

Annual Report
2025

OUR MISSION

WCS saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature.

OUR VISION

WCS envisions a world where wildlife thrives in healthy lands and seas, valued by societies that embrace and benefit from the diversity and integrity of life on earth.

ABOUT US

WCS has been a major actor of conservation for more than 30 years in the Republic of Congo, playing a major role in the creation and expansion of three of its five national parks, and its three marine protected areas.

Local populations are at the heart of our action and beneficiaries of our conservation efforts. We work closely with the government and all stakeholders to protect Congo's rich ecosystems.

WCS strives to combine the integrity of protected areas with the sustainable use of natural resources, to ensure that both ecosystems and human communities can thrive in a healthy and prosperous environment.



OUR INTERVENTION LANDSCAPES

NDOKI-LIKOUALA LANDSCAPE

- 01 Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park
- 02 Lac Télé Community Reserve
- 03 Ecosystem Management Project for the Periphery of the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (PROGEPP)

GULF OF GUINEA LANDSCAPE

- 04 Marine Protected Areas of Mvassa Bay and Loango Bay

04

THE CHALLENGES

WILDLIFE CRIME

Endangered species continue to be targeted by trafficking networks, such as elephants for ivory and pangolins for their scales. The constant threat of poaching endangers these species and their ecosystems as a whole.

UNSUSTAINABLE HUNTING AND FISHING

Illegal bushmeat trade, overfishing and bycatch threaten terrestrial, marine and coastal wildlife. These unsustainable practices are driving alarming declines in wildlife populations and worsening food insecurity.

POLLUTION AND HABITAT LOSS

Pollution and the unsustainable use of natural resources, driven by human and industrial expansion, are damaging wild habitats, threatening the survival of many species and the communities that depend on these natural resources.

ZOONOTIC DISEASES

Human encroachment into wild areas increases interactions between people, wildlife and domestic animals. These interfaces facilitate the emergence of diseases, putting human, animal and ecosystem health at risk.

OUR STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

We work with and for local communities by directly involving them in our conservation actions, promoting the sustainable use of the resources they depend on, and creating viable alternative economic activities that respect their cultures.

APPLYING SCIENCE TO CONSERVATION

We support scientific research and its practical application to strengthen our understanding of ecosystems and ensure that best practices are implemented across all our activities and promoted by partner extractive industries.

OPTIMISING WILDLIFE PROTECTION

We support the Congolese government in its fight against wildlife crime, thanks to qualified ecoguards, effective training, information and communication systems, and a team of analysts and legal experts.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND CAPACITIES

We establish long-term partnerships with committed public and private actors and promote continuous training for our teams to sustain our work and deepen our impact, while training the next generation of conservationists.

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A word from the Country Director

The past year has been marked by a major, inevitable restructuring of our programme, due to the withdrawal of all US government funding allocated to it. This process has enabled our organisation to strengthen its management structures, refine its priorities and optimise the use of its resources. Far from slowing our momentum, these changes have helped to consolidate our foundations and improve the coherence of our work.

In the face of these challenges, we have remained focused on our core missions. Prioritising our actions, realigning our investments and optimising our human resources have ensured the continuity of the strategic activities at the heart of our conservation approach. These collective efforts demonstrate the strength of our model and the unwavering commitment of our teams across the country.

These results must be viewed in light of the history of our programme. For over three decades, WCS in the Republic of the Congo has steadily built an approach grounded in long-term commitment, science, and partnership. The renewed confidence of our technical and financial partners reflects the relevance of this trajectory and our capacity to deliver lasting impact, even in uncertain contexts.



This annual report is of particular significance, as it is a first for WCS Congo. It reflects our determination to strengthen transparency, accountability, and the promotion of our results, while offering a structured overview of our actions and their outcomes.

For me, this document marks a turning point. Having joined the Wildlife Conservation Society in 1995, I have had the privilege of supporting, alongside many colleagues and partners, the evolution and development of this country programme. Now, as I prepare to hand over, I am struck by the distance we have travelled and by our organisation's ability to adapt, nurture talent, and build career paths. My departure comes at a time of continuity, underpinned by a dedicated team and a strong institutional foundation.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all our teams, partners and communities for their unwavering commitment. There are still many challenges ahead, but the outlook remains promising.

Richard Malonga



Our impact

4

wildlife inventory surveys carried out in the Lac Télé Community Reserve in 2025 to further our understanding of its ecosystems

9,000+

hours of scientific observations carried out in 2025 at research sites in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park

5,700

children benefited from environmental education or material support for schooling across the Ndoki-Likouala landscape in 2025

More than **34,000 km²** in northern Congo where WCS carries out conservation efforts

3

iconic terrestrial species under protection: chimpanzees, western lowland gorillas and forest elephants

745

ecoguard patrols carried out across the entire Ndoki-Likouala landscape

40+

species of sharks and rays have been recorded in Congolese waters, many of which are critically endangered

