LAC TÉLÉ COMMUNITY RESERVE

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Annual report 2024

KEY DATES

1998

The Lac Télé site designated as a wetland of international importance (Ramsar Convention).

2001

The reserve is created and supported technically and financially by WCS.

2008

Research carried out by WCS reveals very high density of gorillas in the Reserve.

2017

Scientists discover that the Reserve is at the heart of the world's largest tropical peat bog.

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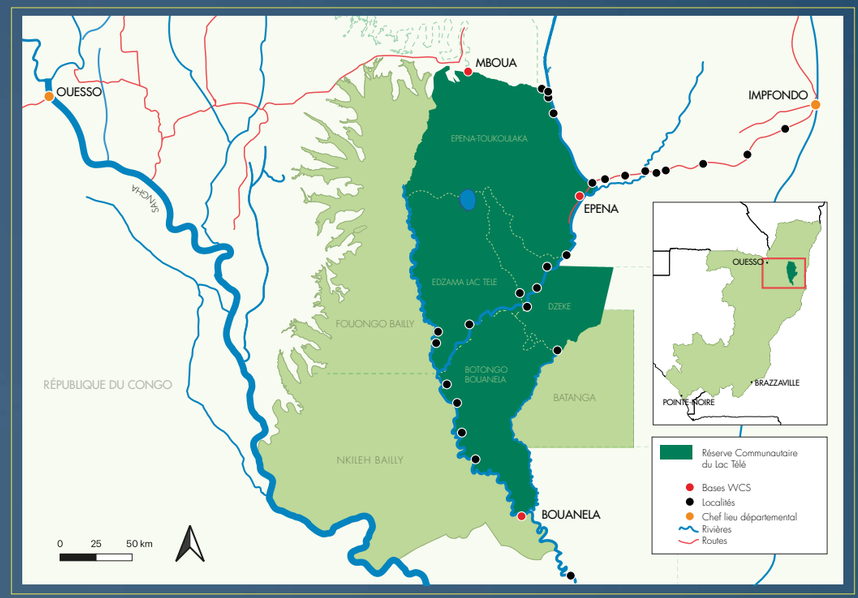
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SHORT PRESENTATION

The Lac Télé Community Reserve (RCLT) was created by Presidential Decree no. 2001-220 of May 10, 2001. With a surface area of 438 9G0 hectares, its boundaries are marked to the northeast and southwest by the Likouala-aux- Herbes river; to east by the Batanga river; to west by the Bailly river and to the north by the Mandoungouma river.



The LTCR is made up of four main terrestrial ecosystems:

• Permanently flooded forests (also known as swamp forests) cover 50% of its surface;

• forests subject to flooding, i.e. seasonally flooded, account for 24% of the area;

• flooded savannahs cover 17% of the surface;

• dry land forests account for 9% of the surface area ;

• The aquatic ecosystem of the Likouala-aux-herbes and its tributaries (Batanga, Bailly, Mandougouma)

The first two forest types (flooded and seasonally flooded) correspond to peatland forests due to the high organic matter content of their soils. These forests sequester a considerable quantity of carbon. These ecosystems are interdependent, and the water cycle plays a major role. Flooding: in the main rainy season (October to December), due to the rising water table and overflowing rivers, 90% of the RCLT is flooded. The RCLT has been designated as a wetland of international importance under the RAMSAR convention. It is home to remarkable biodiversity (large populations of western lowland gorillas, common chimpanzeeswaterbirds and forest elephants), and the ecosystems present provide supply and regulation services of considerable importance, not only to local communities, but also to the international community via climate change mitigation.

The RCLT covers two districts (Epéna and Bouanela) and includes 27 villages with an estimated population of 20,000. Most of the population's means of subsistence (food via fish and game, forest plants) and financial income (sale of fish, game, non-timber forest products, timber products) come from the exploitation of natural resources. Fishing in particular plays a very important economic role.

The fishing industry: a study of the fishing industry showed that fish caught in the RCLT supplies several Congolese urban markets, notably Brazzaville, and is also exported to CAR and the DRC. Hunting fishing activities. Cocoa cultivation on family plantations also provides additional financial income.

1.2 MANAGEMENT METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

For the management of the Lac Télé Community Reserve, a partnership between the government of the Republic of the Congo and the American conservation NGO Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) began in 2001 and was formalised in 2008 by a memorandum of understanding. This protocol established the 'Projet d'Appui à la Gestion de la Réserve Communautaire du Lac Télé' (PAGRCLT). It established the principle of co-management of the RCLT between the Agence Congolaise de la Faune et des Aires Protégées (ACFAP) and WCS.

In 2024, the objectives of WCS's support for the management of the RCLT were revised to incorporate the recommendations from the evaluation conducted in 2023.

These revised objectives are as follows:

Overall objective: to maintain the services provided by the ecosystems of the RCLT to local communities and the international community.

Specific objective 1: Strengthen shared governance for better ownership of conservation objectives.

Specific objective 2: Contribute to improving the living conditions of local populations.

Specific objective 3: Make good management decisions based on long-term ecological monitoring and document global changes.

Specific objective 4: Ensure the protection of the biodiversity of the RCLT.

1.3 ORGANIZATION

To achieve its objectives, the management of the RCLT has been organised into a Coordination and five (5) departments, including three technical departments and two support departments. The Coordination includes the Curator (MEF agent) and the Principal Technical Advisor (WCS agent). This coordination jointly provides supervision and strategic decision-making regarding the Reserve's management activities.

The three technical services are as follows:

Développement Communautaire (Community Development): this service works to promote sustainable development, in particular by strengthening community governance of natural resources, providing support for the development of income-generating activities, and ensuring education, awareness-raising and the improvement of the living conditions of local populations.

Ecological Research and Monitoring (ERM): this department monitors wildlife populations, habitats and threats to biodiversity in the RCLT and contributes to a better understanding of the site's biodiversity.

Anti-poaching (LAB) : the objective of this service is to protect and monitor the Reserve against any form of illegal and unsustainable exploitation of ecosystems through mobile patrols (water, vehicle and foot) and fixed patrols.

The two support services are:

Administration and finance: this department manages human and financial resources, in particular compliance with the procedures of various stakeholders and funders;

Logistics: this department is responsible for deploying teams on the ground, maintaining equipment, purchasing and the effective operation of the bases in Epéna, Mboua and Bouanéla.

2. GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING TOOLS

2.1 PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE WITH THE NOTABLES OF EPENA

A platform for dialogue between the RCLT and the notability of Épena was set up in January 2024. Its objectives are to inform the notability of the activities implemented by the RCLT, to seek opinions and advice on current or future projects, but also to discuss various points of general interest.

This platform is made up of the three notables of Epéna (who act as President, Secretary and Communications Officer) and, on the Reserve side, the Curator (or his representative), the CTP WCS, the head of the 'Community Development' department and another agent from this department.

During the year 2024, a total of six (6) meetings took place. They provided an opportunity to exchange information and discuss issues concerning the local populations. A climate of trust gradually developed between the Reserve and the notables.

2.2 ORGANISATION OF THE MEETING WITH THE LOCAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Local Management Committee (CLG) of the RCLT was created in 2020 by prefectural decree. It represents the populations of the 27 villages in the Reserve. In order to revitalise this structure, which has been on standby for several years, the Reserve Coordination organised a two-day workshop with the CLG on 13 and 14 December 2024. With four representatives per village (president and vice-president of the CGRN, first notable and a representative of the women of the village) and local authorities of Épena, no fewer than 140 participants gathered in this locality.

The morning of 13 December was devoted to presentations by the Reserve Coordination on the main activities carried out in 2024 and on the 2024-2025 policy in terms of community development.

These presentations gave rise to intense question and answer sessions.

In the afternoon, the members of the CLG split into two groups to work on two important issues facing the Reserve: the application of the mini-fishing charter and the control of bush fires. Numerous proposals and recommendations were made. Finally, the morning of 14 December was devoted to the establishment of the new governing bodies of the CLG. This meeting was a great success and was appreciated by all. It embodies the collaborative work between the Reserve and the local populations.

These two days of meetings received extensive media coverage, with a report being broadcast on the DRTV channel.

