

# Ecosystem Management Project for the Periphery of the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (PROGEPP)

Annual report 2025

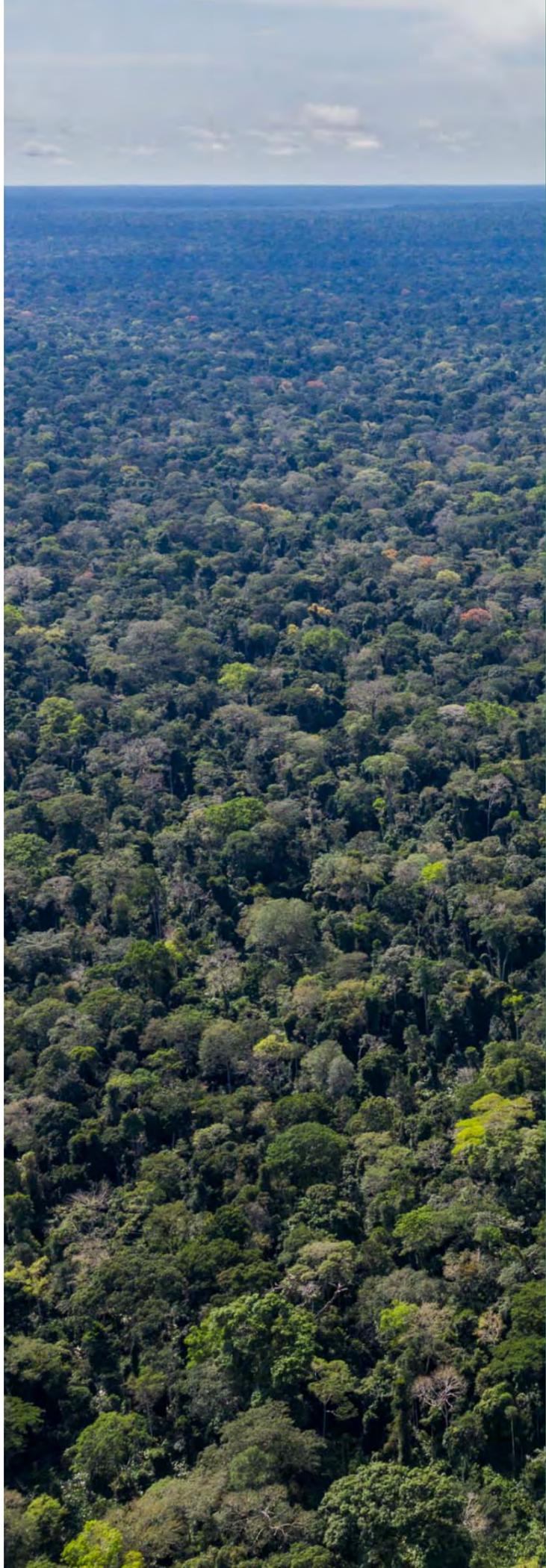


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## ABOUT PROGEPP

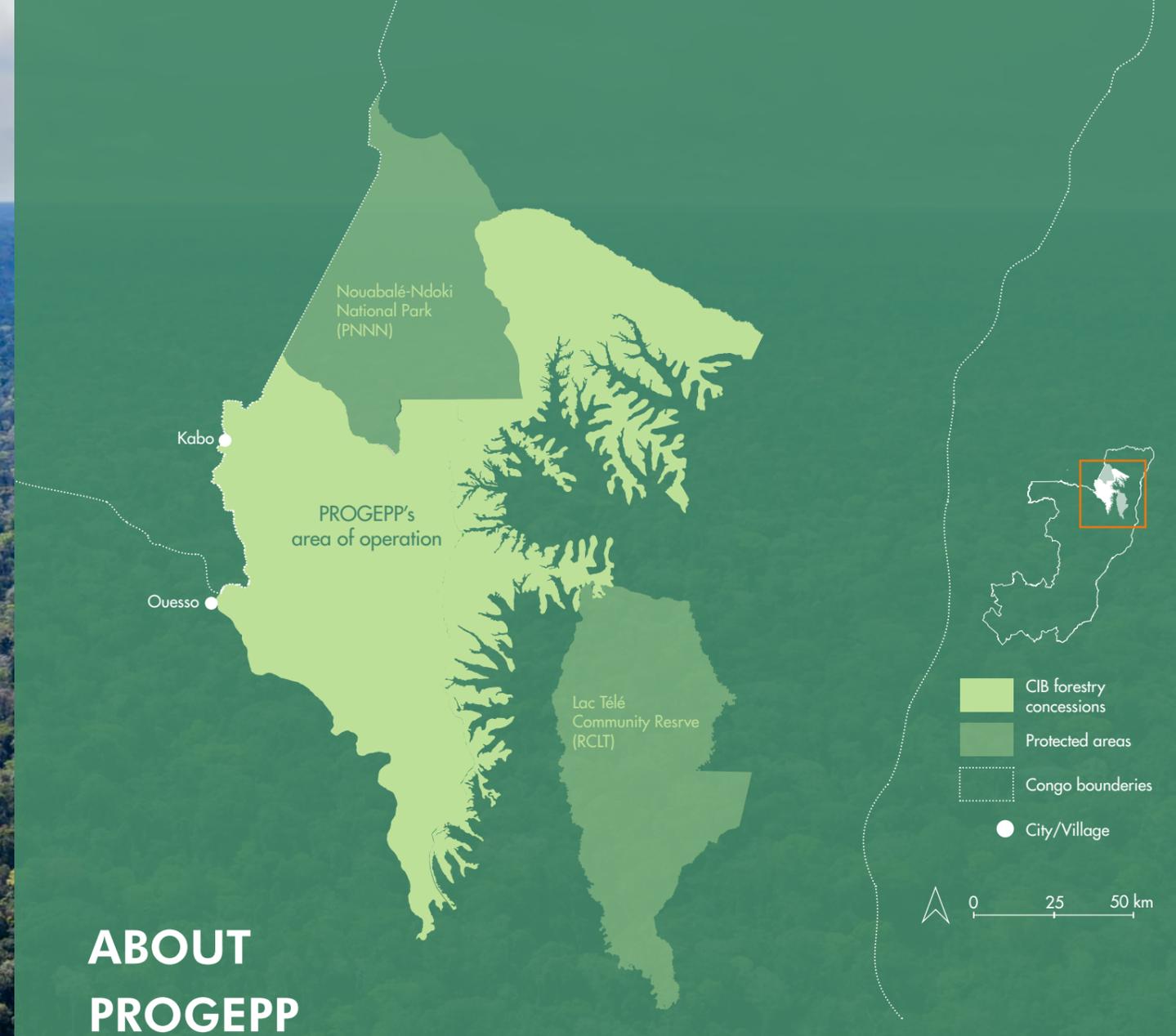
Since 1999, the Ecosystem Management Project for the Periphery of the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (PROGEPP) has been carrying out an essential mission: to protect wildlife and preserve the ecological balance in the park's buffer zone, while taking into account local human and economic realities. The project is based on a solid tripartite partnership between the Ministry of Forest Economy, the Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). This collaboration is governed by a renewable memorandum of understanding, which was renewed in August 2021.

Covering an area of approximately 13,000 km<sup>2</sup>, PROGEPP aims to ensure the sustainable management of ecosystems, fauna and flora within the CIB's forest concessions, prevent the negative impacts of logging on the protected area, and work closely with local communities to promote the responsible use of their land and natural resources.

To achieve these ambitions, the project combines several complementary areas of intervention: wildlife monitoring and protection, ecological monitoring, community conservation and environmental education.

Between January and December 2025, PROGEPP teams intensified their presence in the field through the deployment of mobile and fixed patrols. They also monitored agricultural areas damaged by elephants and assisted communities in installing electric fencing to better protect crops, conducted awareness-raising activities in villages in the intervention zone, and maintained signage.

All of these actions made it possible to identify risk areas more precisely, support local initiatives aimed at protecting livelihoods, and strengthen dialogue around concerted and sustainable natural resource management.



COMMUNITY CONSERVATION



• Installation of road signs in hunting areas

A mission was carried out to install new signs in the Kabo, Pokola and Loundougou UFAs. The aim of this operation was to replace defective signs and improve the distinction between hunting areas, protected areas and safari areas.

The work focused on six strategic areas. A total of **47 new signs were made and installed**: 24 for protected areas, 8 for safari areas and 15 for hunting areas.

• Awareness raising and education

In schools, 16 environmental education sessions were held for **576 pupils (276 boys and 300 girls) in grades CE1 to CM2**. The topics covered included the importance of air, water and soil, waste and pollution management, the legal status of wild animals, and legal and illegal hunting and fishing.

