

# Lola Ya Bonobo Newsletter

**APRIL - MAY - JUNE 2008**

## **April - the end of filming**

We are finishing the shooting of the fiction-documentary movie with Dream Films productions on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Time for celebrations! Alain Tixier, the director, suggests a small gathering in the education centre involving snacks and, of course, speeches.



I cannot bring myself to realise that it is over and life will resume its normal course, at a hundred miles an hour as always! (Is there ever a day without surprises here?) The simple idea of not having to think every morning if I am wearing the "correct clothing" for possible follow-up scenes? If I have not forgotten the film's lucky bracelet? If in the early morning the mirror does not reflect too

much the image of one who compensates during the night the essential work required to run Lola?

But let us be honest, the shooting was a real treat! A team of professionals among whom the atmosphere was much more often fun and good hearted rather than grumpy. This was most likely due to the diplomacy of Alain Tixier, who in his closing speech will emphasize the kindness and patience of Lola's staff... as well as that of

the bonobos!



Together we thank and applaud Valerie for her successful management of twenty-plus people while fulfilling the deadlines imposed by a very busy schedule!

### A strange illness...

Meanwhile in the infirmary, not all is well. Crispin, Patrick, Clemence and Anne-Marie continue the fight against a very strange illness which has struck for the second time in a month. Bolobo is hit by the same evil which took away our little Malou. They relay themselves relentlessly, day and night, to help and sooth his pain a little. Nervous disorder and paralysis leave him completely distressed. There is nothing we can do, he will die despite our efforts, care and love!



**Crispin comforts Bolobo**

### **Salonga and her baby**



A few days on, Salonga takes us by surprise and gives birth prematurely. We find her on the morning of April 15<sup>th</sup>, her offspring in her arms, already feeding at her breast! I do not dare rejoice however, as I find the baby much too small. It looks sharp though and she is so maternal! Unfortunately, on the third day, she brings it to us lifeless. We let her hold it for a while as a mean to allow her to understand the reality of its death. She seems to realise

that life has left the little body as she leaves it on the floor from time to time and walks away. She will end up trying to give it to our nurse Anne-Marie through the bars of the shelter in which we had isolated her that morning. Failed again! Although Salonga could certainly be the best of mothers! She who has cuddled and cared for so many frogs from our swamps!!!

It seems that the months of March and April are to be dreaded at Lola! Each year they nearly invariably bring us mourning...

### **May - it rains, rains, rains!**

May marks the end of the raining season, characterised by huge tropical storms and thus the destruction of our road. "That's it, says Valerie, this time it's sure our bus won't make it through the (African) winter"! It was to be expected. It has more than 300,000 km, even though it proudly wears the naive paintings of forest life and bonobos by our friend the Congolese painter Beret, who has hidden its



rusting bodywork under beautiful colours. We had nearly forgotten its age!



(Except Valerie, who pays for the constant repairs...). It is somehow our own "France" cruise ship. We stare at it parked at the entry of the sanctuary: an educative monument! "Enough sentiments! It has more than 300,000 km, it costs too much to run and it's well past its time!" says Valerie, wallet tightly closed in her hand. We need another one urgently !!! Valerie's husband gives us a serious hand in that: he negotiates for us a Tata (Mercedes-India) bus of 25 seats payable over 12 months. With it, we will make a triumphant entry at Lola under the cheers of all and the whistles of Jean-Claude (keeper of the 3<sup>rd</sup> enclosure and certainly the most demonstrative member of our staff). Come on, we are all going for a ride!

Now, I need to start hunting down a donation so that our new bus continues to transmit our educational message through the streets of Kinshasa, full of colours, forest and bonobos!

### The arrival of new orphans



This time it's sure, something must be going on around Waka in the district of Basankusu. Several orphan bonobos have been seen for sale: hunting must be taking place in the region! With Pierrot, we resolve to go on a new awareness campaign... The Environment Coordinator of Basankusu has arranged the transfer, with support from Filair airline, of little Masisi. She arrives at Lola at the same time as the tiny Lukuru, who was spontaneously handed over to the sanctuary. She seems to be the smallest baby that we

have ever received! Both will be put in quarantine in the arms of two "occasional mums": Clemence, our vet, and Anne-Marie, our nurse.



This is a stroke of luck for Mabali, a young male resident of enclosure #3 who seriously injured his knee ligaments and whose movements have to be carefully monitored and limited. Our coming and going to care for the new little girls are a good distraction for him. It's far more interesting than playing with old keys, padlocks or shoe laces!

The two newcomers are barely settled in that another infant bonobo offered for sale is brought to my attention by a Congolese official, who adds that he found it already very weak. Crispin and Pierrot immediately start the chase. Just like Sherlock Holmes and with the help of the inspectors from the Ministry of Environment, they find its location in town and even obtain the seller's phone number! In line with our standard plan of action, Crispin goes as a scout to meet the vendor and find out what state the bonobo is in. He will pose as a potential buyer. And yes, the bonobo is indeed there! In a corner, miserable, chained up, tiny and obviously at the end of its physical and psychological capacity... The man tells us that he is a trader in bushmeat and wild animals, more particularly grey parrots from Gabon. He wants 600 dollars for the bonobo! (Prices are going up!) He talks about a recent trip and another bonobo already sold. He also suggests the possibility of a dozen baby bonobos, depending on our "order", since, says he, where he goes there are still a fair few groups to slaughter!!!

