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**NEWS RELEASE**

**Prestigious Conservation Award Goes to Milwaukee-Based Group**

Far from the Midwest, deep in the equatorial rain forests of Africa, the Zoological Society of Milwaukee (WI) is leading the fight to save a rare great ape and one of humankind's closest relatives, the endangered bonobo. In recognition of efforts dating to 1993, the Zoological Society's Bonobo & Congo Biodiversity Initiative (BCBI) has won the most prestigious conservation award in the North American zoological community.

In September, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) presented its annual International Conservation Award to the Zoological Society of Milwaukee for promoting species restoration, habitat preservation and biodiversity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In helping to save bonobos, the Zoological Society also is helping the Congolese people who live near the bonobos. The Zoological Society trains and supplies park guards, supports four primary schools, runs the only literacy classes available for adults in the region, and supplies an agricultural cooperative.

"The Zoological Society of Milwaukee is taking the lead in international wildlife conservation," says AZA President and CEO Jim Maddy. Dr. Robert Davis, President and CEO of the Zoological Society of Milwaukee (ZSM) says of the award: "It is wonderful to receive this recognition by our peers and it speaks to our long-term commitment to the bonobo. The award signifies that the AZA recognizes the BCBI as one of the best conservation programs in North America." Directed by Dr. Gay E. Reinartz, the BCBI operates primarily in Salonga National Park, a World Heritage Site and one of the world's largest parks. "We have a great team of people working to conserve bonobos, both in Milwaukee and in Congo," says Dr. Reinartz, who helped develop plans for bonobo conservation starting in 1993. The BCBI was founded in 1997.

In DRC, the BCBI works at Etate, a former poaching camp turned research station and patrol post in the northern sector of the park. About 500 bonobos, endemic only to the DRC, live in this 310-square-mile area. The region is patrolled by park guards employed by the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN), which receives funding and material support from the ZSM. The guards are trained to conduct anti-poaching patrols as well as do field research using GPS technology.

**Guard recognition:** Also in September, the chief guard of the ICCN Etate Patrol Post, Bunda Bokitshi, received the Abraham Conservation Award from the Alexander Abraham Foundation (NY), which honors men and women in Africa and Asia for courageous service and commitment to conservation. Bunda served as a park guard during years of civil war when lawlessness prevailed and when military poachers attacked ICCN patrol posts. "We are very proud of Bunda and are grateful to the Alexander Abraham Foundation for recognizing him. This prize is the highest honor that a national park guard in the DRC can receive," says Dr. Reinartz. "The International Conservation Award and Bunda's Abraham Award reinvigorate us. They recharge our batteries to keep doing our critical conservation work."

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