In addition, three community awareness meetings brought together **63 participants (36 men and 27 women)** for discussions on:

- Participation in the electric fence field project;
- The risks associated with night hunting;
- Management of human-wildlife conflicts in the event of damage to fields.

• Human-Wildlife Conflict

The socio-economic team monitored damage caused by wildlife in the agricultural areas of Kabo and continued to georeference fields. A total of **31 plots (including 15 new ones) were monitored, covering a cumulative area of 69.2 hectares**. The work focused on identifying animal incursions, monitoring crop cycles and production trends.

This monitoring was accompanied by the **installation of 5,400 metres of electric fencing (Elanga project)** to protect the fields from elephants, and by awareness-raising activities for more concerted management of human-wildlife conflict (led by the Wildlife Health Programme WHP).



 Sustainable Hunting SWM Programme

- 16 meetings organised with hunting groups, involving 474 participants (252 Bantu and 222 indigenous people);
- 14 additional awareness-raising sessions to explore the principles of the management plan and best practices in greater depth;
- Active promotion of community monitoring boxes, encouraging self-assessment of harvests and accountability among hunters;
- Assessment of natural resource governance tools (NRGT) carried out with four associations (two hunting and two fishing), highlighting a need for capacity building;
- Inauguration of the Kabo/Gbagbali community centre, providing a permanent forum for consultation on the sustainable management of natural resources.

 Sustainable Fishing SWM Programme

- Six awareness-raising meetings in the villages of Kabo, Gbagbali, Leme, Bondzele, Bomassa and Bon Coin, involving 260 participants (234 Bantus and 26 indigenous people);
- Reminder of the principles of the mini-fishing charter and participatory identification of the main challenges and priority needs of fishermen;
- Reorganisation of the Bomassa fishermen's association of-fice through the signing of the statutes and internal regulations;
- Four-day training course on resource governance, bringing together 32 participants (local associations, CIB, PROGEPP, Water and Forests);
- Capacity building in organisational management and community governance.

# COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Community conservation actions are carried out jointly by the social service of Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB) and the social safeguards and community conservation services of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). These focus on promoting the green economy, strengthening community engagement and improving natural resource governance.

These efforts complement the regular activities carried out by the PROGEPP socio-economic team, including monitoring human-wildlife conflicts in cocoa plantations, cleaning and maintaining signage in hunting zones and protected areas, and raising awareness among local communities.

## THE YEAR IN FIGURES



The small ruminant breeding project continued to be rolled out in order to improve access to livestock protein, notably by distributing the materials needed to build six sheepfolds. The project also maintained 3 hectares of improved community pasture and the quarantine park, launched calls for tenders for the purchase of 100 small ruminants, and supported the creation of two livestock cooperatives in Kabo and Bomassa.



The Kabo/Gbagbali governance groups have been given their own community headquarters, a meeting place designed as a Mbongui to strengthen participatory management of natural resources (carried out as part of the Sustainable Wildlife Management SWM project).

Credit: © Christ Nzouzi/WCS

ANTI-POACHING EFFORTS



• **Deployment of joint patrols**

An operation was conducted with the support of the Congolese Armed Forces, the police and the gendarmerie, with logistical support from WCS and CIB, in the PROGEPP area, in response to an upsurge in automatic weapon fire.

- 57 joint patrols deployed in three weeks, including 13 based on internal intelligence ;
- 17 large illegal settlements dismantled (271 huts destroyed) ;
- 8 weapons seized, including 2 military weapons ;
- 248 rounds of ammunition recovered, including 220 rounds of military weapons ammunition;
- Over a tonne of bush meat seized and 60 live dwarf crocodiles recovered;
- 33 people arrested, including 9 poachers involved in large-scale poaching, referred to the Ouesso public prosecutor's office;
- 30 reports of findings and 28 reports of offences drawn up.

The legal monitoring provided by WCS lawyers ensured that procedures were followed correctly, files were forwarded to the public prosecutor's office, and the legal rights of those arrested were respected.

• **Reinforcement of equipment**

PROGEPP has strengthened the operational and logistical capacities of the LAB service through the acquisition and upgrading of strategic equipment:

- complete equipment for 39 agents (35 eco-guards + 4 MEF agents);
- provision of laptops, including for the control room;
- strengthening of the power supply system with 10 new batteries to secure operations;
- acquisition of two 15 hp outboard motors, improving the mobility and responsiveness of teams on river routes.

