

Democratic Republic of Congo

Investing in wildlife security, protected area management, community engagement and applied research to conserve one of the largest expanses of tropical rainforest on earth.



Left: Eastern DRC landscape. Credit: Dirck Byler/USFWS. **Right: The Lesula (*Cercopithecus lomamiensis*), a primate species discovered in 2007.** Credit: John Hart/Lukuru Wildlife Research Foundation.



The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) represents the 11th largest country in the world and is home to over 75.5 million

people who belong to more than 200 ethnic groups. After a difficult history under Belgian rule from 1908 to 1960, persistent political and economic turmoil has marred the DRC's post-colonial period. In addition to taking its toll on the country's vast natural resources, this turmoil continues to impact DRC's path to economic and social development.

The second largest contiguous forest in the world is in DRC. The forests of DRC are globally important not only because they are home to species found nowhere else - including the bonobo, okapi, and Congo peacock - but also because they serve as a buffer against global climate change. In addition to vast tropical forests, DRC's landscapes include savannas, mountains, active volcanoes, and wetlands. Protecting DRC's diverse ecosystems contributes to the survival of many globally important species, including the forest elephant, giraffe, leopard,

forest buffalo, chimpanzees, two subspecies of gorilla, and the bonobo or dwarf chimpanzee, which does not occur anywhere else. DRC has eight national parks including Africa's oldest protected area, Virunga National Park.

Current threats to Biodiversity in the DRC

Elephant poaching

Poaching for ivory represents the biggest threat to the survival of elephants on the African continent. Central Africa is increasingly targeted due to the quality of the ivory of forest elephants, the ability of poachers to remain undetected in its dense forest habitats, and the lack of law enforcement coupled with corruption and underlying poverty that remains a major problem in Central African countries.

Commercial bushmeat trade

The commercial bushmeat trade refers to the over-hunting of wildlife for its meat and income. Unsustainable bushmeat hunting is the single greatest threat to the majority of wildlife in forests throughout Central Africa. Commercial bushmeat extraction is especially pronounced around

logging concessions and other work camps, where new roads provide hunters access into previously remote forests and facilitate transportation of the meat to urban markets. The commercial bushmeat market is fueled by urban consumers, who associate bushmeat with status and culture.

Extractive industries

Extractive industries - including logging, mining, and oil exploitation - represent a direct threat to DRC's wildlife by destroying or degrading habitat. The camps also lead to road access for hunters, the bushmeat market, new human settlements, and agriculture.



An okapi at DRC's Okapi Faunal Reserve. Credit: Okapi Conservation Project.

Since 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has supported conservation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with 91 grants, totaling more than \$9.2 million this was leveraged with more than \$14.5 million in matching funds.

Garamba National Park

Established in 1938 and designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980, Garamba is one of Africa's first national parks. Although Garamba remains important as habitat for one of the last major populations of forest elephant, uncontrolled poaching for ivory has led to a decline from nearly 20,000 individuals in 1960 to an estimated 3,000 today. In 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) awarded \$123,000 to the African Parks Network to improve law enforcement in Garamba and local community engagement to address ivory poaching by organized crime syndicates.

Virunga National Park

Virunga National Park was established in 1925 and declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. Africa's oldest and most diverse national park, Virunga encompasses an extraordinary variety of landscapes and species. It provides important habitat for 30% of the world's remaining critically endangered mountain gorilla. For more than a decade, USFWS has been helping to rebuild Virunga after the effects of civil war. The Service has supported the development of alternative energy to prevent logging and habitat degradation, anti-poaching activities including improved aerial surveillance, establishing a canine surveillance unit, providing aid to widows of fallen rangers, and developing tourism. In 2013, USFWS and the Virunga Fund, Inc. signed a five-year cooperative agreement to improve the operational capacity of

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the Virunga rangers, strengthen the park's long-term conservation strategy and improve its financial sustainability. USFWS's \$1.25 million over five years is leveraged by \$3.35 million in matching funds.

TL2 – Tshuapa-Lomani-Lualaba

The Tshuapa-Lomani-Lualaba (TL2) landscape is one of the largest pristine forest blocks in the DRC. Relatively unexplored until 2007, the TL2 is home to a wealth of biodiversity, including the bonobo and forest elephant. Support from USFWS, totaling \$843,095 and leveraged by \$1,773,636 to date, has enabled the Lukuru Wildlife Research Project to conduct research, to identify and develop conservation priorities and establish new protected areas. In 2007, a primate species new to science was discovered in TL2, resulting in the second new primate species discovery in nearly 30 years.

Maringa-Lompori-Wamba

The Maringa-Lompori-Wamba landscape represents nearly 20% of the existing range of bonobos. Since 2010, USFWS has provided \$178,135 to the African Wildlife Foundation, leveraged by \$128,190, to develop the capacity of the Congolese Parks Agency (*Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature*, or ICCN) to protect the bonobo and forest elephant in this landscape. Efforts involve enhancing law enforcement, outreach to local communities, and engaging other regional stakeholders in conservation.

Lola ya Bonobo

In 2008, the world's first program for the care and reintroduction of bonobos was established. Located in a community reserve within the Maringa-Lompori-Wamba complex, the sanctuary at Lola ya Bonobo successfully rehabilitated and reintroduced approximately 16 bonobos orphaned by the bushmeat



Above: A bonobo at Lola Ya Bonobo in DRC. Credit: Vanessa Woods/Friends of Bonobos

and illegal wildlife trade. By garnering and building interest in bonobos among local communities, the program is inspiring a long-term conservation culture. USFWS support since 2006 includes \$367,514 in funding, leveraged by \$911,223 in additional funds.

Ituri Forest

The Ituri Forest in Northeastern DRC encompasses a huge swath of relatively intact tropical forest. It provides habitat to the largest known population of the eastern chimpanzee and the endemic okapi. The Ituri Forest also represents one of the last remaining strongholds for forest elephants in the DRC. Since 2008, USFWS awarded \$309,511 to the Wildlife Conservation Society, leveraged by \$154,909 in matching funds, to gain a better understanding of local threats to wildlife, particularly great apes, and to use this information to adapt and improve ICCN's law enforcement through capacity development and by educating rangers about wildlife laws.

USFWS Support to the DRC FY2006-FY2013	
Grants Awarded	91
Amount Awarded	\$9,262,499
Amount Leveraged	\$14,572,213
Total	\$23,834,712