Family photo of the Local Management Committee meeting in Epéna (December 2024) © L. Oyoubi/WCS)

Consultation meeting on the draft Development Plan in Botongo village (©BRL)

2.3 DRAWING UP A DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE RESERVE

Since the support of technical and financial partners (PTF) to the RCLT (IUCN from 199G to 1999 then WCS since 2001), three preliminary versions of the RCLT Development Plan have been prepared, but none has been finalized and validated, for lack of adequate funding.

In order to provide the Reserve with a Development Plan (Plan d'Aménagement - PA), a consultancy mission was launched in March 2024 to support the coordination team in drawing up this framework document. A total of 7 bids were received and, after evaluation, the contract was awarded to BRLi in July 2024.

The AP development process was designed by the Coordination to be highly participatory. Thus, after having elaborated a very first version on a bibliographical basis in September 2024, the team of consultants went to the RCLT in November 2024 to carry out the public consultations. These were held in the 27 villages of the Reserve, during which the preliminary AP was presented and discussed. They focused in particular on the content of the community development program and on the boundaries of the Integral Protection Zone (which, according to the decree creating the reserve, must be defined in the PA). Minutes were drawn up after each consultation.

On the basis of these public consultations and the discussions held with the coordination, the consultant team will deliver a second version of the AP in early 2025. This version will be presented to the local authorities (prefecture, departmental council, sub-prefectures, departmental directorates, etc.) for amendment.

The final version of the AP is expected by July 2025. This version will then be sent to ACFAP for further validation by national authorities.

2.4 UPDATING OF SIMPLE MANAGEMENT PLANS

In 2005, the RCLT supported the 27 RCLT villages in drawing up their Simple Management Plans (SMPs). Each SMP includes five chapters: 1) Presentation of the village (geographical location, history, demographics, socio-economic activities); 2) Management of natural resources (customs and social organisation, customary rules for land management); 3) Zoning of the village land (Rational Use Zone, Integral Protection Zone); 4) Implementation of the Plan and 5) Appendices.

As they date back more than 20 years, it was deemed necessary to update the PSG of the villages in the Reserve. To assist the Coordination in this task, a consultation was launched in September 2024 and two bids were received. The consultant awarded the contract began by examining the 2005 PSG and discussing the guidelines desired by the Coordination. Then the public consultations in the 27 villages began on 20 November 2024. Minutes were drawn up after each consultation.

These consultations will continue until the end of January 2025. A final version of the PSG is expected for each of the 27 villages in May 2025.

2.5 REVISION OF THE DECREE ESTABLISHING THE RESERVE

The presidential decree creating the Réserve Communautaire du Lac Télé was signed in 2001. Almost 25 years old, this decree needs to be revised on several points. The Coordination has therefore worked together to examine the necessary modifications. The four main modifications proposed are:

- **Expand the composition of the Management Committee,** the decision-making body of the RCLT. According to the decree, this body is composed of 10 members, all representatives of the State public administration. It is proposed to expand this composition by including representatives of local communities and PTFs;
- **Insert an advisory body,** in this case the Local Management Committee, a structure representing the local communities of the RCLT created in 2020, well after the 2001 decree;
- **Complement the protective measures,** in particular the ban on opening roads and tracks in the Integral Protection Zone of the RCLT;
- **Correct the surface area of the RCLT** and those of the north and south blocks with the figures produced by using a GIS.

A document entitled «Proposal for the amendment of the presidential decree establishing the Réserve Communautaire du Lac Télé» was drafted and sent to the WCS management in Brazzaville in early December 2024. A meeting was organised with the Wildlife Advisor to the Minister of Forest Economy, who recommended that a letter be drafted for the Minister on this subject.

3 PROTECTION AND ANTI-POACHING

3.1 ORGANIZATION

Le service Protection et Lutte anti-braconnage (LAB)

The Protection and Anti-Poaching Service (LAB) carries out surveillance operations to enforce wildlife law, using mobile and fixed patrols to monitor the movement of wildlife products.

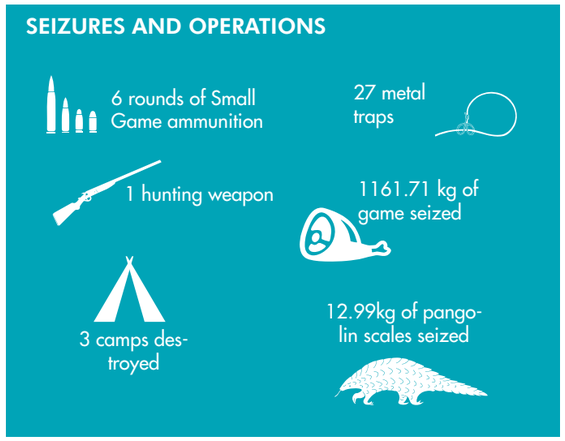
It is currently led by:

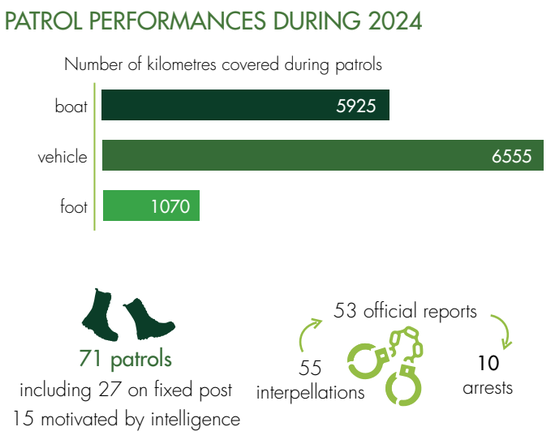
- a strategic command under the direction of the Conservator and the CTP WCS;
- a tactical command composed of two patrol chiefs and four anti-poaching unit chiefs;
- an operational support officer (SMART focal point);
- a lawyer to monitor legal cases.

A support unit in Bomassa, in the Nouabalé Ndoki National Park, includes a trainer and a technical advisor, where the trainer provides refresher training for the ecoguards. The 17 ecoguards are organised into four units, each headed by a Unit Manager and comprising a Deputy Manager and two or three members.

3.2 SUPERVISION ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

Surveillance activities in the TRCA are carried out through mobile and fixed patrols, aimed at improving the effectiveness of the fight against poaching and habitat degradation. Patrol teams collect data on human activities, interventions and wildlife sightings. After each mission, a debriefing is held to verify and store this information in the SMART database, where it is then analysed and presented in graphic form at plenary meetings to guide future missions and overall planning. The results demonstrate the comparative evolution of surveillance efforts and the effectiveness of protection patrols in the region.





Between 2022 and 2024, the intensification of patrols, with an increase in the number of days in the field and the mileage covered, strengthened law enforcement. The number of arrests tripled, from 3 in 2022 to 9 in 2024, reflecting the increased effectiveness of the controls. At the same time, bushmeat seizures at the KP 38 checkpoint fell from 2,285 kg to 1,161 kg.

This decrease may reflect a reduction in the game trade, but could also indicate the development of new transport routes bypassing this checkpoint.

3.3 LEGAL FOLLOW-UP

In 2024, ten (10) people were arrested, questioned and then referred to the Tribunal de Grande Instance (TGI). Among them, - one person was released by the Court due to insufficient evidence;

- one person was transferred to the Tribunal de Grande Instance of Ouesso due to jurisdiction;

- one person (military) was arrested and then released before being presented to the TGI;

- a minor was referred to the juvenile court for socialisation;

- two people were fined for the slaughter of a fully protected species (gorilla).

- One person was sentenced to 36 months' imprisonment for the following offences: killing of fully protected species (a leopard and two giant pangolins), circulation of trophies without holding the corresponding certificate of origin (a leopard skin, 1,690 scales, 7 teeth and other parts of a giant pangolin) and hunting with prohibited means (wire cables).

Four (04) arrest warrants were issued by the Republic's Public Prosecutor's Office against wildlife offenders on the run and all four warrants were executed by the eco-guards with the support of the police force. The execution rate is therefore 100%.

Seizure of a panther skin and pangolin scales in October 2024

Thirty-four (34) visits were made by the lawyer to the cells of the Impfondo prison to ensure the effective presence of the wildlife detainees and their state of health. This has prevented any improper release of detainees throughout the past year.