 **Capacity building for anti-poaching officers.**

- 29 out of 35 ecoguards and 2 MEF agents trained or retrained (82.35%) in the use of SMART Mobile training (digital data collection during patrols and at fixed points).
- SMART monitoring and deployment mission (skills application control): field supervision of trained eco-guards.
- Operational anti-poaching training: 18 eco-guards and 2 MEF agents (52.63% of anti-poaching agents). Topics covered: self-defence, weaponry, forest navigation, obstacle crossing, first aid, fixed post search techniques, wildlife health and zoonosis prevention.
- Module on human rights, protection of Indigenous Peoples and wildlife law (integrated into anti-poaching refresher courses): 20 participants (18 ecoguards + 2 MEF agents).
- Codan HF/VHF radio certification training (Bomassa, November 2025): 2 participants (1 LAB operational support officer and 1 eco-guard). Topics: installation, programming and maintenance of Envoy and ManPack radios, antenna assembly, communication system optimisation.

 **Jurisdiction over wildlife offences**

A workshop dedicated to legal procedures related to wildlife law enforcement was held in Ouesso, with four representatives from PROGEPP: the Coordinator, the Brigade Chief, a Patrol Chief and an ecoguard unit leader.

This session helped to consolidate knowledge of wildlife law, fully integrate human rights principles into anti-poaching operations and improve the quality of procedures.



# ANTI-POACHING EFFORTS

In 2025, anti-poaching activities enabled the deployment of 489 patrols, including 193 mobile patrols and 296 fixed posts, representing 3,024 days and 8,953 man-days of effort.

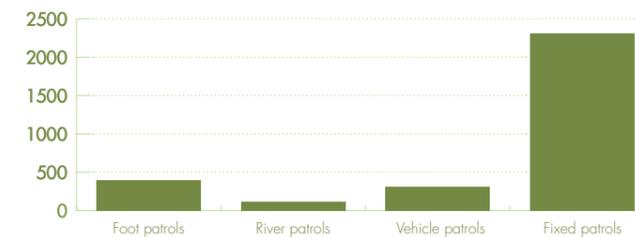
These operations, including 59 intelligence-based patrols, three cross-border missions with Lobeké National Park and 25 joint patrols with NNNP, LTCR and the Congolese Armed Forces, covered

56,130 km over an area of 2,422 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 19% of the action zone and 51% of sensitive areas.

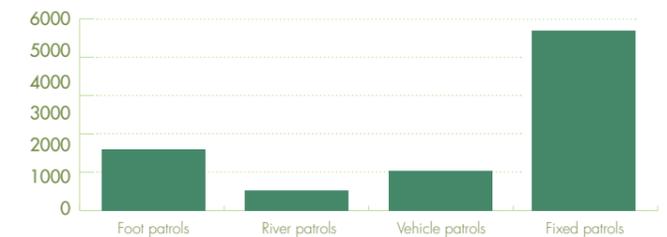
The annual targets were significantly exceeded for fixed posts (116%), confirming a strong presence on the ground, while mobile patrols reached 58% of the forecast.

