

★ ★ ★ Planete bonobo ★ ★ ★

JANUARY – FEBRUARY – MARCH 2009

Mimia and her baby



Nice and round

On return from Basankusu¹, we find Mimia in the good company of the little ones in the Nursery. She is looking very round! It has to be said, she has a great appetite and spends long hours lounging around, napping in the company of little Sandoa who, very brazen, takes all kinds of liberties with Mimia. So much the better, I think to myself, admiring Mimia's patience with the little one, maybe this time she will accept her baby!

Finally, on the morning of January 20th, she gives birth to a beautiful little male... that she stubbornly leaves to lie on the ground, despite his calls and my imploring! An attempt to have the baby adopted by Bandundu, then by Kalina, only serves to weaken the poor little thing. We take him away from his mom, unable to leave him to his sorry fate. From that moment, the "dark angel" that I dread so much will come back to darken the skies of our paradise.



On the 27th of January, everything turns for the worst: Mimia is taken from us with a sudden septicaemia. I can't believe it! Our Princess Mimi, our star! So special, like a Diva, snobby and haughty at times, but so peculiar with her human traits due to 18 years spent living in a family that treated her as their own child. Able to live in a house, to help herself to food in the fridge, to switch on the TV to watch a film, to draw, to play at "dictation", waiting for the words holding her pen in the air and scribbling on her page as she pretended to write... Mimi, who had become sacred to her keeper Stany, who forgave her everything, indulging her every whim, running to her when, impatient to be served before the others, she would clap her hands, because his Princess wouldn't eat food that had been on the ground!

She was also the one who I presented to visitors as "my friend Mimi", because there was so much complicity between us. It is most certainly with her that I most felt that

¹ For more information on our trip to Basankusu in early Spring 2009, visit our blog : <http://www.friendsofbonobos.org/news/>

thin line between our two worlds. Living with great apes, we cross it easily due to the ease of communication between us, then suddenly it all stops, like a case of autism that separates us, forcing us to go back to the other side of the line. Mimia would cross the line with as much ease as I would, but then suddenly she would cut the communication short and return to the other side of the line, in her world, where there was no place for me.

Admittedly, Mimia would never have returned to the wild; but she had found a new life, free in the forest of Lola, loved and respected by the other bonobos, asserting herself



Mimi and Clo (photo C. d'Hauthuille/ABE)

as a dominant female of the group. I will miss her deeply, like all those who have left us and for whom I still feel the gapping hole caused by their absence. May those who knew Mimia cast the first stone for committing the serious mistake of anthropomorphism! I'm not the least bit afraid! A photo of Mimia had been chosen to illustrate the front cover of a book published by our friends at "One Voice".

FEBRUARY

On February 2nd, despite all the care given by our staff and by his new adoptive parents, Guyline and Felix, the little baby also died!



No rest at the infirmary!

Suddenly, on February 4th, Lukaya started behaving strangely: she remained lying face down on her belly and seemed to be suffering greatly. Within a few hours, the situation worsened, looking very serious indeed! Lukaya had frequent bouts of fairly bloody diarrhoea. Anne-Marie, our nurse, was very worried. She wouldn't take her eyes off her, we had to know quickly: "When shigellosis strikes, it all happens too quickly with bonobos!" she explained. Late that morning, her fears were confirmed. But Lukaya was refusing to take the "tri-therapy" (Baytril, Flagyl and Ercefuryl) which works so well in these cases. The infirmary was monopolised. The atmosphere was so tense that I fled, useless and overly stressed! The following day I was even more fearful, I could sense that the staff was starting to lose hope. Lukaya was getting worse... But our team fought without relent until, two days later, they finally won victory over the illness...

Once again thank you to you all for your sleepless nights! The 'mamas' ask for Lukaya to convalesce under their watchful eyes: "Granted!" I approve, only too happy for the good news. Once her treatment is completed, she can have fun with "the little crazy ones".

But we are not out of the woods yet! A small simple cold over in enclosure 3 soon develops into complications for little Luozi, who we know to be very sensitive to respiratory infections. There he is with his rapid breathing and a kind of asthma, which he always manifests in these cases. This time, though, it seems to be really serious! We have to pull out the big guns, including the inhalations! Luozi is used to it and he wears his mask without a fuss. Two days later Lodja is in the same state. The healthcare staff is once again on high alert. Luckily everything goes well and Lodja also recovers promptly. "We'll take these two in the Nursery for their recovery as well!" the substitute mothers declare, shocked at how thin they have become. Well, it's bound to be lively in there! But that's how I like it! We'll manage...



And then, it's my turn to suffer an unexpected setback: my sister is at her worst and I have to rush to her bedside. In this case, there is no happy ending: she passes away, taken from us by her mysterious illness... I return home "in pieces" as I say when I have to search deep within myself in order to bounce back. And yet I am unaware that the dark angel still has more hardship to put us through and that more misfortunes are going to fall upon Lola...

MARCH

What on earth is going on? A return of the flu? Apart from the bonobos quarantined in the reintroduction enclosure, all the bonobos are affected. Marie-Laure, a veterinary doctor, comes to support the infirmary full-time. And they need it; it is a period of sheer insanity!