No proceedings brought before the court have been dismissed on grounds of procedural and/or substantive defects, thanks to the legal assistance provided to all proceedings as soon as they are drawn up by the sworn officers.

3.4 MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT

New field equipment was acquired in 2024: uniforms, camping equipment (tent, mattress). From September 2024, the LAB service will be equipped with the EarthRanger system, which allows for better patrol planning and live monitoring of the movement of units in the field. Communication between the units and the operations room has been strengthened, allowing for better responsiveness.

3.5 CAPACITY BUILDING

Every year, WCS organises refresher training for all the ecoguards working in its areas of intervention. This refresher training is for the ecoguards of the NNNP, PROGEPP and RCLT. All of this training is organised and managed by WCS. Four refresher sessions for the ecoguards were held this year, in which all members of the RCLT participated. The topics covered during these refresher sessions are as follows: operational intervention techniques, handling of weapons, handling of animal carcasses, first aid and human rights.

In addition, the operational support officer benefited from two training courses:

basic training in geographic information systems (ArcGIS Pro);

training in the use of the EarthRanger system.

Finally, a national SMART workshop was held in November 2024 in Ouesso. This brought together all SMART users in the Congo. It also made it possible to evaluate the results of anti-poaching patrols by site and at the national level, and to develop and adopt a framework for the execution of joint patrols.

4 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The activities of the Community Development Department follow four main lines of approach:

- **improving the living conditions of local communities;**
- **supporting the sustainable management of natural resources;**
- **developing income-generating activities;**
- **environmental awareness and education.**

4.1 IMPROVEMENT OF THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE COMMUNITIES

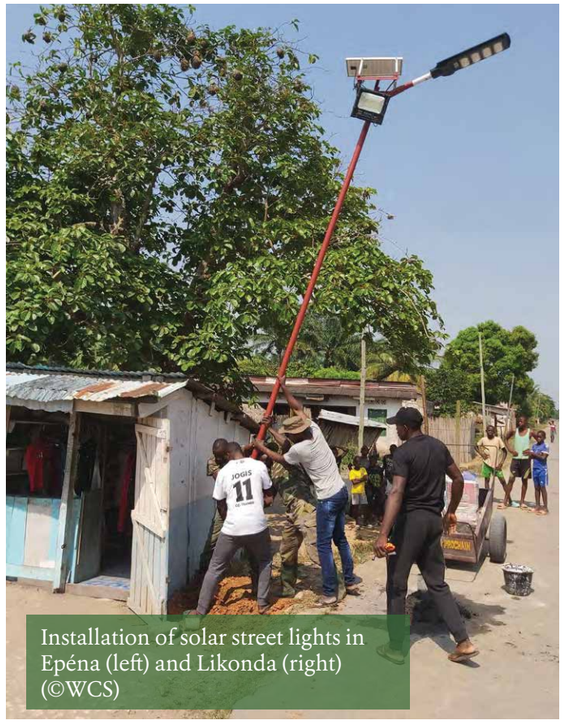
4.1.1 SOLAR ELECTRIFICATION OF VILLAGES

None of the villages in the RCLT, including the urban commune of Epéna, has a functioning public electricity network. This situation poses problems in terms of the safety of property and people. During discussions with the villages, it became clear that rural electrification was a widely supported activity.

For the period from January to December 2024 and with the support of the local authorities (village chiefs), an initial phase of installing solar street lamps has been launched in 14 villages according to the following distribution: 4 villages in the district of Bouanéla (Bouanéla centre, Mossengué, Likonda, Botongo) and 10 villages in the district of Epéna (Dzeké, Mboukou, Impongui, Boha, Mouhounda, Itanga, Ibolo, Koundoumou, Iyahou, and Epéna centre).

A total of 73 solar street lamps and 7 solar floodlights have been installed. The number of street lamps per village varies according to the resident population. The street lamps are placed in the main streets, while the floodlights are installed in gathering places (market squares, landing stages along the rivers).

A new campaign to install streetlights and floodlights is planned for early 2025 in the villages of the RCLT that have not yet benefited from this equipment.



Installation of solar street lights in Epéna (left) and Likonda (right) (©WCS)

4.1.2 ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER

The village of Mokengui, located to the north of the RCLT, suffers from annual flooding that exposes the population to diseases linked to drinking water. Its high-capacity (20,000 litre) borehole was constructed in 2017, but had been out of service since 2021 (3 years).

After a long diagnostic process, the Coordination decided to repair the borehole and the village's water supply and distribution system. It purchased a new pump, solar panels and electrical appliances, and rehabilitated the entire water distribution system, all at a total cost of 5,000,000 CFA francs.

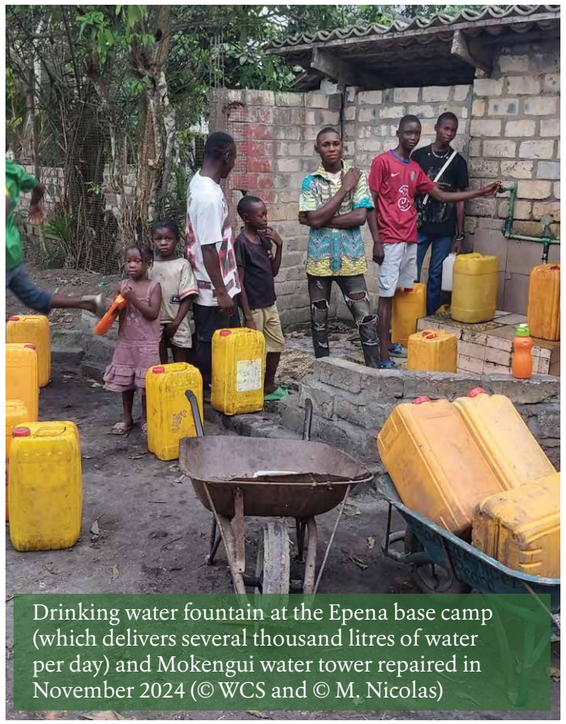
As of now, the borehole is producing water and the 10 fountains in the communal areas of the village are functional.

After completing the work, the Coordination officially handed over the facility on 28 November 2024 and supported the establishment of a Borehole Management Committee to ensure that the community takes care of the day-to-day maintenance of the facility.

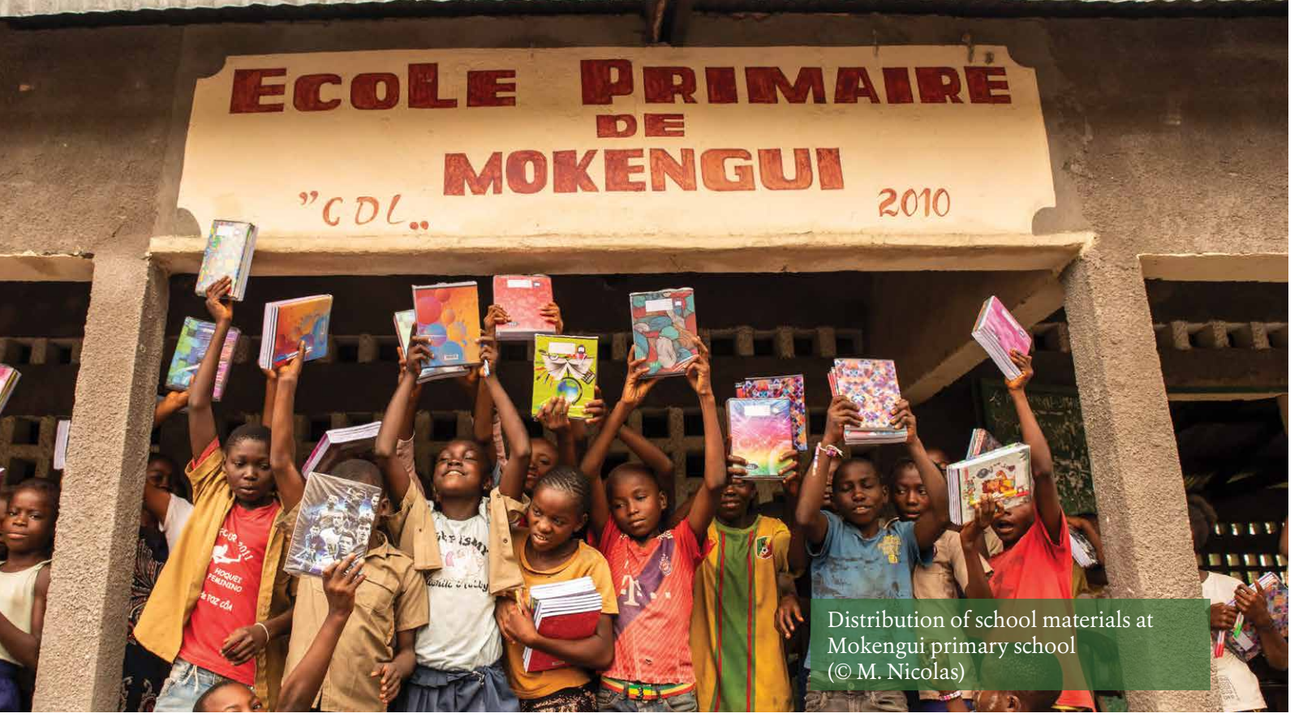
With regard to water distribution, it should be noted that for many years there has been a water fountain at the Reserve's base camp in Epéna that is freely accessible to the inhabitants of Epéna (from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.). This fountain, which was renovated in 2024, is supplied by the drilling of the base camp. It is the only public water source in Epéna and the surrounding villages. It provides the inhabitants with between 6,000 and 7,000 litres of water per day.