## PATROL EFFORTS

Number of days per patrol type

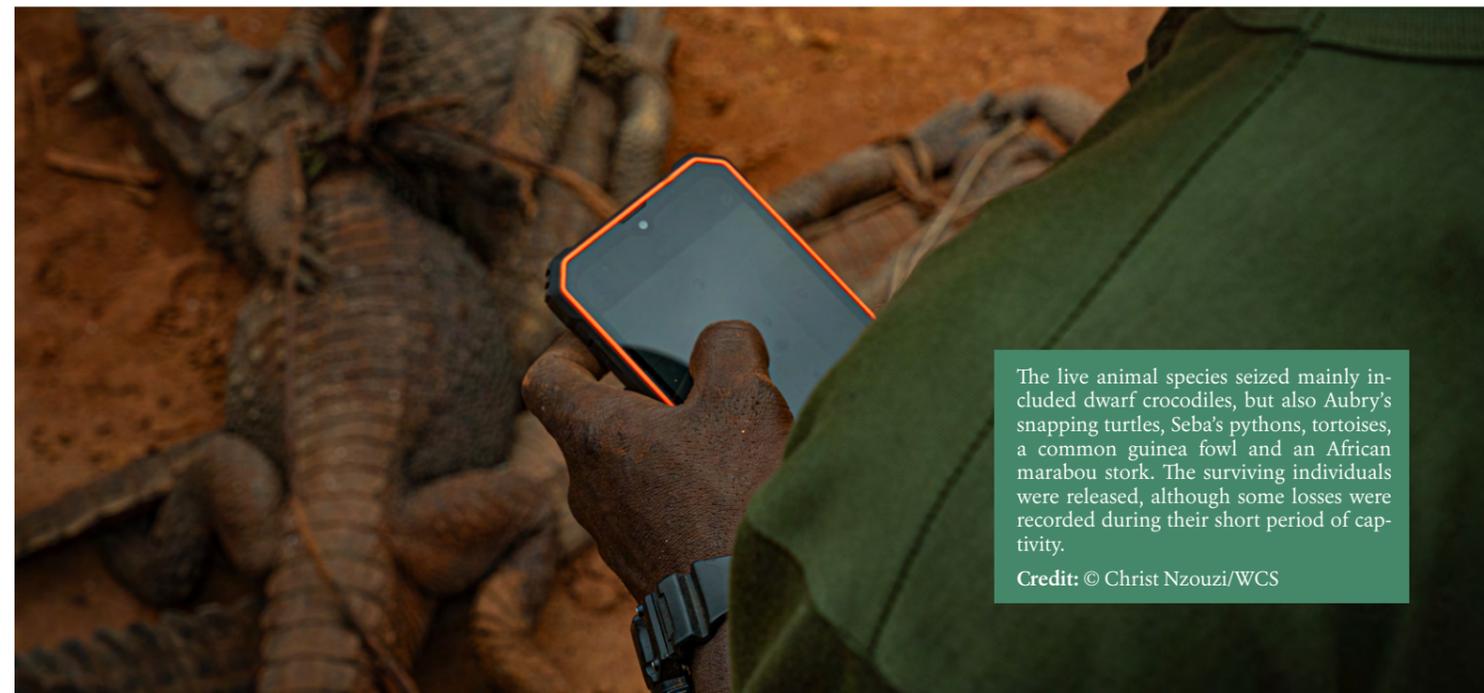


Man/Day by patrol type



## THE YEAR IN FIGURES

<p><b>958</b> </p> <p>rounds of ammunition seized: 617 for small game, 25 for big game, and 316 for military weapons.</p>	<p><b>62</b> </p> <p>weapons seized, including 3 military weapons, and 59 hunting weapons.</p>	<p><b>91</b> </p> <p>illegal hunting camps destroyed out of 199 discovered.</p>	<p><b>03</b> </p> <p>carcasses of poached elephants were discovered.</p>	<p><b>4 012</b> </p> <p>pangolin scales and 4 elephant tusks (8.08 kg) seized.</p>
<p><b>3 598</b> </p> <p>metal cables and 9 rolls of cable seized.</p>	<p><b>4 540 kg</b> </p> <p>of bushmeat from illegal hunting seized.</p>	<p><b>222</b> </p> <p>people arrested, 210 reports filed, 12 referred to court.</p>	<p><b>140</b> </p> <p>animals released, including 116 dwarf crocodiles, 20 tortoises, 2 pythons, 1 guinea fowl, and 1 marabou stork.</p>	



The live animal species seized mainly included dwarf crocodiles, but also Aubry's snapping turtles, Seba's pythons, tortoises, a common guinea fowl and an African marabou stork. The surviving individuals were released, although some losses were recorded during their short period of captivity.

Credit: © Christ Nzouzi/WCS



## Spatial distribution of patrols and threats

Analysis of patrol coverage shows a strategic concentration of interventions along major land and river transport routes, identified as sensitive areas for forest penetration and wildlife trafficking. This distribution is based on a strategy of anticipating and adapting to threats, informed by intelligence and analysis of anthropogenic pressure dynamics.

In the various forestry units, patrol results highlight areas where pressure remains high, particularly in recently logged areas or those located near access roads. The evidence gathered confirms the persistence of illegal hunting activities, affecting both small and large wildlife, and highlights the existence of organised networks exploiting easy entry points into the forest.

Overall, these findings confirm the need to maintain a sustained, flexible and intelligence-led operational presence in order to contain wildlife crime and provide long-term protection for priority species throughout the landscape.

**Credit:** © Scott Ramsay/WCS



Weight and size measurements of dwarf crocodiles seized alive from poachers and released allow for monitoring changes in their physical characteristics.

A preliminary analysis by teams from the Lac Télé Community Reserve indicates a decrease in crocodile weight, which could be due to unsustainable harvesting rates, and therefore a growing threat to the species.

