

SUCCESS STORY

Commitment to Conservation

USAID supports award-winning field conservation program in the Democratic Republic of Congo



Zoological Society of Milwaukee

ZSM staff teaches an ICCN park guard at the Etate Patrol Post in the Salonga National Park on the use of a compass and GPS unit. Park guards receive training in navigation and wildlife monitoring to enhance their law enforcement efforts and combat poaching

USAID's CARPE program partners with organizations like the Zoological Society of Milwaukee (ZSM) to monitor the biodiversity and mitigate threats to the forests of the Congo Basin, the world's second largest contiguous tropical forest. Since 1997, the ZSM has worked to study and protect the endangered bonobo – a rare great ape – and other wildlife in the Salonga National Park.

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Supported by funds from USAID's CARPE program for the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), the Zoological Society of Milwaukee (ZSM) was recently honored with the *International Conservation Award* by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for promoting species restoration, habitat preservation and biodiversity protection in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Through its Bonobo and Congo Biodiversity Initiative (BCBI), the ZSM aims to study and conserve the bonobo, a great ape species found only in DRC.

The ZSM works in the Salonga National Park, a World Heritage Site that covers most of the Salonga-Lukenie-Sankuru Landscape. The park is located in the heart of the Congo Basin and is critical to biodiversity found within this block of relatively intact lowland tropical forest. "Our studies confirm that the Salonga is currently the world's largest protected expanse of bonobo habitat and that poaching is the greatest threat to wildlife in the park, including bonobos," according to Dr. Gay Reinartz, BCBI Director, ZSM.

The ZSM is based at Etate, a former poaching camp turned research station and patrol post inside the park's northern sector. In partnership with the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN) and other CBFP members, the ZSM trains and supplies park guards to increase the effectiveness of anti-poaching patrols. Concomitantly, ZSM supports local community primary schools, operates adult literacy classes, and supplies an agricultural cooperative to help reduce local reliance on hunting in the park by nearby villagers. Using this multifaceted approach, Etate has sustained low poaching levels in its bonobo-rich sector for the past ten years and has become a model for guard-based bio-monitoring and habitat protection.

"We are honored by AZA's recognition of our efforts," says Dr. Reinartz. "We also recognize that our success is due to working at a landscape level in Congo and the mutual support gained from extensive collaboration with partner organizations. Through CBFP/CARPE we receive core infrastructure support necessary to become established in remote regions and to provide technical training to the Congolese to sustainably manage their forests and wildlife resources. Only through long-term support and collaboration, such as the CBFP provides, can we address the root causes of environmental degradation and conserve flagship species like the bonobo."