2025 in pictures

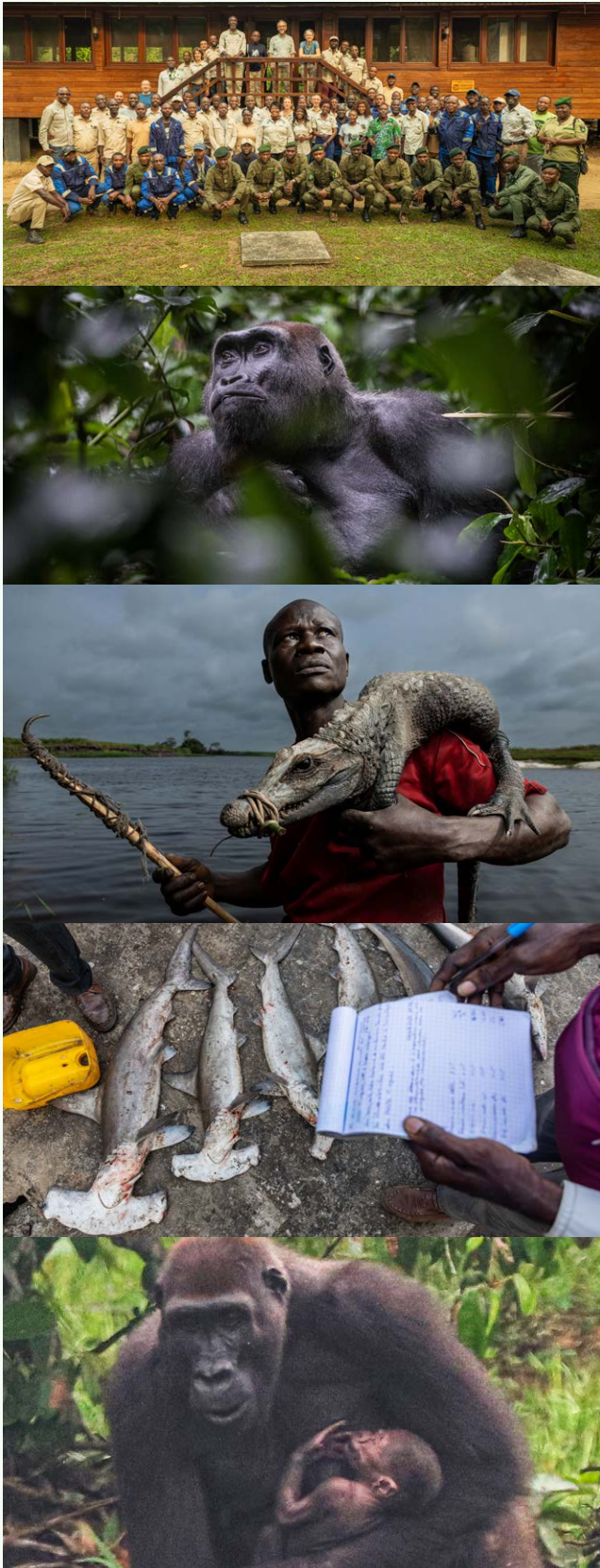
The Congo Programme had the pleasure of welcoming Adam Falk, President and CEO of WCS, in November 2025. His visit helped to strengthen our relationships with our partners (pictured in Bomassa).

The silverback Buka, habituated to human presence since 2006, sadly passed away in February 2025 at an estimated age of 47. Analyses concluded that the most likely cause of death was age-related.

This photograph of a crocodile hunter from the Lac Télé Community Reserve gained international recognition, winning the Best Portrait award at the Siena International Photo Awards (Italy). The prize was awarded to its author, photojournalist Thomas Nicolon, commissioned by WCS to document the daily realities of the Reserve.

An analysis of five years' data on rays and sharks caught by artisanal fishermen in Songolo (Pointe-Noire) shows an alarming picture, with 41% of the catch comprising critically endangered species, the vast majority of which are caught before reaching the average size for sexual maturity, further increasing the threat to these species.

In the Mbeli clearing, at the heart of Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, a rare observation was recorded: the female Mogwai was seen carrying her newborn, with the umbilical cord still visible, suggesting that the birth had just occurred.



Community conservation

People at the heart of our actions

As the groups most directly affected by conservation, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are both key actors and beneficiaries. They are actors through their active involvement in conservation initiatives, particularly in promoting access to sustainable sources of income and protein.

They are beneficiaries through support provided to improve access to healthcare, education and sanitation, as well as through efforts to safeguard their rights, governance and consent.

Protecting crops from elephant raids

Following the success of community fields protected by solar-powered electric fencing in Bomassa, the approach was extended to the village of Kabo in 2025.

Across 20 hectares, communities now have secure agricultural spaces to cultivate essential crops such as cassava and bananas. This initiative addresses recurring conflicts with elephants, whose high density has severely limited food production and threatened local food security.

In Ouessou, a campaign to promote alternatives to bushmeat

From June to September, Ouessou, the main city in northern Congo, hosted a social marketing campaign aimed at reducing bushmeat consumption in favour of local alternatives, particularly chicken produced in the city. Entitled “Soso ya Ouessou”, the campaign targeted young people aged 18 to 27. An impact assessment is currently underway.



A REVITALISATION OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

The year 2025 was marked by a major milestone: the approval of the Development Plan for the Lac Télé Community Reserve at departmental level – a first since the Reserve’s creation – paving the way for the document to be submitted at national level

The revision of the 27 Simple Management Plans (SMPs), together with a consultation workshop held with the Local Management Committee of the Reserve, which brought together 150 participants, reflect encouraging signs of renewed commitment from the villages that sustain the Reserve.