Lodja



Nkumu ya Lola

On 18 March, Lodja dies. On the following day, it is the turn of "Nkumu ya lola", Kisantu's baby (born with hair, which was supposed to bring him luck!)

... then it is the turn of Mixa and of Kindu



Leki ya Lola

In the midst of this upheaval, on the 15th of March, Semendwa gives birth to a handsome little male, whom we call "Leki ya Lola" (which means "the little brother" in Lingala). Indeed, this is Semendwa's second child, the first one is Elikia. Worried, I can't help reflecting that he was not born at the best of times...



Awards for Pierrot

Pierrot is in charge of ABC's educational programs at "Lola ya bonobo" and "Ekolo ya bonobo". He first started educational activities 10 years ago, with Claudia, a Haitian national and our first volunteer, including the creation of "Kindness Club" in the schools of Kinshasa, on an idea of Mrs Gil Richardson from WSPA/Africa. The program now reaches over 15,000 children a year. With the beginning of our new project "Ekolo ya bonobo" in the homelands of the Pôo, and the anticipated reintroduction of a group of our bonobos into the forest of Equateur Province in June 2009, Pierrot and Blaise, his deputy and former biology teacher, initiated a few years ago an awareness-raising campaign around the reintroduction site. Today their efforts are complemented by the educational activities on bonobos of French association AWELY.



In 2008, Pierrot has already received an award from the International Primatological Society for best educator. He had decided to share part of the reward with the Pôo community, to complement the financing (initiated by ABC) of a small village pharmacy. Now, it is the turn of the Abraham Foundation, a foundation very active in conservation in the DRC, to recognize his work with an award! Pierrot is very happy! And myself, I am very proud for his double international recognition! Work at "Lola ya bonobo" is always very collegial, it is that of a united team.

Together, we all contribute to the progress of ABC's initiatives. If one of us is rewarded, through him we are all rewarded! On March 11, we are all with Pierrot at the Grand Hotel of Kinshasa, where he will receive his prize along with a dozen guards from our National Parks who have showed great bravery during the long years of war. Several of them will even receive their prizes posthumously, having died from the bullet of a poacher or soldier....

The letter from France's first lady

The father of Christine d'Hauthuille (nicknamed "Titi Ô" by her friends) had sent a copy of the book "LOLA YA BONOBO" to Mrs Carla Sarkozy. The book is a photographic walk through the Sanctuary, produced by French association "OKA" of which Titi O is a member. In return, I received a very kind letter from Mrs Sarkozy, assuring us that she will find out more about our battle for the bonobos of the DRC. We posted the letter prominently in the Educational Centre, next to a supportive letter we received from Mrs Bardot (see Newsletter #39).



Around March 26, everything seems to be calming down, there are no new cases of respiratory complications, Lola is holding its breath...

Crispin's departure

March 30th is Crispin's last day at Lola, as he has decided to leave us. It is a difficult moment for everyone: Crispin cries, the staff cries and so do I. But that's how it is and we respect his decision.

The arrival of Kinshasa



BCI informs us that there is a new orphan bonobo in Mbandaka and sends it to us in a flight of Hewa Bora, an airline which often helps us in such rescue operations. It is Valery's birthday: in a team spirit, we offer for her to choose a name for this new little female (already 5 years old at least!). "Then it will be the most official of names: Kinshasa!" our "money-keeper" responds. Applause all around. After her period of quarantine, she will join the Nursery in the arms

of Mama Micheline.

Enough of this month of March! Let it finish quickly... What else can be said for such a dark month? Amidst all this intensive medical activity we still managed to stick to our work plan for the reintroduction for this quarter, with our many staff meetings! Phew! We are on-time and ready in the "starting blocks".

JANUARY 2009 IN THE NURSERY
THE NEW YEAR KICKS OFF AT FULL SPEED (by Christine d'Hauthuille)

Even though the Nursery has known times with an even larger number of little orphans, these 7 little bonobos are going non-stop. It's a very feminine and very agitated nursery: "They are messy, naughty and don't care about a thing". As the mamas tell it, all this began following the example of Vanga (transferred to the juvenile's enclosure in November): "He would splash the visitors with water, and bite and smack everyone." With a great talent for mimicking others, Sake took over when he left: "Everything Vanga did back then, Sake does now!" And what about Eleke in all that? Eleke is closely following in Sake's footsteps. Katako, eyes turned to the sky, pretends to be thinking about something else, Waka closely observes the antics of her elders, Masisi bites all the while pretending not to. The two youngest ones, Lukuru and Sandoa, still ask for cuddles, but are already showing signs of agility and swiftness.

While the troop of "the 7 dwarfs" bustles about, "Princess Mimi", who is nearing the end of her pregnancy, seems satisfied with her new position as the respected senior member of the group. Sitting or lying down, still capricious but much more patient, Mimia asks for the watering hose. She likes to drink water directly from the source and enjoys spraying anyone who should happen to pass by, while the little ones observe her with interest, taking note. After a few weeks in the Nursery with the little orphans, Mimia now knows first hand what awaits her!



