

GABON

On the cutting edge of wildlife conservation



Forest elephants in Loango National Park on the coast of Gabon. Credit: Richard Ruggiero / USFWS

Gabon contains a wealth of natural resources. A country roughly the size of Colorado with a population of less than two million people, it represents the best hope for reversing the damage from poaching and habitat loss that has put Central Africa's threatened and endangered species at risk of extinction.

Gabon has demonstrated a strong political will to conserve the biological riches of its wilderness. In 2002 it established a network of 13 national parks covering 10 percent of the country. In 2007 it created a national parks agency, *Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux* or ANPN, and adopted laws formally defining the parks network. ANPN has developed sound management practices for its parks, launched an initiative for attracting eco-tourism and made a long-term commitment to protecting Gabon's marine ecosystems.



Nesting leatherback sea turtle at Pongara National Park. Credit: Richard Ruggiero / USFWS

After years of supporting individual projects in Gabon, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) launched a five-year cooperative agreement with ANPN in FY 2014 to strengthen its national park system, improve management capacity and provide greater protections to its populations of forest elephants, great apes and leatherback turtles.

ANPN has launched two major initiatives to develop the staff, resources and technical capacity it needs to tackle its wildlife conservation challenges on its own over the long-term: *Gabon Vert* and *Gabon Bleu*. *Gabon Vert* seeks to secure wildlife populations and conserve natural resources in its national parks and buffer zones. *Gabon Bleu* strives to do the same for the country's coastal and marine resources. In November 2014, President Ali Bongo Ondimba announced that ANPN would create 10 marine protected areas covering 23 percent of the country's territorial waters.

Gabon's five-year cooperative agreement with USFWS has three main objectives:

- Establish ANPN as a premier African parks agency with strong national support and adaptive capacity for managing the parks and their boundary areas into the future.
- Develop a system for improving wildlife security in buffer zones outside of national parks.
- Reduce pressure on the parks and surrounding areas from extractive industries: forestry, mining, oil and gas, and commercial fishing.

Why support wildlife conservation in Central Africa?

Central Africa contains some of the most iconic wildlife species on the planet. Forest elephants, great apes and other awe-inspiring species have inhabited Central Africa for millions of years. Many of these species now face the threat of extinction within the next 100 years. Global forces have accelerated this threat through well-organized poaching networks and uncontrolled resource extraction. Combined, these forces wipe out vulnerable populations and devastate habitats. As a global leader in wildlife conservation, USFWS has an obligation to help secure endangered Central African species and habitats. Their future hangs in the balance, and we have the power to shape that future.

Why conserve wildlife in Gabon?

About 75 percent of Africa's remaining forest elephants live in Gabon. Important populations of western lowland gorillas and chimpanzees also live there. It has one of the most productive marine ecosystems in the world, and forests cover 85 percent of its land area. As Gabon strengthens its park system, it must protect against poachers who cross its borders to kill wildlife, and against illegal fishing operators who deplete its marine life.

Threats to Central African Wildlife

Inadequate law enforcement, corruption and poverty create an environment that puts wildlife populations at risk by enabling the following threats:

Elephant poaching

The ivory trade poses the single biggest threat to the survival of the African elephant. The number of forest elephants in Central Africa fell 60 percent between 2002 and 2011. The ivory trade uses large-scale transport and heavily armed criminal syndicates to systematically kill unprotected elephant populations.

Commercial bushmeat trade

Commercial demand for bushmeat poses the single greatest threat to the majority of forest animals in Central Africa. A thriving commercial trade often emerges around logging concessions and other work camps, where new roads provide access to previously remote forests and facilitate transport back to urban markets.

Extractive industries

Logging, mining and oil exploration that are unregulated and unmanaged threaten wildlife by destroying and degrading habitats. These industries also create indirect effects through the creation of roads that attract poachers, new human settlements and conversion of forest into agricultural land.

Marine turtle mortality

Marine turtles along Central Africa's Atlantic coast face two main threats: the intentional or incidental capture of marine turtles by commercial and artisanal fishing operations, and the capture of nesting females and raiding of nests for eggs. Logs on nesting beaches from nearby logging concessions also pose a serious threat.

Disease

Ebola and other infectious diseases are a major cause of decline in African great ape populations. Ebola has a higher mortality rate for chimpanzees and gorillas (up to 95%) than for humans (50 to 80%). Apes are vulnerable to many diseases spread by humans who share their habitat. Influenza, leprosy and tuberculosis are often fatal for previously unexposed apes.

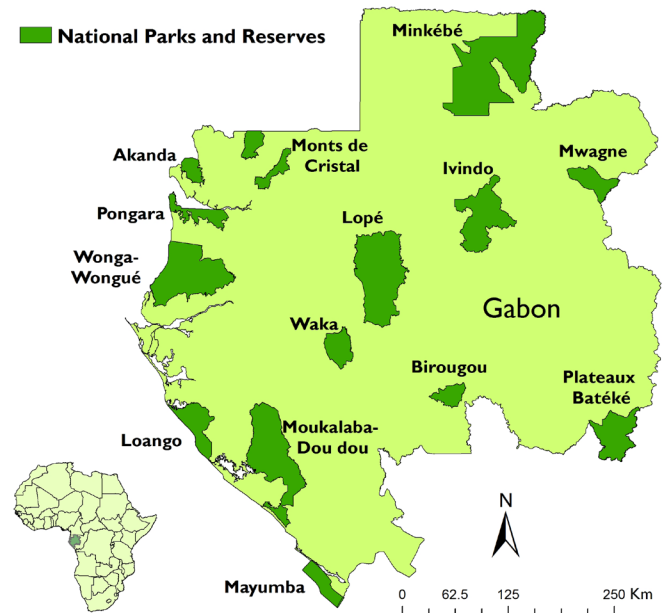
The Pet Trade

Live capture of animals for the pet trade threatens many species, including great apes.

From Fiscal Year 2010 to 2014, USFWS provided \$14.6 million to support conservation projects in Gabon, with an additional \$10.8 million in matching funds coming from ANPN and our non-governmental organization (NGO) partners.

Map: Gabon's network of protected areas.

Credit: William Kanapaux / USFWS



For Fiscal Years 2013 and 2014, USFWS provided \$6.5 million to the cooperative agreement, while ANPN provided a matching amount of \$3.7 million. Major achievements to date include:

- Validation of park management plans for all 13 national parks.
- A spatial plan for marine parks, oil exclusion zones and fishing zones.
- Implementation of a national elephant monitoring program.
- Signed agreements with Gabon's two largest oil producers for protecting marine resources.
- Creation of an integrated information management system for law enforcement.
- Partnerships with the Central African Republic and the Republic of Congo to collaborate on park management and the reduction of ivory poaching.

USFWS capacity-building efforts include a MENTOR (Mentoring for ENvironmental Training in Outreach and Resource conservation) program, which provided academic and field-based training to emerging regional conservationists, and nearly \$1 million in Fiscal Year 2014 for field projects that address direct threats to wildlife.

Despite its progress, Gabon remains vulnerable to poaching. From 2006 to 2011, poachers killed more than 10,000 elephants in Minkébé National Park, bordering Cameroon and the Republic of Congo. Although Gabon's government shut down the illegal mining operation at Minkébé, the poaching threat persists. In contrast, rampant poaching in the Wonga-Wongué Presidential Reserve was controlled after one year of intensive security work. Gabon is seeking to replicate its success at Wonga-Wongué, and USFWS is doing its part to help.



ANPN staff inspect a confiscated firearm.

Credit: Richard Ruggiero / USFWS

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