The PROGEPP Steering Committee, held in Impfondo in March, led to the conditional adoption of the 2025 Annual Work Plan and Budget, following two years during which the meeting had not taken place. The adoption of this plan enabled the updating and reorientation of strategic priorities.

Supporting the production of cocoa, honey and poultry in the Lac Télé Community Reserve

In partnership with the Agriculture for Food Security Project (PARSA), support to cocoa production is ongoing and has enabled assistance to 160 direct beneficiaries across 13 localities, the training of 204 producers, and the distribution of 33,000 seedlings in 2025.

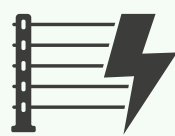
At the same time, the promotion of sustainable beekeeping has been launched in eight villages, while an initial training session in poultry farming was held in Epéna.

How does WCS promote community rights and inclusion?

-  Support for processes to obtain citizenship and birth certificates (400 applications submitted in 2025)
-  Strengthening of the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) around Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park
-  Strengthening of consent procedures (support for the adoption of national FPIC guidelines in July 2025)

Towards sustainable hunting and fishing?

In 2025, the Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) Programme scaled up initiatives to organise and raise awareness among fishermen’s and hunters’ associations along the Sangha River, promoting self-assessment of offtake, greater accountability among hunters, and the application of the fisheries mini-charter to strengthen stakeholder autonomy.



5,400

metres of electric fencing installed to protect community fields in Kabo



100%

vaccination coverage for newborns in Bomassa and Makao



4,700

school kits distributed to 27 primary schools in the districts of Bouanéla and Epéna

Anti-poaching efforts

Working together and optimising our efforts

Wildlife protection measures in the Ndoki–Likouala landscape have demonstrated remarkable adaptability in a context of operational constraints and increased pressures on the periphery of protected areas.

Coordinated and optimised efforts have made it possible to maintain a strategic operational presence, combining patrols, intelligence, technology and inter-institutional cooperation.

Bushfires in the Ndoki River wetland

In early March 2025, several fires were detected east of the Ndoki River, in the context of an exceptional drought that made the wetland highly vulnerable. Joint patrols were deployed with aerial support, in coordination with our partners from Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB).

A number of prevention measures were implemented with the support of local authorities:

- Evacuating specific camps temporarily for their safety;
- Awareness-raising among local populations on the risks associated with bushfires;
- Initiating legal proceedings following the identification of the perpetrators.

Scaling up joint efforts

Cooperation is intensifying between the three conservation operations within the Ndoki–Likouala landscape, as well as beyond, with cross-border missions conducted in 2025 in collaboration with Lobéké National Park (Cameroon), and joint patrols carried out with the Congolese Armed Forces, the police and the gendarmerie, particularly in high-pressure areas.

Technology supporting ecoguards

Following the deployment of SMART Mobile, which enables eco-guards to collect field data, the adoption of the EarthRanger platform now allows this information to be centralised in real time.

Combined with the modernisation of radio equipment (HF/VHF), this solution will enhance analytical and communication capabilities, thereby ensuring that eco-guards can respond more quickly and optimising their deployment.



745

patrols were carried out by ecoguards across the Ndoki-Likouala landscape



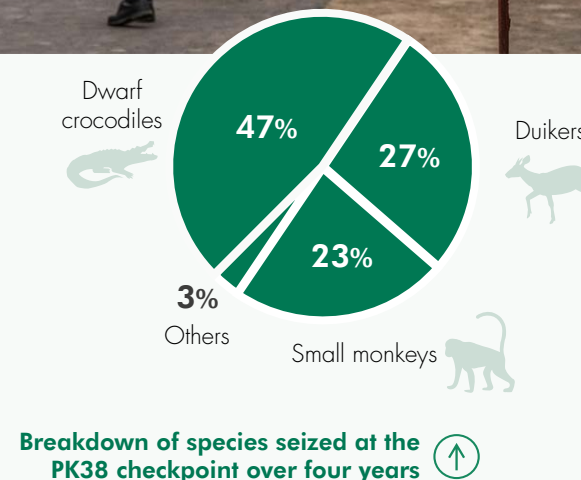
23

elephants were found dead in the Ndoki-Likouala landscape, including 4 that were poached



200+

illegal hunting camps were destroyed in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park and its surrounding areas



Analyzing four years at the PK38 checkpoint

For the past four years, the checkpoint located on the road linking Epéna to Impfondo has played a key role in combating the trafficking of wildlife products leaving the Lac Télé Community Reserve. Analysing data from these four years of activity reveals a decline in the annual number of seizures (from 191 in 2021 to 103 in 2024), with a reduction in the biomass seized.

In total, 547 seizures were recorded, representing 5,921 kg of biomass across 16 different species. The dwarf crocodile accounts for 47% of individuals and 49% of total biomass seized.

While this overall downward trend may suggest a reduction in hunting pressure, it should be interpreted with caution, as it may also reflect circumvention of control measures or variable enforcement effectiveness.



The declining physical condition of seized dwarf crocodiles

In 2025, teams from the Ecosystem Management Project for the Periphery of the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (PROGEPP) released 140 live animals seized from poachers, including 116 dwarf crocodiles. In the Lac Télé Community Reserve, crocodiles also represent the main seizures made by eco-guards (see above).