Crispin comes back to Lola raging and determined to make him eat his cruel words through the sanctions which the Environment inspectors will impose on him, but also very sad: "I left him a few bananas, he tells me, he was starving!" Pierrot takes over



responsibility for obtaining all administrative paperwork at the Ministry. The Inspections' Director, Gaby, immediately organises the bonobo's confiscation via the General Secretary of the Environment for the following morning. Unfortunately, when they arrive at the merchant's, they only find a group of young children. A precious day lost! The man and his wife won't be back any time soon. The next day, sadly, it is already too late. When

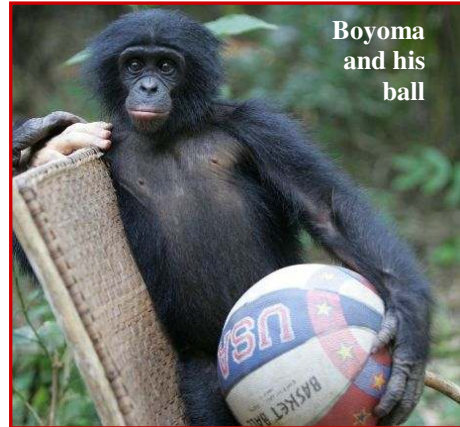
they arrive, Pierrot and the Inspector will witness the death of the little bonobo! This time, luck is not on our side! Death took him; he was too little, too sad, too starved. Without the protection of his mother, the only way he found to escape this cruel world of humans was to let himself die. We did not have the time to offer him our paradise...

### The Nursery this quarter

Their quarantine over, Lukuru and Masisi are put into the care of Henriette and Mummy Yvonne. But tension is rising in the nursery: "We cant take it anymore! The nursery is overcrowded!" Henriette tells me. Despite the four substitute mothers, the group is extremely turbulent. We need to introduce a few of them into the group of the "big guys". Incidentally, some of the little ones, such as the cheeky Tshilenge, tends to look at them when they walk past with envy in her eyes to go and play with the big ones! Muanda is also on the list of candidates for the transfer. An attaching double personality: Capable of the worse mischief, but also of the warmest cuddles when she attaches herself tight around our necks! We hesitate a lot before separating two good friends: Vanga and Boyoma. The mums convince me that it is still too early for Vanga.



(What? This little fearless troublemaker?) They are more concerned about how to separate Boyoma from his ball! He never leaves it and has acquired an incredible dexterity to do whatever he wants while holding it with one hand, without it ever being stolen by another bonobo, except sometimes by Vanga! They make a true pair... Come on, with the novelty of living with the big guys, he will forget it easily!



It is thus a small group of three -Tshilenge, Boyoma and Muanda- which will progressively be introduced, over a few days and with huge success, into the gang of juveniles in enclosure #3. This works out without a hitch. As always the newcomers are treated as guests who are, without fail, given a proper orientation to their new environment...

### Reorganisation of the enclosures

The 3<sup>rd</sup> enclosure needs to be closed in the coming weeks. We must put these bonobos together with those of enclosure #2. Indeed, this new large group of 15 bonobos cannot stay like it is: it essentially consists of juvenile males and an adult couple: Makali and Tshilomba with her baby, Moyi. If this cheerful turbulent gang excels in acrobatics, isolated as such it will never learn how to organise itself and manage the moods and the rules of the alliance between the females and the dominant males!

The preparation for the release are seriously on their way. It is in this enclosure that we will organise the selection process of those bonobos candidate to be transferred into our new "Centre for the re-adaptation of bonobos to wildlife" or EKOLO YA BONOBO ("the land of bonobo" in Lingala) in Basankusu. A group of 30 bonobos will go play together on "bamboo beach"! What a treat! I am already dreaming about it!

### A very enjoyable visit from Twycross zoo

We receive the visit of one of our sponsors, Twycross Zoo in the UK, which hosts a good colony of bonobos. Susie Boardman, the zoo director, is also a veterinary doctor. She



will marvel to see close to 60 bonobos playing in the freedom of their forest! With Claire, they will enjoy afternoons of happiness in the nursery with the newcomers. They also inform me that I will be their guest at the House of Lords in London in November to receive the Badham Evans award for women in environment! I organise for them a meeting with Britain's ambassador to the DRC, delighted in advance at this event for Lola ya bonobo.

## Bandundu's baby (May 22<sup>nd</sup>)

We always end up waiting long in advance for the birth of our babies. The gestation is always longer than expected! But sometimes it is the opposite; we are taken by surprise... This is how Bandundu (completely hairless!) one morning proudly shows off a robust little male infant. We believe he deserves to be called "Wa ngolo ya lola" (the strongest, but really strong! from paradise)...



Pierrot : school visit at LOLA

### An award for Pierrot

It is now Pierrot's turn to receive an award in recognition of his work in conservation education; the award of the International Primatology Society (IPS). He will share his award with a small project designed to assist the vegetable growers that work along the banks of our Lukaya River and from whom we purchase daily fruits and vegetables for the bonobos.

The trimester ends with the visit of Renaud Fulconis, president of AWELY, and his colleague Eva Gross, who are preparing an awareness-raising campaign in the bonobos' habitat. A significant amount of administrative paperwork keeps us busy, but a little air of the upcoming holidays is nevertheless blowing on Lola. This year was heavily charged in events, with the shooting of the movie taking up a lot of my time. I aspire to see my family and friends again for true holidays in July, finally!



A little stop-over in Paris to meet all our "Friends of bonobos in Europe" and inform them of the progress of our EKOLO YA BONOBO project in Basankusu. The bonobos' reintroduction is now scheduled in a year exactly. This time, it's the last straight line to the finish!