

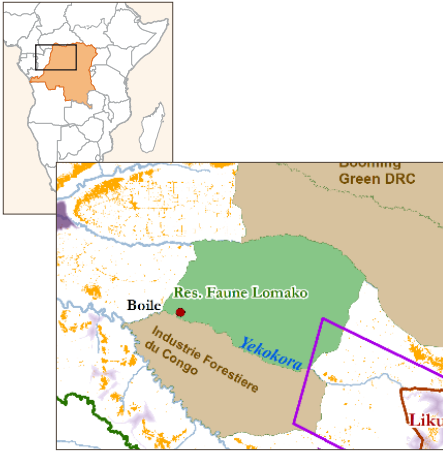
# AWF IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

In spite of a history of political instability, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is an ecological paradise. Located in Central Africa, the DRC is one of the most important countries in Africa for biodiversity conservation. More than 96 million people live here—as do a number of spectacular endemic species like the okapi, Grauer’s gorilla, bonobo, and Congo peacock, along with over 400 other species of mammals, over 1,000 bird species, over 400 fish species, and over 10,000 species of plants.

What’s more, the country is home to the world’s second-largest tropical forest and river basin (the Congo Basin) and features high plateaus, three mountain ranges, and low coastal plains.

AWF is working in two main landscapes in the DRC—the Lomako-Yokokala Faunal Reserve and the Bili-Uele Protected Area Complex.





## AWF INTERVENTIONS IN THE LOMAKO-YOKOKALA FAUNAL RESERVE

With the support of the Arcus Foundation and the technical support of Village Enterprise, AWF is working in the DRC to protect biodiversity and help promote socioeconomic development in the Lomako-Yokokala Faunal Reserve (RFLY).

The reserve is a 3,625 km<sup>2</sup>-protected area created in June 2006 with the support of the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) and AWF. It is part of the Maringa-Lopori-Wamba landscape, adjacent to the Lomako Forest. Eighty percent of the reserve is forest, and 20% is made up of swampy areas.

The main interest of this reserve lies in the preservation of bonobos, which live there in significant proportions, as well as other flagship species such as the forest elephant, the Congolese peacock, the giant pangolin, the African golden cat, the bongo antelope, and a dozen species of primates. With AWF's assistance, members of the two communities living in the reserve (Befale and Bongandanga) have been recruited and trained by ICCN as eco-guards, and various development projects have been implemented in these two communities to promote conservation.

In addition, AWF is implementing a project that aims to build capacity for bonobo conservation and empower local communities in the RFLY.

## AWF Interventions

- 1. Rights-based approach:** Human rights training is integrated into ICCN's eco-guard training modules and is vigorously promoted among partners. AWF promotes gender equality by encouraging the hiring of female eco-guards. We also have established a complaint management mechanism to resolve disputes between the local community and the eco-guards in an expedient manner. Particular attention is paid to the respect of human rights during legal proceedings.
- 2. Anti-poaching and law enforcement:** In addition to assisting ICCN in the recruitment and training of eco-guards, AWF provides financial and technical support for patrols. To ensure compliance with legal procedures, with the support of the US Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), AWF conducts training to enhance the knowledge of eco-guards in wildlife trafficking concepts as part of the fight against wildlife trafficking.
- 3. Community sensitization:** AWF annually sensitizes the local community, administrative and customary authorities, and students to obtain their support in conservation activities and to raise their awareness of their future role as leaders. As a result of these campaigns, some poachers have given up their hunting weapons.
- 4. Biological monitoring:** AWF has strengthened the capacity of ICCN managers and eco-guards to collect and process data for better management and evidence-based decision-making. We provide SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) software and devices such as Delorme trackers for ecological monitoring, and we train eco-guards in their use. The expected result is improved and more adaptive management of the protected area and use of staff.
- 5. Community Livelihoods:** With technical support from Village Enterprise, AWF selects the RFLY households identified as the poorest and organizes them into micro-enterprise groups for training in entrepreneurship and savings to improve their living conditions and reduce the human footprint on



biodiversity. This approach requires a grant for training community members in entrepreneurship and follow-up on progress and results of these income-generating activities.

## Impact

### Community Buy-in

There has been increased community awareness and participation in conservation activities. Community leaders now understand and support sustainable natural resource management, while local community members in the grant sector are becoming less involved in hunting and are gradually laying down their weapons in favor of sustainable entrepreneurship. We are taking steps toward a Lomako that is more aware than ever of the climate urgency and ecological value of the RFLY; this should result in the recovery of wildlife populations and appropriate community development.

### Capacity building for ICCN eco-guards

Our training and equipping of eco-guards have enabled reserve managers to collect data accurately and use cutting-edge tools to properly record wildlife indices. We have also seen an obvious improvement in the skills of officers in writing citations and handling wildlife violations.

### Recovery of wildlife populations

With the decrease in human pressure on wildlife, we have seen in the community forest an increase in bonobo populations and other flagship species of the region such as elephants. At this rate, the spotlight will soon be on the RFLY for its biological diversity, paving the way for tourism in this extraordinarily remote corner of the DRC.