Similarly, the borehole at the Bouanela forward operating base is freely accessible to the inhabitants of that locality. Several thousand litres of water are distributed every day.

At the Mboua forward operating base, a tap has been installed on the road running alongside the base so that the inhabitants can benefit from the water from the borehole. The borehole, which is currently not functioning properly, will be repaired in early 2025.



Drinking water fountain at the Epena base camp (which delivers several thousand litres of water per day) and Mokengui water tower repaired in November 2024 (© WCS and © M. Nicolas)



Distribution of school materials at Mokengui primary school (© M. Nicolas)

4.1.3 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

In order to lighten the financial burden that parents of pupils have to bear at the start of the school year, the RCLT has funded the purchase and distribution of school kits to pupils in the 22 primary schools of the LTRC (21 villages).

This distribution took place from 27 October to 28 November 2024 and 3,658 pupils were given a school kit. The contents varied according to the school year:

- in preparatory classes (CP1 and CP2): a slate, a box of chalk, two exercise books;

- in elementary school (CE1 and CE2): one slate, three notebooks and two pens;

- in middle school (CM1 and CM2): five notebooks and two pens.

This distribution activity was greatly appreciated by parents and teachers.

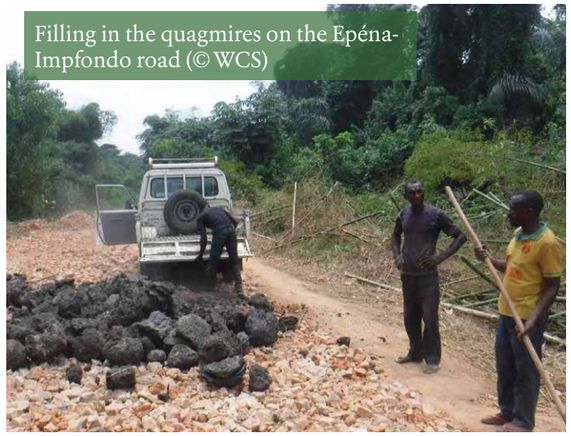
4.1.4 REHABILITATION OF COMMUNICATION ROUTES

The villages of the LTRC are very isolated: the rivers (Likouala-aux-Herbes and its tributaries) are the main means of communication, and Epéna is connected to Impfondo by a paved road in very poor condition that has not been maintained for many years (this is the responsibility of the Departmental Council). It has not been maintained for many years (this is the responsibility of the Departmental Council). In the rainy season, two huge quagmires appear and prevent the movement of lorries, saloon cars and delivery tricycles. In addition, the vegetation largely encroaches on the road, which reduces visibility and increases the risk of collision.

Faced with this situation, which considerably disrupts the economic and social development of the villages along the road and also hinders the safety of the inhabitants (medical evacuations, road accidents), the Coordination decided to rehabilitate the section of road between Epéna and the checkpoint PK 38. Two types of work were carried out in 2024:

• The vegetation invading the roadway was pruned over a 19.2 km section between the villages of Boléké and Ngounda. This work, paid for by the LTRC, was carried out by volunteer members of the villages along the road, under the joint supervision of the sub-prefect of the Epéna district and the head of the Community Development department.

An initial mission by the LTRC Logistics Department had made it possible to draw up an inventory of the 14 main holes and quagmires on the Epéna-PK 38 section. With the support of the sub-prefecture and the urban community of Epéna, old abandoned buildings were demolished and the bricks were collected. They were then transported to the quagmires in a lorry provided by the town hall of Impfondo. The day labourers brought to the site then proceeded to fill in the two quagmires. The other large holes were also filled with a mixture of crushed bricks and termite mound soil. Ten day labourers were mobilised for the whole of this work, which lasted 40 days.


Filling in the quagmires on the Epéna-Impfondo road (© WCS)


Clearing of vegetation obstructing the Mandougouma river (© WCS)

In addition to the rehabilitation of the road, the LTRC financed the cleaning of the Mandougouma River at the end of 2024. This watercourse, which forms the northern boundary of the Reserve, plays an important role in communication and exchanges between the villages in the north of the Reserve. It connects the villages of the Kabounga lands to the Likouala-aux-Herbes axis and thus allows people to reach the sub-prefecture of Épéna from Mboua in a few hours by dugout canoe (instead of more than a day and a half by road). This small river is regularly obstructed by vegetation and requires regular cleaning. This project, carried out over 30 days by more than 20 local villagers, made it possible to clean 38 km of river.

4.1.5 SUPPORT FOR SPORTS ACTIVITIES

In response to recurring requests, the LTRC has decided to support sports activities in the villages. This has resulted in:

• The distribution of quality footballs to village teams. A total of 41 footballs have been distributed to football teams in 17 villages (11 in the district of Épena and 6 in the district of Bouanéla). It should be noted that women's teams, where they existed, also benefited from balls. Distribution will continue in 2025 in the non-beneficiary villages.

• The cleaning of the football pitches (Epéna, Bouanela, Matoko) was made possible thanks to the provision of a portable brush cutter and a technician from the LTRC.


Distribution of footballs to the Likonda men's and women's team (© WCS)

4.1.6 SUPPORTING PEOPLE'S HEALTH

There are a total of six integrated health centres in the 27 villages of the Reserve: Mboua, Mokengui, Epené, Dzéké, Mougouma-Bailly and Bouanéla. They are managed by the Impfondo Health District (DSI). The state of the infrastructure and equipment available varies from one CSI to another, but overall, these centres require support for the rehabilitation of infrastructure and the acquisition of new equipment.

To determine the exact needs of each CSI, we carried out an on-site assessment in 2024. An initial evaluation mission, carried out in April-May, visited the ISCs of Epéna, Dzéké, Bouanela and Mongouma-Bailly. A second mission, carried out in September, visited the Mboua ISC. It then returned to Dzéké and Mougoula-Bailly to request quotes from craftsmen for emergency infrastructure work.

At the end of these missions, it appears that the rehabilitation costs are considerable and exceed WCS's financial possibilities. A meeting with the DSI is scheduled for early January 2025 to prioritise our support according to the available budget and in view of the other planned interventions.

In this respect, the lack of transparency on the part of the CSI centre managers and the DSI is regrettable, as they never mention the support provided by other partners during interviews. This is how we learned by chance that the forestry company Thanry Congo was going to rehabilitate the Dzéké and Mokengui CSIs from January 2025. Similarly, the Kobikossa project, financed by the World Bank, should provide equipment and materials to several ISCs in 2025.

