats and rodents under the INFORBIO project, in collaboration with the WWF One Health team. Following initial field assessments and community consultations, trapping and sampling were conducted around Mongambe camp, then continued in Yandoumbe village and surrounding areas. These activities provided hands-on training for WWF staff and actively involved local communities.

Over a three-week period, the HIOH/WWF team captured and sampled 223 animals, revealing a high diversity of bats and rodents. Collected samples will be used for genetic species identification and zoonotic pathogen testing.

©Lorenzo Lagostina



©Lorenzo Lagostina

The first round of clinical surveillance in DSPLA was successfully completed in late November. In collaboration with six health posts and the HIOH research team, 205 dried blood spots were collected from malaria-positive patients to study parasite prevalence and antimicrobial resistance.

In addition, 47 patients with suspected skin diseases (including leprosy, yaws, anthrax, and mpox) were sampled using skin swabs. All PCR analyses are now underway in our laboratory, with results shared confidentially with health post staff. Skin samples have also been sent to Institut Pasteur Bangui for antimicrobial resistance testing.

Based on feedback from this pilot phase, continuous surveillance is planned to resume in February next year



Microbiologist Jephthe busy in the Une Seule Santé field lab in Bayanga analyzing the samples of the human clinical surveillance.

DSPA Administration

In November, we completed several important infrastructure projects, including the construction of 2 new staff housing for the APDS (one of which is shown in the photo on the right), a new technical building for the garage staff changing rooms, the installation of equipment for the APDS solar power plant, and administrative archives (shown on the left).



©Ray Hencker

Following the official installation of the first solar panel by His Excellency the President of the Central African Republic, the remaining panels and other components of the Bayanga solar power plant were installed.



©Presse Presidentielle RCA



©Ray Hencker

The DSPA Management Unit also participated in the 35th Board of Directors meeting of the FTNS held in Brazzaville.



©FTNS

Tourism and marketing

We were honored to welcome the President of the Central African Republic during Dzanga Sangha Day and to see him stay at Doli Lodge along with a large part of his delegation.



We're also happy to share that an article on Dzanga Sangha by Noo Saro-Wiwa, with photos by Simon Winnall, has just been published in the magazine Conde Nast Traveller



In a clearing in the rainforest known as Dzanga Bai, in the Dzanga-Sangha National Park, about 20 elephants mill around, plunging their trunks into the mineral-rich clay soil. Every day, up to 200 of them can congregate here in what is one of the largest gatherings of elephants in the world. In the same clearing, at other times they are joined by buffaloes, marshbucks, chinkara, bongo antelopes and red river hogs, in the midst of trees that rustle with colobus monkeys. The main draw for this multi-species convection is the soil, which the elephants eat and smear on themselves to kill toxins. Watching from an elevated wooden platform 20 feet above the ground, I note that the various soils turn their skin different colours: one elephant looks burnt orange; a nearby juvenile has painted herself in a bright yellow primer. The lemons, lime and orange are not psychedelic in the wildness. I've never seen anything like it. Not that many visitors have.

Dzanga-Sangha National Park lies on the northern fringe of the Congo Basin in the extreme southwest of the Central African Republic (CAR), a country that receives fewer tourists – about 700 in 2024 – than Antarctica, and gets little global attention beyond reports about its civil

war and the Wagner mercenaries enlisted to protect the government. Bordered by troubled South Sudan, Chad and the DRC, as well as Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo, the CAR was the last “great blank space” on the 19th-century maps of French colonisers who named it Ubangi-Shari in 1889. It became independent 10 years later, when it was the colony least prepared for independence, on account of its severe lack of infrastructure and tiny formal economy.

The Wabafirka, as its citizens call themselves in the Sango language, are among the world's poorest by per capita GDP, but their natural endowments are beyond measure. Besides being home to forest elephants, Dzanga-Sangha National Park harbours western lowland gorillas, chimpanzees, pangolins, silvery-cheeked mangabays. These animals were hunted for sport in the 1970s by the CAR's former dictator and self-declared emperor, Jean-Bédel Bokassa, alongside his friend, France's then president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (until his young daughter chastised him for it). But in 1990 the national park was established, and the WWF was invited to protect its unique and endangered wildlife from poachers (who use guns made from motorcycle

