

Bonobo Nursery-Sanctuary in Kinshasa

Newsletter #2 (April-June 2000)

April 2000

Tshikapa has been the object of a lot of worries this quarter, due to frequent crises of asthmatic bronchitis. Once again we had to deploy the full-scale treatment : Medrol, Ventolin and Becatide. She collaborates willingly to frequent sessions of aerosol treatment: she keeps the mask on for over ten minutes without complaining. Unfortunately, she is loosing weight. We have decided to give her banana supplementation (she loves bananas!) in order to maintain her weight as much as possible. She will have two very serious asthma crises this month.

April 3rd: In anticipation of the International Conference on Cites to be held on April 11th in Nairobi, Stephanie Walters of the BBC has programmed a short documentary film on life at the Sanctuary, as well as interviews on the radio. We have a hard time getting a school visit on film since it's Easter break... and since the fuel crisis in Kinshasa is continuing to worsen: "Congo-Tour", our tour company, has a hard time finding buses with full tanks for the visits!

April 18th: During her short visit to Congo for the "Blue White" project ("Bleu Blanc", an educational publication for Congolese children), Delphi Messinger proposes to make a film jointly with "Blue-White" on the Nursery-Sanctuary's school education program. She also gives us, through her own experience, some useful medical advice for the infant bonobos.



Kikwit

April 21st: **Arrival of Kikwit.** Mbo, our head keeper at the Nursery-Sanctuary, had to make an emergency trip to Mushie, Bandundu Province, to get his mother who had been ill with Trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness). On the river-boat back to Kinshasa, he met a cassava merchant who was bringing an infant bonobo for sale in Kinshasa. Mbo convinced him to come to the Nursery-Sanctuary and to leave us the young male, 2 ½ years old, whom we named Kikwit.

To our great surprise, this merchant had in his possession an official certificate from the veterinary services of the Ministry of Agriculture, authorizing him to travel with a “gorilla” (sic) to sell in Kinshasa. Unbelievable! I had to do something to raise awareness about the Cites law.

The authorities of the Environment Ministry and of ICCN (a specialized branch of the Environment Ministry) are appalled when they see such documents... I write to everyone right away about this incident so that no one is allowed to forget it. And I decide to organize without further delay a workshop with the relevant ministries and the armed forces.

In the meantime, Kikwit did not arrive at the Sanctuary alone. He brought with him quite an impressive colony of “Troglodytella abrossanti”, as well as those “Bullantidium Colli” which give us so much trouble when they affect our youngest bonobos. To top it all, Kikwit also has amebic cysts.... Kikwit is fairly courageous, but that’s quite enough to get him stressed! In addition, believing that it was a gorilla, the traders had cut off a couple of his finger tips off one foot and one hand, as well as a tooth, probably for some magic potion... (There are many legends on the strength of gorilla....) Serious medical care is also required for the open, infected wounds on Kikwit’s ankles, where the skin was broken bare by the ropes used to tie him up during transport.

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In the “forest of the little ones”, all is joyful around the two substitute mothers, Henriette and Micheline. Isiro climbs to the conquest of tree tops, followed by Beni. All of them are under the unchallenged leadership of “Kalina”, the youngest bonobo, who deserves the nickname of “chief’s daughter” for her dictatorial temper! Although older than her, Salonga does not let go of Micheline...

April 26th: This morning, **Isiro** is in tears... Does she have conjunctivitis? Fever? Not yet... but she is soon pulling on her ear: it is clearly an ear infection. And Isiro is back under a full dose of antibiotics and pain-killers...

April 29th: Saturday, I will receive a “decoration” from the Press for my work at the Nursery-Sanctuary – as well as a Kuba wooden cup to enrich my primitive art collection. Great!

April 30th: Dr Williams, a pneumologist, agrees to check on **Tshikapa**. She takes the opportunity of the very first exam to “taste” a bite off his finger.... Just in case there was any doubt about whom between them was the chief!

May 2000

Visits of several journalists: The Observer (South Africa); Dallas Morning News.
Visit of people from the General Direction of Sabena, who are in Kinshasa for the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the first flight from Brussels to Leopoldville.

May 15th: Arrival of Garry Richardson, of WSPA/Central Africa, and Nick de Souza, “our” veterinarian from Mombassa, whose precious visits and veterinarian care are offered to us by WSPA. They are coming to operate on **Maya** (female, 7 years), whose larynx bag has been infected for many months now, with all entailed risks of complications. Her terrible-smelling breath and the swelling of her larynx bag threaten severe fever within short delays.



Maya

The operation takes place on the 17th: Maya is anesthetized in the morning and the operation is conducted on Maya sitting up, to prevent her from swallowing the infected liquid. (A joint publication by Nick and Crespin will follow.) The operation is a total success! The next day, Maya plays with the other bonobos in the forest as if nothing had happened. She lets Nick take off the suture threads a week later without any difficulty.

May 22nd: Taking advantage of Nick’s visit and considering that he is one of the few in whom we have total confidence to entrust the infant bonobos, we decide to test the blood of the last eight bonobos to have arrived at the Nursery-Sanctuary. Testing will be for HIV, SIV, HTLV, STLV, as well as TB. I need to request Cites authorizations to have their blood tested outside the country, in Prof. Beatrice Hahn’s laboratory in the US...