Credit: © Christ Nzouzi/WCS

## Awareness of zoonotic risks

Several awareness-raising missions on zoonotic risks were conducted in the CIB's forest concessions by WCS One Health teams, in collaboration with the SWM programme.

Other missions were carried out with CIB teams, the Departmental Health Directorate and the Sangha Musique group from Pokola to raise awareness among populations in villages further away from the park.

All these activities aimed to strengthen understanding of the health risks associated with interactions with wildlife and to promote preventive behaviours.

These missions reached 41 villages and raised awareness among 2,261 people, including 1,052 from indigenous peoples.

The OKA project ('listen' in Mbandzela), a CIB initiative, uses audio devices (MP3 players) to disseminate awareness messages on zoonotic diseases in local languages (Lingala and Mbandzela). This system makes it easier for Indigenous Ba'aka People to access information and improve their understanding of zoonoses.



## Operational response to bushfires

On 4 March 2025, an aerial patrol along the Ndoki River spotted a large bush fire approximately ten kilometres from Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (NNNP), as well as a second fire downstream from Ndoki 2 camp.

In response to this situation, aerial, river and foot patrols were mobilised to assess the extent of the incident and identify its origin.

A joint river mission with NNNP units enabled investigations to be carried out in the field. The information gathered indicates that these fires were started by a single individual as part of fishing activities.

Several management and prevention measures have been implemented in coordination with the local authorities:

- the temporary evacuation of certain camps;
- raising awareness among local communities about the risks associated with bushfires;
- the initiation of legal proceedings.

These coordinated actions were aimed at limiting the impact on ecosystems and preventing further incidents in the area.



## Grievance redress mechanism (GRM)

WCS continued its efforts to strengthen the effectiveness of the grievance redress mechanism (GRM) in communities bordering Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, to improve community participation and ensuring transparent and fair handling of complaints.

In this context, a community meeting held in Kabo led to the improvement of the visibility and accessibility of a grievance box to make it easier for communities to express their concerns and to strengthen confidence in the program.

In addition, a field mission allowed awareness-raising among Bantu and indigenous communities about how the mechanism works, renewing community focal points and strengthening their capacity to collect and transmit complaints. During the period, no new complaints were recorded; a file submitted the previous year is being monitored.

SUPPORT SERVICES



• **Infrastructure**

Several improvements have been made to PROGEPP's infrastructure, despite constraints related to investment priorities:

- **Refurbishment of the former aviation building**, now converted into the Brigade's office and armoury;
- **Construction of the Djaka (Delta) fixed post**;
- **Repair of three damaged barriers**, covered by the CIB, with consideration being given to a more resistant system to limit repeated damage;
- Construction of a vehicle wash station (February 2025), enabling regular maintenance of vehicles in a secure area with a waste water disposal system.

• **Human resources**

PROGEPP Kabo has undergone several changes within its system, particularly in the area of anti-poaching:

- Integration of **three new patrol leaders**;
- **Promotion of ATP Constance Ngombé** to the position of patrol leader in Ngombé;
- **Departure of patrol leader Patou Ngoyi**, admitted to the National School of Agronomy and Forestry;
- Two interns from Denis Sassou Nguesso University;
- **Mobilisation of 30 day workers** for the maintenance of the airstrip;
- **Mobilisation of 10 forest guides** (8 indigenous and 2 Bantu) for carcass verification missions.

• **Technical Steering Committee**

The Steering Committee met on 25 March 2025 in Impfondo. It approved the 2025 PTAB, subject to amendments, and validated the 2022 PTAB. The 2023–2024 PTABs were presented for information purposes, as the corresponding sessions had not been held.

- **Maintenance of the socio-economic component**, with a recommendation to capitalise on achievements for the benefit of local communities and Indigenous Peoples;
- **Reorientation of priorities** towards strengthening surveillance;
- **Harmonisation of the contractual conditions of eco-guard**s across the landscape.

 **Training and development**

In 2025, PROGEPP continued to strengthen the technical and operational capacities of its teams through a structured programme of training and participation in specialised meetings.

- SMART Mobile training (February–March 2025): 29 eco-guardians and 2 MEF agents trained in the use of mobile devices integrating SMART Mobile;
- ArcGIS Pro and ArcGIS Online coaching (13–16 May 2025): participation of the SMART National Coordinator, SMART Focal Points and WCS cartographer in an online session organised by ESRI Rwanda;

- Training on zoonosis data collection (Bomassa): skills development for socio-economic monitoring assistants;
- Technical assistance for eco-guardians and contact officers (June and September 2025, Kabo): modules on weaponry, close operational intervention techniques, navigation, sport and first aid;
- Participation in the ACT-Con international congress (Hanoi, November 2025): representation provided by the SMART National Coordinator;
- Codan HF/VHF radio certification training (Bomassa, 15–21 November 2025): participation of the LAB Operational Support Officer and an eco-guard to strengthen the reliability of the communication system.