## AWF INTERVENTIONS IN BILI-UELE PROTECTED AREA COMPLEX

With support from the European Union and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), AWF is working to ensure that biodiversity thrives and socioeconomic development is enhanced in the Bili-Uele Protected Area Complex.

The Bili-Uele complex covers more than 40,000 square kilometers and is home to the largest population of endangered chimpanzees in the east and one of the region's last remaining populations of critically endangered forest elephants.

Since the creation of the complex in 1974, ICCN has struggled to effectively protect and manage this critical biodiversity area due to a lack of required resources and the landlocked nature of the site.

In 2016, a consortium made up of ICCN, AWF, and MAISHA Group security consultants was created to improve the management of this complex; the co-management was later codified in a formal agreement between ICCN and AWF.

This partnership has been enriched with the arrival of Juristrale, experts in environmental law, in 2018. Since then, the European Union and USAID have supported our work through their programs, respectively, ECOFAC6 Preserving Biodiversity and Fragile Ecosystems in Central Africa and Community Based County Wildlife Trafficking.



### AWF Interventions

**1. Security and rule of law:** AWF provides technical and financial support to ICCN, the Corps de Protection des Parcs Nationaux, and the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo to plan and execute joint patrol missions in the central Bili-Mbomu area, and we are currently expanding our operations into adjacent insecure areas. We also built a community radio station that broadcasts over 10 kilometers, and we installed 11 radio stations (HF radios) in seven chiefdoms in the Bili-Mbomu complex to support early warning and environmental awareness.

**2. Rights-based approach:** Human rights training is integrated into ICCN's basic eco-guard training modules and is strongly promoted among partners. AWF also promotes gender equality by encouraging the hiring of female rangers.

**3. Anti-Poaching and Law Enforcement:** AWF has assisted ICCN in the retirement of former eco-guards and facilitated the recruitment of 42 young eco-guards to form a rapid response team in the Bili-Mbomu Landscape. With support from INL, AWF is working to improve the capacity of eco-guards, judges and magistrates, judicial police officers, and other law enforcement officers in the fight against wildlife trafficking, as well as due process.

**4. Logistics and Access:** AWF assisted ICCN in establishing a new operational base and is in the process of establishing two patrol posts in the northern landscape. In 2021, AWF purchased a Savannah S microlight aircraft, which provides monitoring and biomonitoring services in the landscape.

In 2022, AWF opened a new office in the provincial capital of Buta to serve as a logistics base.

**5. Community Livelihoods and Land Management:** To address the problems of slash-and-burn agriculture, water poisoning, and illegal hunting in the landscape, our team developed a land-use plan informed by community participatory mapping that allocated each piece of land to a specific use. To address slash-and-burn agriculture and low agricultural productivity, we organized training workshops on crop rotation and set up school fields to demonstrate seedling farming. In addition, we provided training in key topics such as processing and marketing of products. Finally, our team provided improved seedlings to farmers in the landscape, helping them set up their own fields (school fields) to apply new cultivation techniques. Furthermore, we introduced them to processing techniques for cassava flour to reorient their agriculture toward commercial use.

We organized training workshops to introduce the communities to sustainable fishing techniques, adapted materials, and fish-processing methods. We also set up experimental ponds to introduce community members to fish farming.

To address hunting, AWF supports ICCN in enforcing the hunting closure periods to allow wildlife to reproduce; this includes supporting patrols in the protected area.

**6. Strengthening collaboration:** We revitalized the local conservation and development committees to create a formal collaborative framework that



engages protected-area managers and the local community alike to promote sustainable natural resource management and sustainable community development. These local committees offer a chance for grassroots participation in community decisions.

**7. Biological monitoring:** AWF has strengthened the capacity of ICCN managers and eco-guards to collect and process data for better management and evidence-based decision-making. We provide SMART and CyberTracker devices to support anti-poaching strategies and ecological monitoring, and we train eco-guards in their use. The result is improved and more adaptive management of the protected area and use of personnel.

### Impact

#### Improved security and rule of law

Four years into the program, authorities are now better equipped to handle security challenges in the landscape, with greater presence and capacity in the core area. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in insecurity around Bili and its surroundings, with 65% of community members reporting feeling a greater sense of security and better ease of movement since the program started.

#### Capacity Building of ICCN Eco-guards

Our training and equipping eco-guards have allowed park managers to expand the patrol area and improve intelligence systems and cooperation. The eco-guards are now using CyberTracker, SMART, and drones to gather information to improve adaptive management of the protected area. We have also observed an improvement in the skills of officers in the writing of minutes and the treatment of wildlife offenses.

#### Community Buy-In

There has been increased community awareness and participation in conservation activities. The needle is pointing to a Bili whose thriving community is now more caring and ready to invest in sustainability, and this should result in the recovery of wildlife populations, the rehabilitation of degraded wildlife habitats, and a more prosperous local community.



*Building a Future for Africa Where  
People and Wildlife Thrive*

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