*The lemon-coloured
pachyderm is almost
psychedelic in its vividness*



sandbank as it winds longitudinally miles downstream past hippos, eventually joining the jagernaut Congo River. One evening beneath apricot skies, we cruise in a dugout canoe, looking out for jacanas, turacos, hornbills and kingfishers. Laiac non-native water hyacinths decorate the grassy banks, and local young men climb the raffia palm trees to tap them and make palm wine. Twenty minutes by motorboat takes us to an area of primary rainforest filled with steep cliffs and waterfalls. Next morning we're back in the dugout to see some of the park's estimated 2,000 gorillas, a third of whom are being habituated to humans for the first time. En route we spot elephant tracks in the soil. The possibility of encountering those beasts adds a thrilling dimension to our trek. We soon find Limo, a silverback with a red tuft of hair on his head, staring down at us from a tree-top. Minutes later, he and a baby-clutching female descend to the ground, and in a shower of leaves, All of the dugout from view – except Limo, who lies prostrate in our direction, playing sentry guard. Although still wary, he is getting used to new faces and charges at people less frequently. “This is part of the next phase of the habituation,” says the programme adviser, Andrea Sotto-Mayor, “letting the gorillas know that there are new visitors and that this will be a regular thing.”

As we venture further into the area all the time, poachers, mainly Chinese loggers and the war-displaced now outnumber the 5,000 Indigenous Ba'Aka people (formerly known as “pygmies”) who, traditionally being illiterate, have historically been disdained and exploited by other Wabafirka. Now semi-nomadic, they keep one foot in the forest and another around Bayanga village. They can still hunt legally in the Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve, but their livelihood, based on selling medicinal plants, fruits, wild nuts and honey to settled

tribes, is vanishing. They are entering the area all the time. Poachers, mainly Chinese loggers and the war-displaced now outnumber the 5,000 Indigenous Ba'Aka people (formerly known as “pygmies”) who, traditionally being illiterate, have historically been disdained and exploited by other Wabafirka. Now semi-nomadic, they keep one foot in the forest and another around Bayanga village. They can still hunt legally in the Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve, but their livelihood, based on selling medicinal plants, fruits, wild nuts and honey to settled

We join the Ba'Aka on a hunt among equatorial trees where more than a quarter of all known medicines are found. They show us the gaps in tree bark used for problematic pregnancies and removing parasites, before they catch a squirrel with a net made from vines. Then the men collect honey by hacking footholds into the tree trunk and climbing up incredibly fast, using a rope and hoist technique. After 20 minutes of smacking out the bees, two boys place the honeycomb in baskets – weaved

*A woman's voice embodiment
the spirits calls out and
everyone responds in unison*

in situ from leaves and vines – and let the taste its organic sweetness.

Nature here is powerful and all-consuming, making it easy to let go and establish a spiritual awareness of it – everyone must submit to the forest's savage domain. We camp with the Ba'Aka for one night in a clearing, where their carbon footprint is as light as the butterflies fluttering about. Sitting around the domed huts erected from twigs and waterproof leaves, men, women and children joke and chatter endlessly; the hunter-gatherer lifestyle seems to create a refreshing lack of social or gender hierarchies. Francois Motisse, the exhibitionist who runs the Doli Lodge, is a good example: he is a tall, dark, hairy – while the others sing and shake hollowed gourds for percussion, creating a rich melody. After sundown a woman's voice embodiment the spirits calls out and everyone responds in unison as sheet lightning flashes in the sky. Lying sleepily on a mat, among the flames, watching the ladies' silhouettes dancing by the flames, I feel joyfully disconnected from the world and yet so connected – to my ancestors and to nature here in this green heart of Africa. ♀

BOOK IT Cookson Adventures can organise a five-night adventure to the Central African Republic from £17,500 per person based on a private group of eight guests. This includes exclusive use of Doli Lodge, two gorilla treks, camping with the Ba'Aka and Dzanga Bai elephant experiences, as well as internal charter flights, itinerary planning and a Cookson Adventures host. cooksonadventures.com

Arrivals and departures



As part of the Barefoot College program, we are proud to introduce our four Solar Mamas from Babongo and Nguengueli, who have embarked on a three-month training adventure in Zanzibar.



A biomedical engineer visited DSPA to test the radiology equipment. During the visit, he also carried out maintenance on several Bayanga Hospital devices and installed the ultrasound printer

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