# SUPPORT SERVICES

In 2025, PROGEPP's administrative and logistical management ensured continuity of operations, despite a context that required constant adaptation of operating methods. The governing bodies validated the planning tools, clarified the strategic orientations and strengthened coordination between partners.

Human and material resources were maintained and gradually consolidated: staffing levels were stabilised through contract reviews and salary increases for eco-guardians, new patrol leaders were recruited, technical capacities were strengthened, and the use of digital data collection tools was improved.

## THE YEAR IN FIGURES

**80%**

of eco-guardians trained in the use of the SMART Mobile tool.



**03**

new patrol leaders appointed and operational.



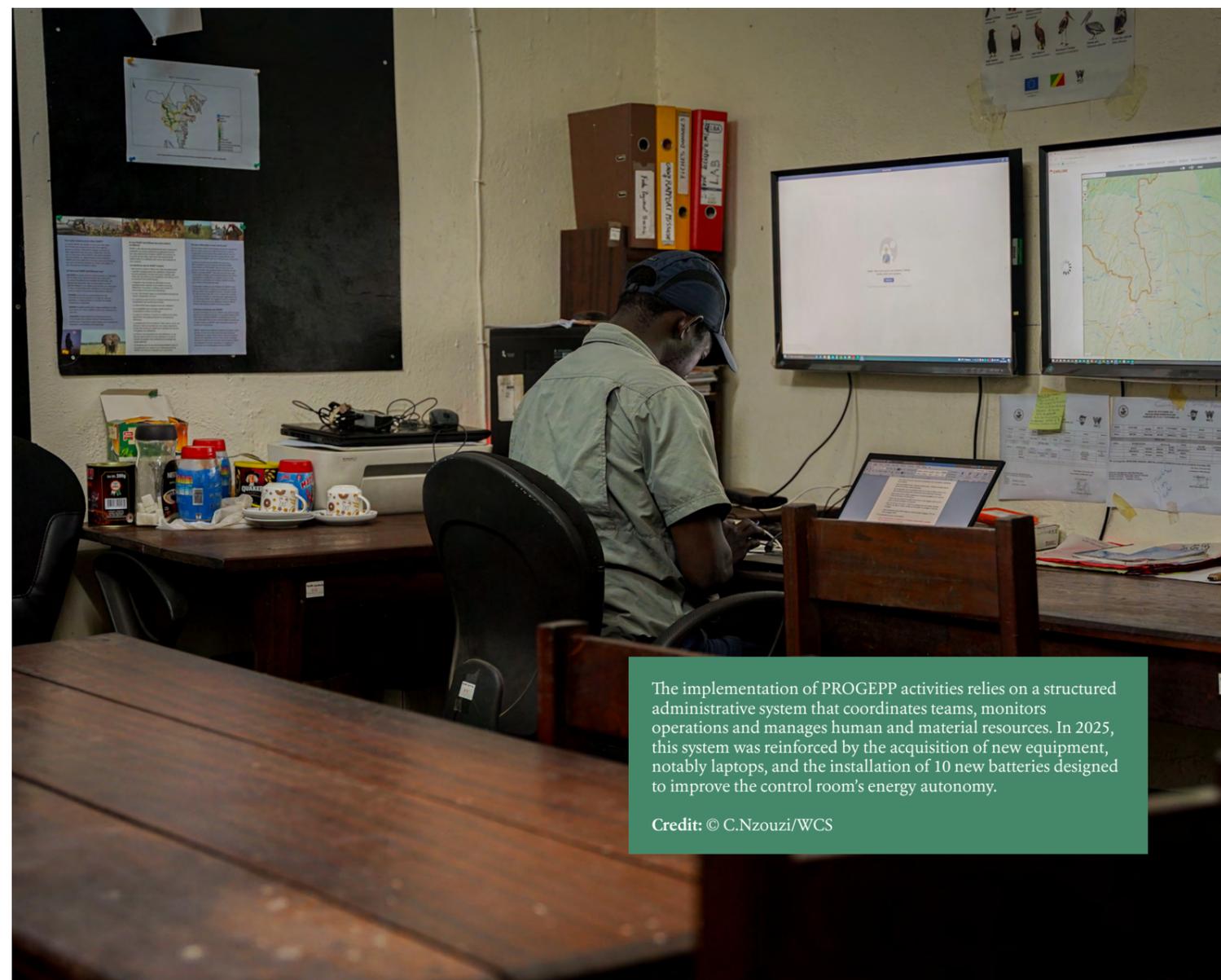
**65**

agents mobilised to manage and monitor PROGEPP, including 35 ecoguards.