Each animal is measured and weighed before being released. These data make it possible to monitor changes in the physical characteristics of wild populations.

A preliminary analysis suggests a decline in the weight of dwarf crocodiles seized from poachers (an average decrease of 517 g per year), which may be linked to unsustainable hunting and could represent an increasing threat to the species.



27

alerts were issued by the Counter Wildlife Trafficking team, based on intelligence reports



379

individuals were apprehended during ecoguard patrols across the Ndoki-Likouala landscape



900+

rounds of hunting, military and large-calibre ammunition were seized, along with a hundred weapons

Research and biomonitoring

Understanding better to protect better

In 2025, our research and biomonitoring activities in the Ndoki–Likouala landscape continued to play a central role in informing conservation strategies. Through a network of key research sites, scientific

partnerships, and long-term monitoring systems, WCS has strengthened its science-based approach to better understand, protect, and enhance ecosystems.



Ongoing data collection efforts in Ndoki

- Gorilla monitoring at Mondika was marked by the death of the silverback Buka, whose natural passing led to the dissolution of his group. Two groups are now being monitored, including one that is fully habituated. Monitoring efforts totalled 2,280 hours of observation, with 747 behavioural records and 225 health observations collected.
- At Goualougo, monitoring of chimpanzees and gorillas continued intensively, with 23 and 19 observation days per month respectively, for a total of 3,296 hours.
- Studies on the use of the Mbeli Bai were maintained, with near-daily data collection (up to 30 days per month), totalling 3,353 hours of observation.
- Over six months of monitoring by the Elephant Listening Project (ELP), nine automatic gunshots were detected, while 803.5 km were covered for the monitoring and maintenance of 88 acoustic units. The results confirm a correlation between reduced patrol efforts and an increase in gunfire.



Four surveys to better understand wildlife in Lac Télé



A new ten-year research strategy (2026–2035) has been adopted for the Lac Télé Community Reserve. It is built around four main pillars:

- Strengthening knowledge of biodiversity and ecosystems through targeted inventories and ecological and socio-economic studies;
- Establishing an integrated ecological and socio-economic monitoring system to document changes and assess the impacts of human activities and natural dynamics;
- Enhancing local and institutional capacity by involving researchers, students, Reserve staff and local communities in research programmes;
- Disseminating and promoting findings at multiple levels to ensure their uptake by communities, their use by managers, and their contribution to public policy and scientific debate.

- The innovative use of thermal drones enabled the identification of 211 gorilla nests over 400 km, revealing an average density of 5.25 individuals/km², with peaks of up to 15 in terra firma forest, while detection remains limited in swamp areas due to dense canopy cover.
- Monitoring of hippopotamuses along 178 km of river confirmed the stability of a small population of 13 adult individuals, unchanged since 2022, but highlighted a stagnant population and increasing conflicts with local communities.
- Terrestrial wildlife surveys, based on 74 transects covering 976 km and 122 camera traps, documented a high diversity of primates and ungulates, as well as the presence of carnivores such as leopards. The abundance of rodents, particularly large species, further confirms the ecological productivity of these areas.
- Waterbird monitoring, conducted across 138 transects covering 414 km of waterways, recorded 5,499 individuals from 49 species. The results indicate an overall stable population (–1.5% in numbers), with increased species richness (+5 species) and a strong dominance of resident species (75.5%).



31

new births were observed within the groups monitored at Mbeli Bai, including 4 elephants, 16 gorillas, 6 sitatungas and 5 buffalo.



5 499

waterbirds were recorded in the Lac Télé Community Reserve, belonging to 17 families and 49 species



11

individuals were identified in the gorilla group currently undergoing habituation at Mondika, including two juveniles and two infants



One Health Program

For human, animal and ecosystem health

Through research activities, community outreach and multisectoral coordination, WCS and its partners contribute to a better understanding and reduction of zoonotic risks, while strengthening coordinated responses.

This integrated approach, known as One Health, recognises the close links between human health, animal

health and ecosystem health. It helps prevent diseases, protect biodiversity and strengthen the resilience of communities.

WCS operates the main wildlife health surveillance system in the Republic of the Congo, contributing to the early detection of emerging and re-emerging zoonotic threats.

Animal health in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park

Park teams carried out more than 3,700 health scans on gorillas and chimpanzees and collected 516 biological samples for the analysis of parasites and pathogens.

The Bomassa rehabilitation centre received 11 grey parrots, with a survival rate of 73% and 64% successfully released. A subadult fish eagle was also released back into the wild. However, the deterioration of infrastructure highlights the need for a complete renovation of the centre, scheduled for 2026.

Communities: the key actors for prevention

Eleven awareness missions on the prevention of zoonotic diseases were conducted in 73 villages across the Ndoki-Likouala landscape, reaching 5,161 people to promote best practices, particularly in the event of finding a dead animal in the forest, in order to reduce the risk of contamination.

These activities were carried out in collaboration with CIB, the Sangha Music group and the departmental health authorities. A joint mission was also conducted with Lobéké National Park (Cameroon) along the Sangha River.

Assessing communities' awareness

A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey was conducted in the Ndoki-Likouala landscape, in collaboration with the Goulougo Triangle Ape Project (GTAP), the WCS community conservation team and the Congolaise Industrielle du Bois (CIB).