In August 2023, WCS signed a collaboration agreement with the NGO ASLAV, which finances mobile medical consultations in the villages along the Likouala-aux-herbes and Bailly rivers. In 2024, ASLAV conducted seven (7) consultations in the northern axis (Epéna-Mokengui) and ten (10) consultations in the southern axis (Epéna-Bouanela). In accordance with the terms of the partnership, ASLAV staff were provided with free accommodation at the reserve's base camp and fuel was loaned to the clinic boat when the NGO was experiencing shortages.

4.2 SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

This year, activities on the sustainable management of natural resources have focused on the analysis and interpretation of data collected in 2023 on fishing and hunting in certain pilot villages in the Reserve. For six months in 2023, data was collected by investigators on the hunting records and the quantities of fish brought back by hunters and fishermen in six villages in the reserve. After a long process of data analysis, the main results of these two studies are as follows:

• As regards fishing, the biomass of fish caught annually per fisherman averages 423 kg. The most common techniques are the net and the hook. In view of the estimated number of active fishermen in the reserve, 1,138 tonnes of fish are caught annually in Likouala-aux-herbes and its tributaries, generating a turnover of 1.23 billion CFA francs for the fishermen.

• As far as hunting is concerned, the biomass of game killed annually per hunter is on average 619 kg. The pygmy crocodile, the blue duiker and the mangabey are the three most frequently killed species (52% of the total). Taking into account the estimated number of active hunters in the Reserve, the biomass of game taken annually would be 166.8 tonnes, generating a turnover of 107.8 million CFA francs. Analysis of the hunting tables suggests that the wildlife of the LTRC is, for the moment, little affected by hunting.

4.3 INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES

4.3.1 SUPPORT FOR THE REVIVAL OF COCOA FARMING

With a view to reviving the cocoa sector through competitive and environmentally friendly production in the LTRC, the Agricultural Sector Recovery Support Project (PARSA) and WCS signed a partnership in 2023 to work jointly on the theme. The promotion of sustainable cocoa production has been targeted as an alternative livelihood for the local communities in and around the Reserve.

Three producer inventory missions were organised in 16 villages in the Reserve, the first two at the end of 2023 and the third in March 2024. A database of producers and cocoa plots per village has been developed.

In September 2024, two cocoa cultivation technicians joined the LTRC team to support the revival of the cocoa sector in the Reserve. These technicians carried out the following activities:

• From 12 to 22 August 2024, a mission was conducted in 10 villages to make contact with producers and identify priority support needs;

• A second mission was conducted from 28 October to 30 November with the aim of presenting the selection criteria, drawing up lists of shortlisted producers and visiting the plantations to confirm the results of the mapping in the 16 pilot villages.

Ultimately, 160 producers in 16 LTRC localities covering an area of 156.48 hectares will be supported from 2025 with small equipment and training.

The training manuals (running a nursery, cleaning a plantation) were written in December 2024 by the two cocoa technicians.

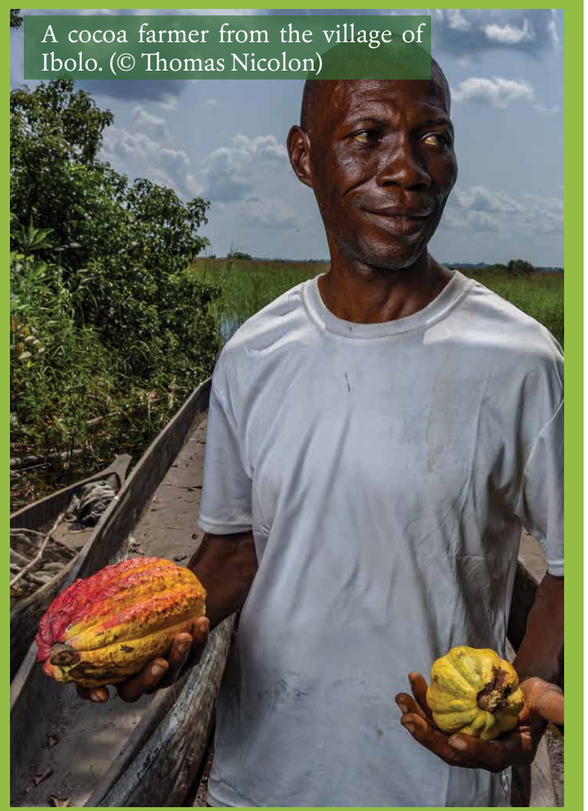
4.3.2 SUPPORT FOR BEEKEEPING

Currently, the felling of trees for honey harvesting has become a very common activity for the peoples (indigenous populations and local communities) who live in forest areas. This artisanal practice causes the destruction of bee colonies, the felling of brood-bearing trees and the burning of forests, particularly gallery forests.

To contribute to the protection of the environment but also to provide communities with a sustainable source of income, the LTRC Coordination wanted to promote modern beekeeping in the LTRC villages.

In September 2024, a consultation was launched to select an operator to promote modern beekeeping. Three bids were received and the 'Ya Diyi Cooperative' group was selected.

This operator will work in 8 pilot villages in the Reserve from February 2025 for a period of one year.



A cocoa farmer from the village of Ibolo. (© Thomas Nicolon)

Traditional indigenous dance during the celebration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (© WCS)

4.4 ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

4.4.1 CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

On the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, celebrated on 9 August 2024, the local communities and indigenous populations of Mobangui, Toukoulaka, Bène and Minganga gathered in the village of Mboua. Participants were made aware of good fishing practices, social inclusion and the essential role of indigenous women in conservation actions.

The day's activities included scenes performed by the indigenous communities, traditional games and musical performances. They beautifully honoured the know-how and the enhancement of the cultural richness of the indigenous peoples.

At the end of the ceremony, eight footballs were presented to the four teams from the villages of Mboua, Bène, Toukoulaka and Mobangui, bringing the day to a close on a note of conviviality and sharing.

4.4.2 AWARENESS-RAISING AMONG COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS

Community and school meetings were organised in the villages of the Reserve to raise awareness on various topics.

An initial campaign was organised from 18 April to 8 May 2024 in 10 villages in the Epéna district. It targeted the entire village community as well as schoolchildren and focused on bush fires and zoonoses.

A total of 14 meetings were held and 432 villagers were made aware of the issues (281 Bantu men and 121 women; 25 indigenous men and 6 women).

Eleven schools were visited, reaching 802 pupils (446 boys and 356 girls) during 13 awareness-raising sessions.

As this period coincided with the long school holidays, only village meetings were held. These meetings reached 330 Bantu villagers, including 237 men and 85 women.

5 ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND MONITORING

The Ecological Research and Monitoring Department (R&SE) implements activities aimed at better understanding the functioning of the LTRC's ecosystems, and in particular at monitoring changes over time. It therefore covers ecological monitoring and research activities, the latter generally being conducted in partnership with national and international institutions.

Measuring change through ecological monitoring is particularly important because it can guide the management activities of other services, including surveillance and community development (through the sustainable use of natural resources).

5.1 ECOLOGICAL MONITORING

5.1.1 ANNUAL WATER BIRD CENSUS

As for the past 20 years, the waterbird count took place in 2024 during the low-water season, with the aim of determining the number of waterbirds per family and per species observed.

A total of 5,581 waterbirds were observed, belonging to 17 families and 44 species. The species observed were categorised according to their migratory status: 75% of the species are sedentary, 4 are intra-African migrants, and 7 are Palearctic migrants. The best represented families are the Ardeidae, the Alcédinidae and the Scolopacidae. Three species dominate the bird population, accounting for more than 50% of sightings: *Anhinga rufa*, *Microcarbo africanus* and *Ardea purpurea*. A new species, *Dendrocygna viduata*, was observed for the first time between the villages of Edzama and Dzeke.

At the same time, a fixed-site counting method was used to observe the nests of two species, the *Anhinga rufa* and the *Ardea purpurea*, at the Edzama and Itanga nesting sites. The use of drones improved the accuracy of the counts, with a 27% increase for the Anhinga and 200% for the Purple Heron compared to counts using binoculars.

This 2024 campaign was carried out with the support of two ornithological consultants who accompanied the two ornithological experts from the LTRC. After working together, a change in the methods of data collection in the field was proposed. In addition, in order to be able to carry out statistical tests from one year to the next or even in the same year on different sections, it was proposed to 'section' the counting sections along the Likouala into a succession of transects. This new methodology will be applied in 2025.