**07**

mobile units, including five vehicles and two canoes, to cover land and river routes.



The implementation of PROGEPP activities relies on a structured administrative system that coordinates teams, monitors operations and manages human and material resources. In 2025, this system was reinforced by the acquisition of new equipment, notably laptops, and the installation of 10 new batteries designed to improve the control room's energy autonomy.

Credit: © C.Nzouzi/WCS

## CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

In order to provide appropriate responses to the constraints observed in the field, a set of priority measures is being considered. These guidelines aim to strengthen the operational capacity of the program, improve institutional coordination and optimise the working conditions of the teams involved in the anti-poaching efforts.

The year 2026 should therefore mark a stage of strategic consolidation for PROGEPP. The effective implementation of the new strategy will be a priority, taking into account emerging threats linked to major infrastructure projects, in particular the construction of the bridge over the Sangha River and the asphaltting of the Ouesso-Bangui road. In this context, strengthening the capacities of operational managers – in terms of intelligence, team management and crime scene management – will be crucial to improving the system's anticipation and responsiveness.

At the operational level, the extension and improvement of in-depth patrol coverage in forest areas, particularly in sensitive areas, must be ensured through the rigorous implementation of the anti-poaching strategy. Joint missions with the Congolese Armed Forces, when the context requires it, as well as the strengthening of departmental platforms for wildlife law enforcement, will help to consolidate the integrated approach between conservation and public security.

Furthermore, in view of the water deficits observed over the last two years, strengthening monitoring measures during the dry season should be considered in order to prevent similar situations from recurring.

At the same time, continuing ecological monitoring and improving the quality of data reporting will be major challenges. Reconnaissance walks, the strategic deployment of cameras and the organisation of targeted training for the ecological team will enable us to refine our knowledge of the state of conservation and guide management decisions more effectively.

In 2026, the objective will therefore be clear: to anticipate emerging pressures, strengthen institutional synergies and ensure the sustainable protection of biodiversity.



Wildlife surveys conducted in the Ndoki-Likouala landscape show that the FSC-certified forest units of Kabo, Loundougou and Pokola, managed by CIB, are home to higher densities of elephants than non-certified concessions, confirming the **positive impact of responsible forest management** that incorporates strict conservation requirements.

These results illustrate that sustainable timber harvesting can go hand in hand with effective biodiversity protection. At the heart of this performance, PROGEPP plays a decisive role: since 1999, this partnership between the Congolese Government, CIB and WCS has ensured the active protection of wildlife in the concessions, making this model a strategic pillar of conservation in the Ndoki-Likouala landscape and a benchmark for integrated forest ecosystem management.

Credit: © Pavel Zoubek/WCS

## THANKS

The year 2025 has been a year of resilience and consolidation for PROGEPP. Marked by the Steering Committee meeting in Impfondo, the management of a social crisis at the beginning of the year, and the deployment of joint response operations to armed threats around Kabo, it confirmed the programme's institutional strength and its ability to adapt in a demanding context.

Salary increases, team reorganization and skills development have revitalized the programme. Budgetary discipline and the mobilization of partners have made it possible to secure priority activities and maintain a sustained level of intervention.

Anti-poaching operations demonstrated both the effectiveness of patrols and the persistence of structured threats, particularly against elephants and gorillas.

Community engagement continued through the Elanga project in Kabo to reduce human-wildlife conflicts, as well as various community conservation initiatives. Local infrastructure, livestock projects, awareness-raising among schoolchildren and Indigenous People, and improvements to the grievance management mechanism have strengthened local governance and community confidence.

Ultimately, 2025 confirms that partner synergy, rigorous management and community involvement are the pillars of effective and sustainable conservation in the Ndoki-Likouala landscape.

PROGEPP would therefore like to acknowledge the sustained involvement of its partners and donors, and thank them:

Agence Française de Développement (AFD)

Bezos Earth Fund

Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB)

European Union (EU)