A total of 1,246 households were surveyed across 17 communities located around Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park. The study assessed knowledge, attitudes and practices related to zoonotic diseases, hygiene, conservation and hunting, including protected species.

The findings will inform targeted awareness and behaviour change strategies, strengthening One Health interventions and contributing to the sustainable conservation of biodiversity in northern Republic of the Congo.



5,161

people were reached through community education activities on the prevention of zoonotic diseases



19

people were trained in the use of the Biomeme PCR thermocycler, which enables Ebola virus detection in animal carcasses in the field



12

animal carcasses found dead in the forest were sampled and tested for Ebola virus disease, Mpox and anthrax, with all results returning negative

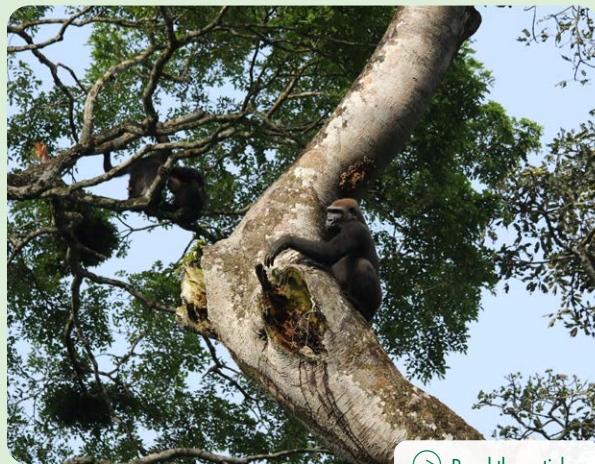
Towards national coordination of zoonotic disease prevention

In November, a workshop was held in Brazzaville bringing together 39 participants from the human health, animal health, wildlife conservation, environment, research, public services and civil society sectors. It enabled the identification of key risks at the human-wildlife interface and strengthened multisectoral collaboration.

This national workshop led to the formulation of recommendations, including the development of a joint action plan, the reinforcement of community awareness, particularly among Indigenous Peoples, and the integration of findings into a roadmap for the prevention and reduction of zoonotic risks in the Republic of the Congo.



Publications of the year

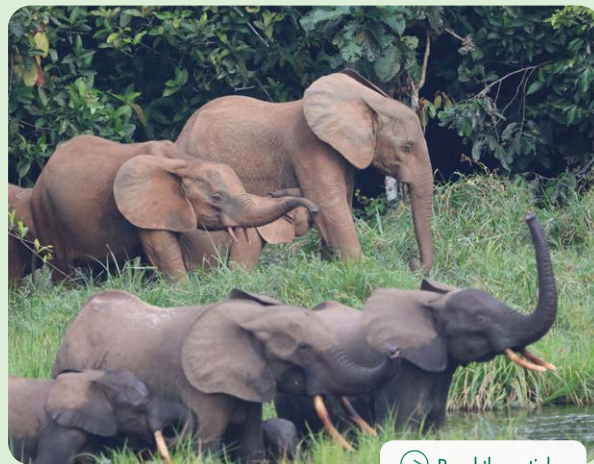

[Read the article](#)

The nocturnal life of chimpanzees and gorillas

This study compares 24-hour activity patterns and behaviours of captive chimpanzees (Saint Louis Zoo, United States) with those of wild chimpanzees in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, as well as with published datasets on the nocturnal behaviour of all chimpanzee subspecies.

The study notably reveals that wild chimpanzees are far more active on the ground at night than previously documented.

Funkhouser et al. (2025). Chimpanzee Activity and Behavioral Diversity Extends Across 24 Hours in Both Captive and Wild Settings. *American Journal of Primatology*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajp.23729>


[Read the article](#)

The behaviour of forest elephants in response to danger

African forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) adjust their behaviour when exposed to danger signals linked to human activities, such as gunshots.

Around Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, their presence temporarily decreases following such disturbances, while nocturnal vocal activity increases. These responses suggest behavioural adaptability, with potential consequences for space use and the species' ecological role.

Verahrami et al. (2025). Forest elephants modulate their behaviour to adapt to sounds of danger. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2024.0051>


[Read the article](#)

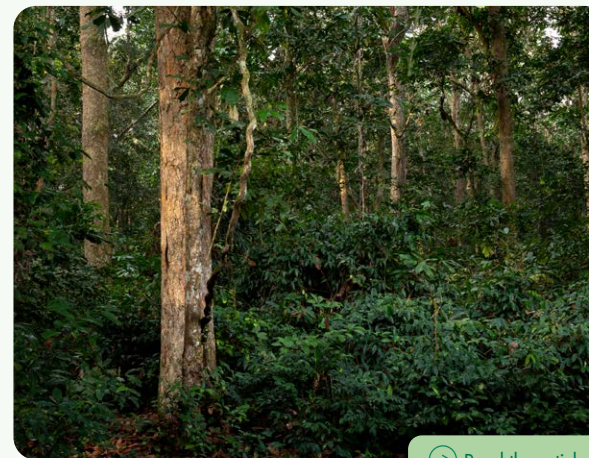
Analysis of primates in the Lac Télé Community Reserve

Based on more than 6,000 recording days from 83 camera-traps installed in nine flooded forest clearings, this study identified eight primate species within the Lac Télé Community Reserve, including the western lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*), the chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes troglodytes*), and Allen's swamp monkey (*Allenopithecus nigroviridis*).

