

CONSERVATION STATUS OF LOMAKO FOREST BONOBOS, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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In September 2005, a team of researchers and a film crew from the BBC Natural History Unit went to the Lomako Forest study site to ascertain the impact of the civil war and absence of researchers on the study population of bonobos or pygmy chimpanzees, *Pan paniscus*. The Lomako Forest consists of predominantly polyspecific evergreen rain forest between the Lomako and Yekokora Rivers in the central region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The N'dele study site, located at 0 50' N, 21 05' E has been an area of active research since the 1970s until the political unrest and war in DR Congo made further research impossible in 1998. Many soldiers are still based in the region. An active market, including carcasses of many monkeys and one bonobo, ammunition for sale, and observations along the rivers showed active bush-meat hunting. There was evidence of past hunting at the study site, although most primate species and some duikers were confirmed as still present. Based on their reaction to familiar researchers and new observers and unchanged levels of habituation to being followed, the bonobos did not appear to have been hunted. There were several tentative and one definitive identification of previously known bonobos. All bonobos were tolerant of observation. All sightings included several infants, juveniles, or pregnant females, suggesting an increase in reproductive rate of the population perhaps due to decreased competition with other primates.