The 2024 census report has been sent to the national focal point of Wetland International for official transmission to the office of this organisation, which centralises all data on waterbird census operations worldwide.

The White-faced Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna viduata*), a species of Anatidae observed for the first time in 2024 in the Reserve (© Christ Nzouzi/WCS)

5.1.2 MONITORING OF CROCODILE POPULATIONS

The dwarf crocodile (*Osteolaemus osborni*) is an important species for the LTRC. On the one hand, the Reserve is home to one of the highest known densities in Africa. Furthermore, this species is heavily hunted by local communities for consumption and trade. It is therefore important to ensure long-term monitoring so that management measures can be taken if the population of this species is found to be declining.

Over the past years, several studies have been conducted on this species:

density estimation (in the Batanga),

assessment of hunting yields (CPUE),

assessment of the quantities of crocodiles exported from the Reserve by hunters/traders.

In 2024, as part of the monitoring of this species, the following activities were carried out:

- **Estimated densities:** between February and June 2024, 66.09 km of transects (and 245.5 km of recces) were opened in three areas of swamp forest. The main objective was to mark out the transects defined by the study plan in preparation for the night count. During the opening of the transects, evidence of the presence of pygmy crocodiles, human activities and large mammals was collected. The data collected includes observations of nests, burrows, vocalisations, as well as evidence of the presence of elephants and humans. The encounter rates of pygmy crocodile burrows were highest in the Moukalé stratum. Signs of human presence were observed in all three strata. The counting of crocodiles (density estimation) could not be carried out due to the absence of water in the swamp forests, linked to an extremely dry year. It is planned for 2025.

- **Evaluation of hunting yield:** the study was conducted by four investigators spread across two villages, Dzéké and Botongo, between August and October 2024. A total of 21 groups of hunters were monitored, i.e. 63 hunters in total. The total distance travelled by the hunters was 583.8 km in 102 days. A total of 210 dwarf crocodiles were captured, with a majority of adults (65%). No juvenile crocodiles were captured. The hunters consumed 25% of the crocodiles in the forest. The hunting method used by all groups was to use a liana with a hook to capture the crocodiles in their burrows. The capture success rate was 58.6%, with an average of 0.36 crocodiles captured per km travelled. Compared to the 2019 and 2020-2021 surveys, the 2024 results show an increase in the capture rate and average weight of crocodiles in Botongo, while in Dzéké the average weight has remained stable. This information provides a better understanding of the evolution of hunting practices and their impact on crocodile populations.

- **Monitoring of average weights:** the evolution of average weights and sizes of crocodiles is an indicator of harvesting pressure. In collaboration with the LAB service, a protocol for collecting data on the weights and sizes of crocodiles seized at the PK 38 control post has been put in place. Weight data has been available since 2019 (but not size data). Analyses are underway to detect a possible decrease in average weight over the years, which would be an indicator of over-harvesting.

La chasse au crocodile nain est une activité pratiquée couramment par les communautés dans la Réserve (© Thomas Nicolon/WCS)

5.1.3 COUNTING ELEPHANTS AND GREAT APES

The Ndoki-Likouala census (including the NNNP, the LTRC and the forestry concessions of the Congolaise Industrielle du Bois (CIB)) of elephants and great apes was completed in early 2024. The data is currently being analysed and the final results should be available in 2025.

5.1.4 FIRE MONITORING

The fires that sweep through the LTRC savannahs every year are an important factor in the dynamics of the LTRC's ecosystems. Little information has been collected so far on the characteristics of fires in the Reserve.

At the request of the LTRC, the WCS Forest & Climate Change unit conducted a retrospective analysis covering the last 20 years on the intensity, temporality and frequency of fires in the Reserve. This study shows that these parameters can vary considerably from one year to the next, but that it is not possible to identify an upward or downward trend over the past 20 years. This study constitutes a baseline that will be updated annually.

In addition, a consultation was launched at the end of 2024 to assess the impact of fires on gallery forests along the Likouala and propose protective measures. No fewer than 12 bids were received from firms and individual consultants, and the firm FRM (which has an office in Brazzaville) was selected. The study is expected to begin in early 2025.

Fires are very common in the Reserve during the dry season. They burn the savannahs, but sometimes penetrate into the forest. An ongoing study should quantify their impact (© Thomas Nicolon/WCS).

WEATHER MONITORING

In October 2024, a graduated pole was installed at the port of the Epena base in order to collect information on the evolution of the water level of the Likouala-aux-Herbes river. In addition, an electronic weather station has been installed at the Épena base camp to collect daily data on rainfall and temperature. It is important to emphasise that this data will be collected over the long term.

Previous meteorological data, collected in logbooks for more than 15 years, has never been verified or entered. This work began in September 2024, with the support of an intern from Marien Ngouabi University. This is a considerable task in view of the mass of data accumulated. A summary report on the meteorological data covering the period 2005-2023 is expected in 2025.

5.2 RESEARCH

5.2.1 INVENTORY OF AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

A survey of reptiles, amphibians and killifish was conducted by the consultant Laurent Chirio in July 2024. The aim was to expand the list of taxa in these groups by exploring new sites, including Lake Télé. Prior to this mission, 26 species of reptile, 17 of amphibian and 5 of killifish were known to inhabit the Reserve. The main results of the mission in terms of species observed are:

- 35 species of reptile, including 11 potentially new to science.

- 40 species of amphibians, including 15 potential new species.

- 3 species of killifish, including one unknown species.

Of the 78 species observed, 27 are therefore potentially new, representing more than a third of the species recorded. However, the mission was disrupted by an unusual drought, which particularly affected the swamp forests. Combining the results of this mission with existing preliminary data, the LTRC population currently includes 63 species of reptiles, 48 species of amphibians and 9 species of killifish. Knowledge remains incomplete and it is recommended that inventories be continued, especially during the rainy season.

A Gabon viper (*Bitis gabonica*) observed during the reptile inventory (©Thomas Nicolon/WCS)

5.2.2 FISH INVENTORY FOR LAC TÉLÉ

An inventory of the fish in Lake Télé was conducted by Jean-François Agnèse (IRD, Montpellier) between 18 July and 9 August 2024, with the aim of characterising the lake's fish population, which is still largely unknown. Specimens were collected, as well as lake water for environmental DNA analysis. A total of 16 families of fish, representing 25 genera and 32 species, were observed. Of these 32 species, eight could not be determined with certainty. If we add the rare previous observations, we can consider that the lake is populated by at least 35 species from 16 families and 28 genera.

The environmental DNA study suggests the existence of one or two species endemic to the lake, but these results have yet to be confirmed. Other species, which have not yet been found, are also probably present.

These results represent an important step forward in our knowledge of the lake's fauna, but should not be considered definitive.

5.2.3 STUDY ON GASES EMITTED BY PEAT BOGS

Researchers from the Institute of Ecology and Earth Sciences at the University of Tartu (Estonia) and the University of Marien Ngouabi (Congo) have conducted a study on the greenhouse gases produced by the peatland forests of the LTRC. In March (dry season) and November 2024 (wet season), measurements of CO_2, CH_4 and N_2O fluxes were taken in a swamp forest and a peat savannah located near Epena. The analyses revealed high CO_2 respiration and CH_4 consumption in the dry season, due to extreme heat and drought, while in the wet season, CH_4 emissions increased due to rising groundwater levels. The study also explored the microbial communities involved in the nitrogen and methane cycles.

This study will be the subject of a paper at the 2025 General Assembly of the European Geosciences Union.

In November 2024, the WCS signed a collaboration agreement with the University of Tartu for the long-term monitoring of gas emissions from the LTRC peatland forests.

5.2.4 METHODOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE COUNTING OF GREAT APES BY DRONE

A professor at the University of Davies in the United States conducted a feasibility study on the census of great apes at night using a thermal drone. The Deltaquad drone proved to be reliable, with no technical problems. On 3 September 2024, two night flights detected a single animal in a marshy area and several groups of great apes in the forest on dry land. A team of trackers confirmed the presence of gorilla nests. On 6 September 2024, new night flights detected several great apes and fresh nests were confirmed at three sites. Other small mammals were also spotted. This very promising preliminary study will be supplemented in 2025 by additional missions to refine the methodology.