The study establishes a significant positive correlation between primate visitation frequency and the distance of clearings from villages, alongside more than 5,000 records of human presence in the same clearings. It also highlights the Reserve as a critical protected area for the conservation of Allen's swamp monkey, a species found only in the flooded forests of the Congo Basin.

This work provides the first systematic assessment of the primate community in the Reserve and underscores that conservation measures must take into account the impacts of human activity on primate behaviour and distribution.

Brugière et al. (2025). The Primate Community of the Lac Télé Community Reserve, Republic of Congo : Insights from a Camera Trap Survey in Flooded Forests and Comparison with Other Sites in Northern Congo. *African Primates*.


[Read the article](#)

Mapping monodominant forest in Central Africa

Using satellite imagery and field data, this study mapped the monodominant forest of *Gilbertiodendron dewevrei* across the Sangha Trinational landscape (Congo, Cameroon, Central African Republic).

Through a random forest algorithm trained on more than 1,300 reference points, the authors were able to accurately distinguish and map different forest types within tropical forest ecosystems. This work spatially defines the extent of this key forest type for conservation in Central Africa.

Heimpel et al. (2025). Mapping of Monodominant *Gilbertiodendron dewevrei* Forest Across the Western Congo Basin Using Sentinel-2 Imagery. *Remote Sensing*, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rs17091639>


[Read the article](#)

Sociality in western lowland gorillas

A study based on data from four western lowland gorilla groups in Ndoki shows that these animals maintain numerous non-aggressive social relationships both within and between groups. The findings reveal that these primates are not limited to interactions within their own group, but also engage in regular contact with individuals outside it, including between dominant males.

These relationships, more frequent and structured than previously thought, form an extended social network beyond group boundaries. They challenge the notion of a strictly closed social organisation in gorillas and highlight the complexity of their social dynamics.

Cooksey et al. (2025). The extent of western lowland gorilla social relationships within and between groups. *PLoS ONE*, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0316598>


[Read the article](#)

Current state of knowledge on marine fisheries in the Republic of the Congo

This synthesis highlights the central role of artisanal fisheries, which represent the main source of income and protein for many coastal communities in the Congo, while remaining largely underestimated in official statistics.

The study shows how the sector has developed through complex dynamics, including the diversification of fishing techniques, the increase in vessel size and fishing effort, as well as the growing influence of migrant fishers and urban markets. It also reveals increased pressure on certain resources, particularly sharks and high-value commercial species, in a context where data remain fragmented and governance limited.

By analysing ecological, economic and social dimensions, the report underscores major challenges for sustainable management, including the lack of reliable data, insufficient regulation of activities, and increasing dependence of local populations on these resources. It therefore highlights the urgent need to strengthen knowledge and policies in order to preserve both marine ecosystems and livelihoods.

Metcalfe et al. (2025). Synthèse de l'état actuel des connaissances sur le secteur des pêches maritimes en République du Congo

Congo Marine Programme

WCS marine interventions in the Republic of the Congo in 2025 focused on strengthening scientific knowledge, supporting governance, and developing innovative monitoring tools.

Strengthening institutional capacities

- The Congolese Government requested technical and financial support from WCS for the management of the Mvassa and Loango Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), in partnership with two local associations, Renatura and ESI Congo for the Loango MPA, thereby laying the foundations for coordinated management of these newly established MPAs.
- Training was provided to ecoguards of Conkouati-Douli National Park (PNCD) on judicial procedures, aimed at improving their understanding of the criminal justice chain and enhancing the effectiveness of their enforcement actions.
- The Platform of Marine Conservation Actors in Congo (PACMAC) met three times in 2025, bringing together conservation NGOs, researchers, civil society organisations, and representatives of fishing communities. Discussions covered a wide range of topics, from resource overexploitation to coastal pollution.

The activities carried out helped consolidate strategic partnerships with national institutions and technical stakeholders, while contributing to the fight against illegal fishing and improving the management of marine and coastal areas.



A new technology for detecting illegal fishing

The Congo Marine Programme facilitated training for Congolese authorities on the use of Skylight, a new technology developed by the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence (AI2), designed to detect and analyse illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities through satellite data and vessel tracking systems.

Other open-access tools, such as Global Fishing Watch and Triton, were also presented as solutions to enhance the effectiveness of vessel monitoring and surveillance.