While we are at it, Nick takes advantage of this work to also anesthetize **Inongo** (male, 4 years) and evaluate the condition of his hip, since his right leg seems to have shortened after a shock he received while playing with Michael. Indeed, we confirm a 3 cm difference between the two legs! Nick thinks that Inongo may have broken his hip bone; we would need a radio to confirm this, but where and how to do this?

May 15th: Two helicopters over-fly the sanctuary, which is close to President Kabila’s office... This kind of noise really stresses the bonobos out! **Michael** (male, the older bonobo at 9 years) jumps the fence of the enclosure in spite of the electric current!!! It will take all the staff’s patience to coax him into returning inside...

Nioki's arrival: One more infant bonobo will arrive at the Nursery-Sanctuary this month, once again from the presumed front line. We had her confiscated by Inspectors Etienne and Freddy, who are now our “regulars”.



Nioki

Nioki –this will be her name-- is very light skinned, like Kalina; she is very

small, too small –she is only 12 or 18 months--; she is totally dehydrated and full of parasites. And she unfortunately has the same hand and feet mutilations as Kikwit...

As a consequence, the confiscation process is slightly aggressive. We have come a long way from the first confiscation, when the inspectors were providing long explanations to the vendors. Now that they are taking an increased interest in the bonobos, they cannot stand any more to see how the infant bonobos are being mutilated.... And they even threaten to arrest the vendors!

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Organization of the Reflection Workshop: I am almost ready to organize the “Day of Reflection on the Consequences of the War on Endemic Species in the DRC: the Case of the Bonobo”. The date has been set for June 3rd. I am going almost every day to Kokolo military camp to meet Major-General Joseph Kabila, so that he send a few of his commanders to the workshop. He eventually agrees to delegate three commanders of the terrestrial Armed Forces, of which he is Head, to the meeting. The Ministries of agriculture and environment, specialized agencies ICCN (Nature Conservancy) and IJBZC (Botanical Gardens and Zoos) and a few NGOs will participate as well. All concerned express a lot of interest!

JUNE 2000

June 2nd: One more infant bonobo received at the Nursery-Sanctuary after a confiscation! **Ruzizi** is a very, very small (12 months? 18 months?) female –she is the same size as Nioki, but very dark. She is also very dehydrated and malnourished, her skin is wrinkled and hangs loosely on her... will she survive? And will Nioki? Both of them struggle to survive under the intensive care of Valerie, in her home. We definitely need another substitute mother; we select Yvonne, whose salary is being offered by an AAC member.

June 3rd: Reflection Workshop: We have brought together 39 participants, including a representative from the Cabinet of the Environment Minister, Mr. Ylanga, advisor to the Minister on environmental issues. Officers from the Armed Forces of DRC are also present... It is a workshop with practical-oriented field people, who understand the context we work in, the country's taboos and tradition. The discussion is at times heated, but a good meal, prepared single-handedly by Valerie, brings back everyone's good spirits.



June 3rd Reflection Workshop

Dominique Morel, who acts as moderator, facilitating the discussion and organizing the working groups. She has opted for an “appreciative” methodology, building on successes accomplished rather than problems faced, in order to minimize the potential conflicts between the various groups represented... She handles the situation in a very diplomatic manner! A great job done!

For my part, I assist the rapporteur with the preparation of the workshop's report and summary of its agreed-upon recommendations, and I handle the media (written and audio-visual press).

The DRC Armed Forces have warmly thanked us for having associated them to this workshop, which represented something totally new for them. They were particularly interested in the idea of training ecoguards, a kind of paramilitary corps which would revive the former forest guards and receive dual training in environment and security issues....

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June 8th : Italian-style survival fight for **Nioki** and **Ruzizi**, who are still in intensive care with Valerie. Having exhausted all further inspiration to stimulate their appetite, Valerie has them

discover spaghetti. One should have seen them, with their small hands full of dripping pasta! They would not have given away a centimeter of it for all their life!!! But Valerie is exhausted by the

amount of attention which they require. Henriette, our head substitute mother for the little ones joins her and learns about intensive care.

Unfortunately, Ruzizi will not survive. She was too small, too dehydrated... She will have remained only a few days with us.

Among the good news this quarter:

Gerard de Nys of the Netherlands has obtained an oxygen-therapy machine for us! Many, many thanks Gerard!

Thanks to Jo Thomson for having presented our project to Japanese researchers, who mobilized to collect a significant amount of funds for us! Thanks to all our Japanese donors!

Thanks for their fidelity in supporting us to the Zoological Society of Milwaukee, to Columbus Zoo, to Anvers Zoo and more specifically the Bonobo project of Plaukendaël, to WSPA/Central Africa.

Thanks to Sally Coxe and Alison Mize, thanks to Emy Verhnet, Betsy and Jim,

Vicky Aduar, Kate Farnsworth, Dominique Morel, and to all of you who, from close by or from afar, allow me to dream that we will succeed in soon creating a “Bonobo Sanctuary in Congo”...

Thanks to the Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Fishing and Forests, to ICCN, to the Armed Forces and to our Congolese friends for their mobilization during the reflection workshop.

And a special thanks to Garry Richardson (WSPA) for allowing Maya to achieve a successful recovery and to Nick for his irreplaceable competence!