Preparing the thermal drone for a night count of the great apes (©WCS)

5.2.5 SUPPORT FOR DOCTORAL STUDIES

In 2024, three American students from Davies University (United States) were welcomed as part of their preparatory thesis work. They worked in pairs with two students from Marien Ngouabi University (Congo).

• Alice Mitchel has started a study to test a new coupled method for monitoring gorilla interactions. Over the course of a month, acoustic recordings were used to locate 24 recent nest sites and triangulate 11 sites with greater precision using a new cross-correlation technique. A total of 41 faecal samples and 39 hair samples were collected for future genetic analysis, particularly to identify gorillas emitting chest beats. The study confirmed the effectiveness of the acoustic-drone approach and revealed that the detection range of chest beats was greater than expected.

• Abigail Morris conducted a pilot study on the genetics and dispersion of gorillas, which resulted in the collection of 93 faecal samples. Each sample was geolocated, photographed and analysed to estimate the age of the individuals. The high density of gorillas in the forest was confirmed by the large number of samples found. Genetic extraction and analysis will be carried out in the United States to determine the sex of the individuals and to study the genetic structure of the populations using autosomal, mitochondrial and Y-chromosome markers. The study of diets will be further investigated by molecular analysis.

Bradley Christin conducted a preliminary study on primate density and the impact of hunting by analysing wildlife signs on 16 transects. The majority of the signs found relate to ungulates (50%) and primates (37.6%), with a predominance of gorillas. The study reveals an apparent absence of active hunting, probably due to the season and the location of the transects. However, the correlation between distance from the village and the increase in signs of great apes suggests hunting pressure. Future in-depth research will make it possible to assess the real impact of this activity.

5.3 KNOWLEDGE SHARING

• Mr Bola Madzoke, a researcher at the Reserve since 2002, represented the LTRC from 18 to 21 November 2024 in Abidjan at the 'Assessment Workshop for the Red List and Conservation Planning for Pygmy Crocodiles'. This workshop was organised by the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Crocodile Specialist Group. On this occasion, he was able to present the results of studies conducted on dwarf crocodiles over several years. It thus emerged that the Reserve constitutes the reference site for the Osteolaenus osborni species in Central Africa, due to the numerous studies that have been conducted there and the knowledge that has been acquired there about this species.

• Katherine Meir, who carried out her thesis work in the LTRC in 2023-2024, presented a paper at the annual meeting of the Wildlife Society (USA) in October 2024 entitled: 'Fruit phenology across a swamp forest gradient: implications for Gorilla, Chimpanzee and Elephant conservation'.


Bola Madzoke, researcher at the LTRC since 2002 (©Thomas Nicolon/WCS)

6 MONITORING OF WILDLIFE HEALTH

Taking samples from a gorilla carcass found in the Reserve (© WCS)

An agent of the Wildlife Health Programme of the WCS Congo has been based at the reserve since 2023. He is integrated into the Community Development department where he simultaneously intervenes on issues of human health and animal health, the two subjects being partly linked (zoonosis).

During the year 2024, the following main activities were carried out:

• In January 2024, a significant mortality of Parachanna obscura fish in Likouala-aux-herbes was identified. A sampling campaign was therefore organised from 16 to 18 February and the samples were transferred to Brazzaville for analysis at the Centre de Recherche sur les Maladies Infectieuses (CeRMI) of the Fondation Congolaise pour la Recherche Médicale. The results did not make it possible to identify the cause of the fish deaths. If this mortality recurs at the beginning of 2025, a new collection campaign will be carried out and more in-depth analyses will be conducted.

• In August 2024, a gorilla carcass was discovered in the forest by researchers west of the village of Impongui. Tissue samples were taken from the carcass and sent to Brazzaville on 26 August 2024. They were tested for Ebola, anthrax and Mpox pathogens at the National Public Health Laboratory. PCR analyses revealed negative results for all pathogens tested.

• As every year, an Ebola virus prevention campaign was conducted in the villages of the reserve. Information on what to do if a carcass is found was provided in 7 villages in the district of Bouanéla, reaching 330 people (208 men, including 28 indigenous people, and 92 women, including 2 indigenous people). Ebola posters were distributed in each village.

• Following the emergence of the zoonosis Mpox in Central Africa at the end of 2024, an awareness campaign on this zoonosis was prepared in December 2024 to be conducted in early January 2025.

7 COMMUNICATION AND TOURISM

7.1 NEWSLETTER

After several years of absence, the Reserve's newsletter was produced again in March 2024 with the support of the WCS Communication Department. Published every two months, five newsletters were published in 2024 and distributed electronically to more than 300 recipients (local and national authorities, national and international partners, consultants, conservation figures, researchers, journalists, national and international WCS staff, etc.).

This newsletter presents the main activities of the Reserve and highlights the highlights of the period covered.

7.2 CONFERENCE

In order to raise awareness of the Reserve among the Congolese public, the Coordination organised a conference entitled 'The Lac Télé Community Reserve, a key site for biodiversity and the climate in Congo' on 9 June 2024 at the French Institute of Congo in Brazzaville. This conference included three specific presentations: i) the history and biodiversity of the Reserve; ii) Lake Télé; and iii) peatland forests.

These presentations highlighted the importance of the Reserve for biodiversity and the climate at the national and regional levels.

More than 100 people attended this conference and the question-and-answer sessions were rich in debate.

The conference held in Brazzaville in June 2024 brought together more than 100 participants. (© Laëtitia Oyoubi/WCS)

7.3 PROMOTIONAL DOCUMENTS

In 2024, in collaboration with the WCS Communication Department, two flyers were prepared to facilitate the discovery of the Lac Télé Community Reserve: one on the access conditions and the possibilities for discovering the site, the other on the conditions for visiting Lac Télé. The flyers are sent to people requesting information by e-mail and will soon be available on the WCS Congo website (https://congo.wcs.org/).

Lac Télé as seen from a drone. © WCS

7.4 RECEPTION OF JOURNALISTS

Three journalists visited the LTRC this year:

• Bart Crezze (Dutch journalist) came in February 2024 to report on peatland forests;

• Thomas Nicolon, a professional photographer with whom WCS signed a collaboration agreement in 2023, came in July 2024 to accompany the two research missions to Lake Télé (amphibians-reptiles and fish). He took numerous photos during these missions, but also on more general subjects (fishing, bush fires, villagers, etc.).

• Mathys Nicolas, a professional photographer working for the Zeppelin agency, came in November 2024 on the occasion of a report for the NGO ASLAV (which conducts medical consultations in the villages of the reserve). At the end of his work, he stayed for about ten days to take photos on various subjects related to the environment of the Reserve.

Access to the online report:

https://www.zeppelin-geo.com/galeries/monde/asf_messagerie/panorama.htm

The photos taken by T. Nicolon and M. Nicolas were sent to WCS and added to the photo library managed by the Communication department.

7.5 CONDITIONS DE VISITE DU LAC TÉLÉ

Une séance de discussion a été conduite en février 2024 sous l'égide de Monsieur le Sous-Préfet du district d'Epéna avec les notables du village de Boha pour fixer les conditions de visite du lac Télé. Après de longues négociations, les tarifs d'accès au lac pour les touristes et les coûts des porteurs ont été arrêtés et consignés dans un procès-verbal signé par toutes les parties prenantes.

Ce document permettra d'éviter les longues négociations avec les notables du village qui prévalaient précédemment avant chaque visite au Lac Télé.

Intervention du sous-préfet lors de la réunion en Boha sur les conditions d'accès touristiques au lac.

8 ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE

8.1 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The staff of the Lac Télé Community Reserve consists of civil servants assigned by the MEF and contractors recruited by WCS Congo.

As of 31 December 2024, the LTRC had a total of 67 employees, comprising:

• 3 (three) MEF employees;

• 64 WCS Congo contract employees.

The distribution of personnel according to the components is presented below. Note the high number of personnel in the logistics component (30 agents), which includes 1 head of component, 1 logistician, 2 assistant logisticians, 3 storekeepers, 1 electrician, 1 mechanic/driver, 2 drivers, 5 pinassiers (boatmen), 1 cleaning technician and 13 guards.