100 000+

sharks and rays were landed at Songolo between 2018 and 2023 and recorded by the programme team



1754

landings were monitored over five years, involving 377 canoes, revealing a structured and intensive artisanal fishing activity



41%

of elasmobranchs landed over the study period are classified as critically endangered



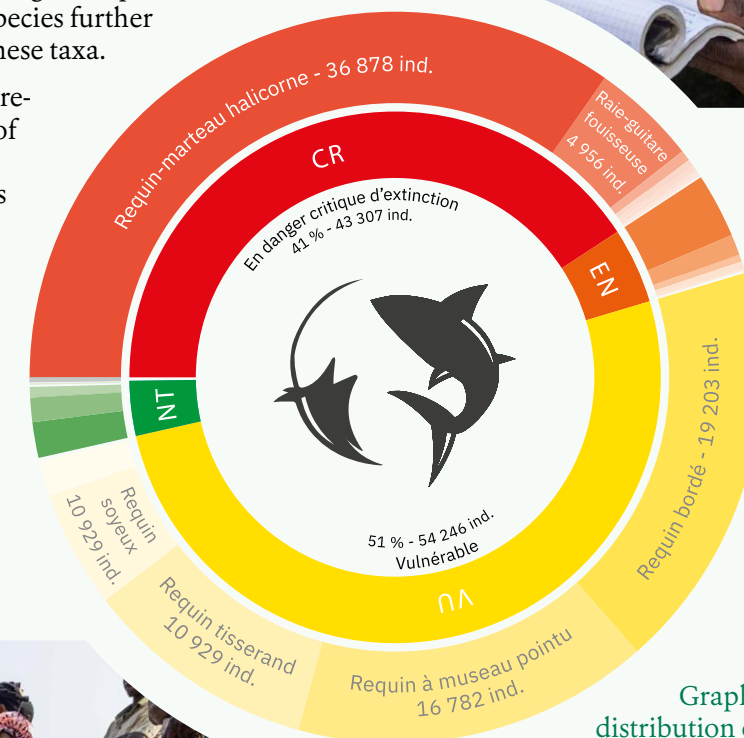
AN ALARMING FIVE-YEAR ANALYSIS OF ARTISANAL FISHERIES MONITORING

Between 2018 and 2023, WCS team, in collaboration with the University of Exeter, monitored shark and ray caught by artisanal fishers in Songolo (Pointe-Noire), compiling data that enabled the publication, in 2025, of an analysis of fishing dynamics.

More than 40 elasmobranch species were recorded over this period, highlighting the notable diversity and productivity of Congolese waters, with six dominant species, including the scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*), despite its critically endangered status.

The results show that the majority of individuals caught by artisanal fishers in Songolo are juveniles, indicating a serious threat to stock replenishment. The absence of national regulations prohibiting the capture of certain shark and ray species further increases pressure on these taxa.

While artisanal fishing remains a crucial source of income and protein for thousands of people, its growing attractiveness, driven by profitability combined with the richness of Congolese waters, is leading to high and likely unsustainable catch volumes, thereby putting coastal food security at risk.



Graph showing the distribution of individuals sampled during the study period, broken down by species and conservation status.



Institutional support

After supporting the Government of the Republic of the Congo in the adoption of national guidelines for the implementation of the Free, Prior and Informed Consent process for individuals and communities affected by conservation projects, WCS continued

and strengthened its institutional support in 2025, achieving further progress, including the adoption of national guidelines for Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures.



Identification of High Conservation Values (HCV)

WCS, alongside partners such as CIRAD, the HCV Network, WWF and WRI, is contributing to the identification of High Conservation Values (HCV) and High Carbon Stocks (HCS) in the Republic of the Congo. This effort makes it possible to identify areas with high biodiversity concentrations, landscape-scale ecosystems, rare or threatened habitats and ecosystems, sites essential for maintaining critical ecosystem services, areas and resources fundamental to community livelihoods, as well as sites and resources of cultural, archaeological or historical importance.

High Carbon Stocks also help identify lower-carbon forest areas to guide Congo's zero-deforestation pathway within the framework of agricultural development, as well as broader land-use planning.

Following the validation of the national methodology for HCV and HCS identification at the end of 2024, it was presented along with preliminary results in eight cities in 2025. In 2026, field missions will further refine the mapping of HCV and HCS at a more local scale.



Protecting the Congo Basin peatlands

The Republic of the Congo hosts one third of the world's largest tropical peatland complex, covering approximately 57,400 km² and storing nearly 11.3 billion tonnes of carbon, making its protection critical for climate change mitigation.

In 2025, a strategic study commissioned by WCS and led by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), in collaboration with the Universities of St

Andrews, Leeds and Marien Ngouabi, was conducted to better understand the ecological dynamics, uses and key challenges associated with these ecosystems. Its findings are expected to help identify ways to operationalise and finance context-appropriate solutions for improving the conservation and sustainable management of peatlands in the Congo.



OECMs guidelines: recognising and valuing conservation beyond protected areas

The Republic of the Congo has adopted national guidelines for Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), marking a significant step forward in structuring conservation policies at the national level. Developed with technical support from WCS and validated through a participatory process involving a wide range of stakeholders, these guidelines represent a first in the Congo Basin.

OECMs make it possible to officially recognise areas that are not protected areas but that nonetheless contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation. These include community forests, certified forestry concessions, and sustainably managed hunting and fishing zones. This approach broadens the scope of conservation by integrating territories where human use coexists with sustainable practices.

The development process, initiated in February 2025 and completed in September, brought together around 60 participants, including representatives from public institutions, conservation organisations, researchers, as well as Indigenous Peoples and local communities. It enabled the definition of clear identification criteria, recognition mechanisms and governance principles adapted to the national context, while aligning with IUCN international standards.

Particular attention was given to integrating the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), ensuring that the rights and knowledge of communities are taken into account in OECM recognition processes. This strengthens the inclusive and equitable nature of the approach.