Sake's nickname - the "chief's daughter" - has never suited her better! She is becoming the terror of the nursery and acts like a turbulent juvenile. She even manages to



severely test the mamas' patience! Tired of never being able to take their eyes off her, they think it might be high time she went to confront the "big ones" in the adult enclosure and to blow off steam in the forest. In the meantime, she patiently waits the slightest moment of distraction to think up and fulfil new mischief. Her latest trick is to discreetly approach the door of the enclosure. She sits looking at the padlock for a long time, she takes a hold of it, opens it, and, being very careful not to touch the

electric wires, slowly pushes the door open. Just as the mamas do! Once outside, it is Crispin who sets her straight. "It is really time she went and joined the juveniles, stopped breaking the chairs and got on the straight and narrow" declares Suzy, seeing the trouble that Sake manages to cause in record breaking speed.



When it comes to being naughty, Eleke and Sake make the perfect team. There's no way of separating them. The only male in the nursery, Eleke has a new passion: Mama Micheline's shoes. The game is quite simple: to grab one and take off as fast as possible. But when Mama Henriette intervenes and tells them to give back Mama Micheline's shoe, they lower their heads and reluctantly give back their stolen trophy. "They are a pain in the neck but sometimes they obey!" says Mama Henriette, smiling. The duo of little thieves no longer let the Mamas eat in peace. The one who steals the most food from the plates wins! And taking example from Mimia who makes her requests by clapping her hands, Eleke had understood how it

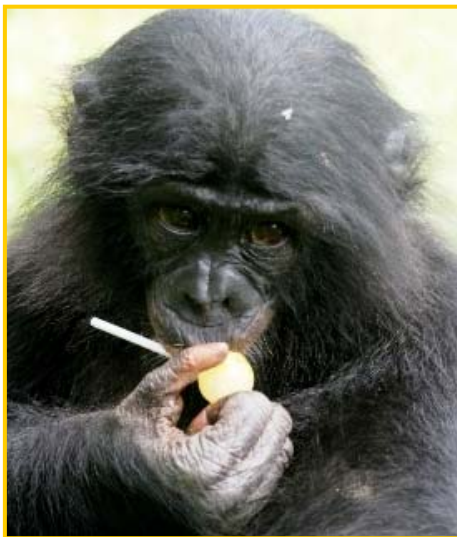
works and makes his demands known with all the cheek of his young age.... He likes to play alone with his bottle, of course dousing anyone he can with water when the chance arises. When it is time for bed, Eleke plays up yet again refusing to go in before a last swing through the palm trees.

Masisi came from the province of Equateur. Crispin and Mama Yvonne went to get her at the airport. She is quite impressed by Mimia's big belly. So she touches it, feels it, lays her ear on it and examines her from head to toe. It's quite a distraction, giving a bit of a break to the mamas, and when Mimia has had enough she gently pushed her away. Masisi is cool for the moment, the mamas agree, but she is looking quite promising, as is Waka: she is quite gentle but a "silent biter". She encourages the others to start up the trouble then slowly retreats as if she had no part in it. She is a good actress says Mama Yvonne : "She can sit next to you, bite you, and suddenly stand up and look you straight in the eyes as if she hadn't done a thing! Masisi, so mischievous so soon!



Lukuru arrived at the Nursery the day after Masisi, her health problems are now a distant memory. She now feels at home among the other orphans. She is even quite demanding: she chose Mama Henriette but she refuses to stay on her back, finding her lap much more comfortable. She is quite a character and screams to get what she wants. She likes well prepared beans, especially when they come from the plates of the mamas! Henriette likes to sing a little song to her from the film "Kirikou".

Sandoa was the last to arrive at the Nursery. Even though she chose Mama Esperance, she likes all the substitute moms. She is neither difficult nor demanding. Although she loves playing with Lukuru, she holds on to Katako, one arm under one arm over. Like "Dupont and Dupond" jokes Mama Henriette. In Mimia, she has also found a new mother who lets her get away with everything. The mamas are resigned: "When she is with Mimia we can call her, try everything, she doesn't care!"



Waka comes from the village of Waka in the province of Equateur. Marie-Laure gave her initial care and treated her bronchitis. Now Waka sticks close to Mama Micheline. But when the milk bottles, fruit and vegetables arrive... it's a different story altogether! Faster than a bolt of lightning, she throws herself on the bananas, her favourite food. And when she's finished her part, she doesn't hesitate to beg from Mimia who lets her get away with... nearly everything. But Waka is more than just a greedy little bonobo, she is also a keen observer. She seems to find Sake's new game of opening the enclosure door most amusing. She is eager to act as a "big one" and learns assiduously from Sake.

Katako also loves to eat. She is even the most greedy one of the lot. With her easily recognisable face, straight from "Planet of the Apes", she is relatively calm compared to the others, in the sense that she gets up to less mischief than the others! A bit hot-tempered and demanding, she screams to get what she wants and doesn't stop until she gets it. We know where Lukuru found her inspiration. No surprise really as Katako loves the two little ones and spends a lot of time playing with them. Protective, she watches over them like a big sister.