Service provided	Total staff	Status of
Coordination	1 Conservation officer	State employee
	Anti-poaching	WCS employee
Research & Ecological Monitoring	2 Patrol leaders	State employee
	Community development	WCS employee
	Administration and finance	WCS employees
Logistics	4	WCS employees
Développement Communautaire	8	WCS employees
Administration et finance	3	WCS employees
Logistique	30	WCS employees

The main staff movements recorded during 2024 are as follows:

• Coordination: the Deputy Curator left the LTRC in the first half of 2024 following his appointment to another Congolese protected area by his supervisory administration (MEF);

• LAB Department: 1 ecoguard whose fixed-term contract was coming to an end was not renewed;

• Ecological Research & Monitoring Department: a new Head of Department took up his post on 1 June 2024, while a Research Assistant was assigned to the Logistics Department in December 2024;

• Community Development Department: a new head of department took up his post on 1 March 2024, while two technicians specialising in cocoa cultivation took up their posts on 1 September 2024;

• Logistics Department: a new boat driver took up his post on 1 February 2024, while a Research Assistant from the R&SE department was transferred to a warehouse assistant position;

• An intern from Marien Ngouabi University (Brazzaville) has been accepted for a four-month work experience placement in the R&SE department starting in September 2024.

8.2 CAPACITY BUILDING

Training and capacity building for LTRC agents are priorities for the LTRC Coordination. This reinforcement can be done in two different ways:

- Specific training provided by trainers;

- Participation of agents in technical workshops.

The table in the appendix lists the training courses and workshops in which LTRC agents participated in 2024.

All agents participated at the beginning of the year in general training on gender policy and social guarantees, the code of conduct and conservation standards. Then, 15 agents from different departments participated in 11 training sessions or technical workshops throughout the year.

It should also be mentioned that the 17 ecoguards and 2 patrol leaders of the LTRC took part in the refresher sessions organised by WCS at Ndoki 2 camp in 2024. These sessions brought together the ecoguards of the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, the LTRC and PROGEP.

8.3 FUNDING

The activities implemented during the year 2024 were supported by several donors:

• The NGO ECF 'Elephant Crisis Fund' via the project 'Strengthening the protection of elephants in the Lac Télé Community Reserve'; the first phase of this project ended on 30 June 2024; a second phase of one year started on 1 September 2024;

• The US agency INL (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs) via the INL project;

• The USFWS (United States Fish and Wildlife Service) via the project 'Strengthening monitoring, institutions, and management planning to ensure the impact of the Lac Tele Community Reserve'. The first phase ended on 30 September 2024; a second phase has been granted until 31 December 2025(*) ;

• The international fund GEF 'Global Environmental Facility' via the project 'Integrated conservation of peatland ecosystems and promotion of ecotourism in the Lake Télé landscape in the Republic of the Congo' implemented by UNEP. This project has a duration of 3.5 years and will end on 31 December 2027;

• The German Climate Initiative (IKI) via the project 'Securing crucial biodiversity, carbon and water stores in the Congo Basin Peatlands by enabling evidence-based decision making and good governance' implemented by UNEP. This project has a duration of 4 years and will end on 31 December 2027;

• The private foundation Bezos Earth Fund. The (regional) funding of this foundation will end on 31 October 2025;

• WCS's own funds.

It should be noted that most of the projects mentioned above are national or multi-country multi-site projects of which the LTRC is only one component.

* Following the decrees signed by US President Donald Trump upon his accession to the presidency of the United States on 20 January 2025, all US cooperation funds have been frozen with immediate effect.

9 LOGISTICS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Guest house, due for completion in 2024, to accommodate experts on mission to the Reserve. © WCS

9.1 INFRASTRUCTURES

The LTRC infrastructure includes four bases:

- The LTRC base is located in Epena. It houses the administrative and logistical headquarters of the Reserve;

- 2 forward bases: one in Mboua (far north of the LTRC) and a second in Bouanela (far south of the LTRC). These bases provide logistical support (in particular the Mboua base, which enables equipment to be transported from Ouesso) and act as a relay point for surveillance patrols;

- 1 checkpoint known as 'PK38' located on the road between Epéna and Impfondo;

- 1 office in Impfondo (prefecture of the Likouala department) which houses a lawyer whose main task is to follow legal cases dealt with at the Impfondo court.

The infrastructure work carried out in 2024 mainly concerned the Epena base. The following work was carried out:

• Completion of the Guest House (started in 2023) with 4 bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. This building can accommodate missionaries coming to work at the LTRC (researchers, consultants, students);

• Completion of the kitchen at the Stopover Centre;

• Creation of a specific office for the Finance department (former stopover room);

Renovation of the annexes and main accommodation of the Conservator and the CTP;

Complete renovation of the free access sanitary block (3 showers, 3 toilets);

Rehabilitation of the paintwork and roofs of the logistics building (office and store).

With this work, the LTRC has a capacity of 9 rooms, or 11 people (three rooms have double beds).

It is also worth mentioning the completion of the accommodation hut for the eco-guards at the checkpoint at KP 38. Started at the end of 2023 and completed in April 2024, it has two bedrooms (four beds) and a small kitchen. It has been equipped with solar panels and batteries so that night checks can be carried out in complete safety.

On the Mboua base, a new toilet and shower block has been built after the original block was destroyed by heavy rain.

9.2 TRANSPORT AND MOTORISED VEHICLES

During the course of 2024, new vehicles were acquired. This concerns:

- 1 new double cab pick-up (ECF funding);

- 1 new land cruiser station wagon;

- 3 new wooden canoes.

- 1 new motorbike (Impfondo office).

In total, the LTRC's motorised fleet is made up as follows:

- 4 Toyota/Land Cruiser 4x4s (one single double cab, two double cab pick-ups, one estate car);

- 8 canoes (5 wooden and 3 metal);

- 2 motorbikes.

9.3 MAINTENANCE

The equipment is maintained by a car mechanic, an outboard motor mechanic and an electrician. The latter is responsible for the operation of the solar park at the Epena base.

Each base is guarded by three security guards.

9.4 ACHATS ET MAGASINS

The Logistics department plays a crucial role in providing the logistical support necessary for the operation of the LTRC. It manages purchases via the Purchase Request (PR) procedure: all requests for materials and work are addressed to this department, which prepares the PRs. They are then sent to the Administration and Finance department, which checks them before they are signed by the CTP.

This department also manages the main store at the Epena base and the secondary stores at the outposts.

10 CONCLUSION

Considerable work was accomplished during the year 2024 in all areas of intervention of the LTRC. A special effort was made in the Community Development department, with the implementation of new activities (electrification, communication routes, schools, etc.) that were greatly appreciated by the communities and local authorities.

These efforts culminated in the meeting of the Local Management Committee in December 2024, a body representing the populations of the Reserve that had been on standby for several years. These interventions have notably made it possible to significantly improve relations with local communities.

While ecoguards were previously denied access to certain villages, they can now patrol the entire Reserve, and the results of the anti-poaching campaign have improved as a result. This observation illustrates the extent to which the actions undertaken by the Reserve's various departments work in synergy. In the Research and Ecological Monitoring department, the arrival of a new head of department has revitalised the department and enabled it to develop partnerships with national and international institutions.

Combined with an active communication policy (newsletter, conferences, etc.), this development has considerably improved the visibility and reputation of the Reserve. In 2025, we will continue and intensify our efforts in all areas of the Reserve's work, prioritising the consolidation of our relationships of trust with the communities.

We would like to thank all the donors who have placed their trust in us, some for many years.

LIST OF TECHNICAL REPORTS PRODUCED IN 2024

RESEARCHERS' REPORT

- REDJALI, S. 2024. Utilisation des habitats par les chimpanzés dans un habitat inondé et modifié par les activités humaines dans la Réserve Communautaire du Lac Télé. Thèse de licence, Université de Yale, USA.

- CAILLAUD, D. 2024. Etude de faisabilité du recensement des grands singes à l'ide d'un drone à aile fixe dans la Réserve Communautaire du Lac Télé. WCS Congo.

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