The OECM guidelines now serve as an operational tool to support the Congo in meeting its international commitments, notably the protection of 30% of the planet by 2030 (the 30x30 target) under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.



Administration and logistics

In 2025, the Congo Programme underwent an organisational adjustment to adapt to the evolution of its funding portfolio. This reorganisation led to a realignment of human and operational resources, aimed at maintaining the effectiveness of interventions while ensuring rigorous management of available resources.

These adjustments helped consolidate the programme's key functions, strengthen synergies between teams, and ensure the continuity of strategic activities. In the field, this translated into prioritised investments that supported the reinforcement of infrastructure as well as team capacities.

A sustained investment in capacity building



100 % of staff of the Lac Télé Community Reserve attended at least one training session



65 training sessions were organised at Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, totalling 7,967 person-hours



49 staff members of Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, including 34 trackers, were trained in first aid



80 % of eco-guardians in the Ndoki-Likouala landscape were trained in the use of the SMART Mobile tool



Maintenance, renovations and solar autonomy

- Significant works were carried out in the Lac Télé Community Reserve, including the renovation of the quarantine facility for animals seized alive, the securing of the Epéna base (fencing and gates), the acquisition of two fuel storage tanks protected by dedicated hangars, and the relocation to a new, more functional office in Impfondo.
- Improvements were made at the PROGEPP base, with the refurbishment of the former aviation building, now converted into a Brigade office and armoury, as well as the construction of the Djaka (Delta) fixed post with support from CIB.
- At Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, progress towards solar autonomy continued. In Bomassa, all buildings are now connected to a continuous solar power supply supported by a battery system. Major renovation works were also undertaken, notably in Bomassa and at the Goulougo research site.

New infrastructure for communities

- The Lac Télé Community Reserve supported the clearing of the only access road linking Epéna to Impfondo. Between Boléké and Ngounda, a 16 km stretch was notably rehabilitated to help improve connectivity for local communities.
- Within the Reserve, the solar electrification programme also continued in 2025. Seventeen villages were equipped with 87 solar streetlights and projectors, bringing the total to 149 streetlights deployed over two years.
- The Kabo/Gbagbali governance groups received their community headquarters, a consultation space designed as a Mbongui to strengthen participatory natural resource management, implemented under the Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) project.

Communication and visibility

The secret life of the Congo Basin forest

Published in **The Guardian**, an exceptional portfolio reveals the rarest wildlife of Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park. Produced through a collaboration between WCS and Will Burrard-Lucas, a specialist in high-definition camera trapping photography, these images showcase elusive and often nocturnal wildlife—including leopard, golden cat, pangolin, duikers and mongooses—as well as striking portraits of a little-known biodiversity.

BBC Wildlife Magazine also dedicated eight pages to these unprecedented images, which required the deployment of five camera traps over more than a year. This was made possible through the essential support of researchers, Indigenous trackers, and field teams dedicated to the park's conservation.

[Read the articles](#)

Website update and launch of the Newsroom

The WCS Congo website now features enhanced and updated content covering all programme activities across the country, complemented by a Newsroom regularly updated to centralise all country programme news: field updates, periodic bulletins, scientific publications, press releases and institutional announcements.

congo.wcs.org/Newsroom

Scientific expedition at Lac Télé

An exceptional report published in the French magazine *Terre Sauvage* follows a scientific expedition to Lac Télé, funded and organised by WCS, aimed at conducting the first inventory of reptiles and amphibians in the Lac Télé Community Reserve.

Accessible only after a three-day walk through the tropical forests of the Congo Basin, Lac Télé remains a largely unexplored area, surrounded by an aura of mystery and local beliefs.

It harbours a yet-to-be-fully-documented biodiversity, including many species that are likely endemic.

[Read the article](#)

Reorientation and promotion of tourism in Ndoki

Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park welcomed 134 tourists in 2025, a year marked by a strategic reorientation focusing tourism development on community involvement, notably through the Village Development Fund to support tourism-related initiatives.

The tourism team also continued to promote the park, including at an international trade fair in Madrid and at the Nabemba Tourism Expo in Brazzaville, while continuing to support the Lih Ngolio cultural association, which represented the park at the 4th edition of the Baaka-Bantu festival in Cameroon.

Challenges and perspectives

In the short and medium term, the strategic orientations of the country programme are aligned with a broader transformation of the conservation model, based on the diversification of financing mechanisms and the strengthening of structured partnerships, particularly with the private sector. This evolution is accompanied by support for emerging processes recognising Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), as well as reinforced engagement alongside the government to contribute to the achievement of its international commitments, particularly under the 30x30 initiative.

A particular emphasis will be placed on strengthening the territorial anchoring of interventions. Actions will increasingly be deployed at operational level, including in coastal and marine landscapes, alongside reinforced local management systems. Community governance mechanisms, such as local management committees and hunters' and fishers' organisations, will see their role consolidated, while the implementation of community conservation programmes will be intensified to promote lasting local ownership of conservation issues.

Finally, securing ecosystems against increasing anthropogenic pressures remains a central priority. Efforts will focus on strengthening the use of technology for conservation purposes and expanding the One Health approach to better anticipate and reduce zoonotic risks. In parallel, anti-poaching strategies will be adapted to respond to evolving threats, particularly in areas most exposed to new patterns of pressure.



