

OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT



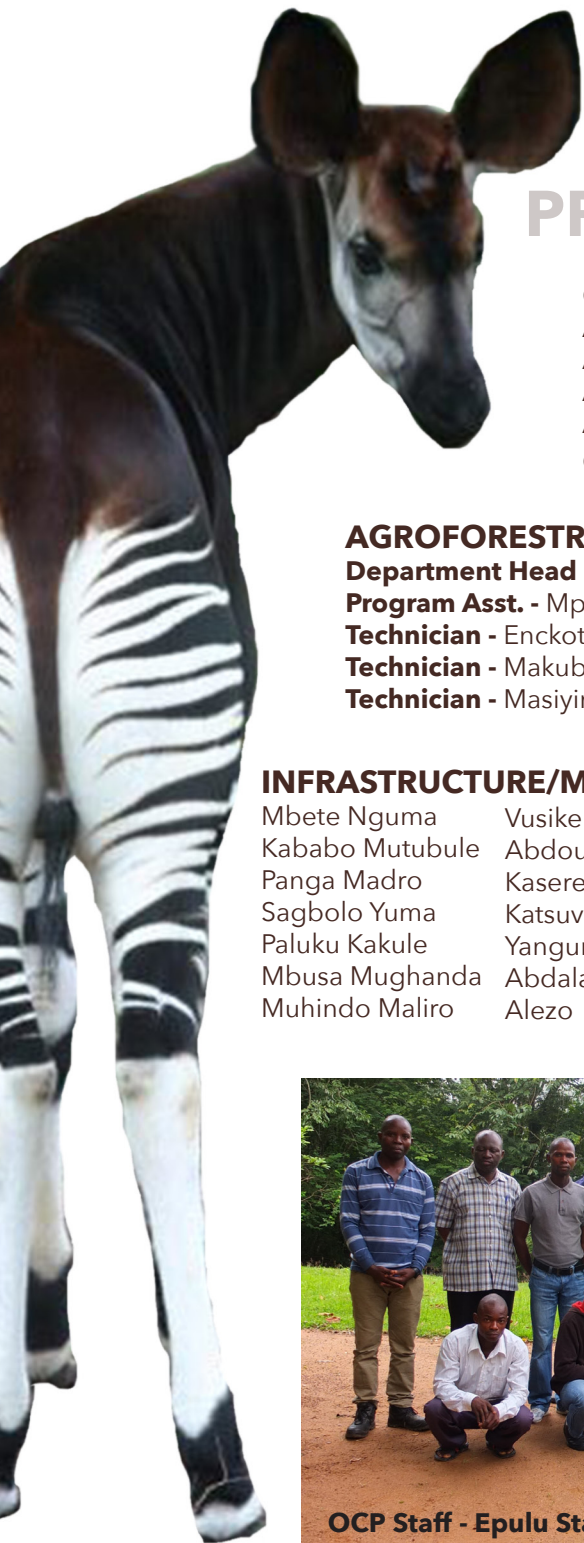
**2015
ANNUAL
REPORT**

MISSION

**TO CONSERVE THE OKAPI IN THE WILD,
WHILE PRESERVING THE BIOLOGICAL
AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF THE ITURI
FOREST**



**OKAPI
CONSERVATION
PROJECT**



PROJECT STAFF

Founder & President - John Lukas
On-site Director - Rosmarie Ruf
Asst. Director - Enckoto Napameyi Marcel
Asst. Director of Education - M'monga Kiete
Accountant - Mutahinga Mumbere Eleme
Asst. Accountant - Kambale Katsuva Julien
Communications Officer - Zaituni Lubengo

AGROFORESTRY

Department Head - Muvi Yalala
Program Asst. - Mpinda Tchinkunku
Technician - Enckoto Bameseto
Technician - Makubili Mwanika
Technician - Masiyiri Mulawa

DISPENSARY NURSES

Anzatebedanga
Mbambu Mituho
Mulowayi Katalayi
Seburo Bwichebungize

INFRASTRUCTURE/MAINTENANCE

Mbete Nguma	Vusike Kiruzi
Kababo Mutubule	Abdoul Kimakima
Panga Madro	Kasereka Katsuva
Sagbolo Yuma	Katsuva Kaposo
Paluku Kakule	Yangunapayi Makasi
Mbusa Mughanda	Abdala Moricho
Muhindo Maliro	Alezo

EDUCATORS

Gomo Akyo
Kakule Kavunga
Kalinda Mubengwa
Kasereka Kyove
Mumbere Kayenga
Nelson Murongo
Toliba Maseko



OCP Staff - Epulu Station

A LETTER FROM JOHN

This past year we have had several positive developments in our programs, including our important long term partnership with ICCN (Institute in the Congo for the Conservation of Nature) which was officially extended for another 5 years. Overall, considerable progress was made in 2015, when factoring in the many difficult challenges, toward the long term goal of bringing complete protection to the Ituri Forest ecosystem that harbors one of the highest levels of biodiversity in all of Africa. Without highly trained and dedicated protection forces maintaining security in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR), our community work would grind to a halt. ICCN rangers have tackled the multitudes of challenges of protecting the vast resources of the Reserve from exploitation by miners, poachers and opportunistic bands of militia, making it a safer place for wildlife and the communities which live in and around the area.

Taking advantage of a period of improved security in eastern DRC, which was brought on by ICCN rangers working in partnership with Congolese soldiers, ICCN partners prioritized extending protection to all areas of the OWR, including the remote northern sector. This expansion required the recruitment and extensive training of new ICCN rangers. A recruitment team traveled around the Reserve selecting candidates, including four women, from several important villages. Experienced French military trainers that had spent over 20 years in Western Africa put the recruits through 3 months of intensive training and 49 made the cut to become ICCN Wildlife Rangers. The new rangers added much needed capacity so that by the end of 2015, forty percent of the Reserve was being regularly covered by patrols that protect wildlife and forests from harm and improved the monitoring of okapi, forest elephant and chimpanzee populations.

To bring the message of the importance of conserving wildlife and sustainable living to the thousands of people living inside and around the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, OCP staff travel thousands of kilometers each year on motorbikes over rutted dirt roads. The improved state of security that evolved in 2015 allowed OCP educators to expand the agroforestry programs, set up a new tree nursery, involve more women in women's groups, improve delivery of health care in rural clinics and provide hundreds of conservation lectures in schools around the Reserve.

A very special thank you to our many friends, partners and donors who supported our efforts to help ICCN improve and extend protection of okapi, along with all the other wildlife living in and around the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. Considering the threatening cloud of uncertainty under which OCP staff and ICCN rangers work every day to preserve this unique biological and cultural UNESCO World Heritage Site for all of us, it is truly a recognition of their bravery and dedication that we are making substantial progress in securing a future for okapi in the wild.

John Lukas
Founder and President

WILDLIFE PROTECTION

HOW WE ARE SECURING A FUTURE FOR OKAPI IN THE ITURI FOREST

Okapi need undisturbed tracts of forests to sustain themselves, and protecting the forests from exploitation can only be done by a highly trained and motivated force of wildlife rangers. Okapi Conservation Project (OCP) provides logistical and financial support to 140 Institute in the Congo for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) rangers to provide a conservation presence in the region, to monitor land use changes and protect the wildlife and natural resources of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR) from exploitation.

In February 2015, OCP renewed its *Contract of Collaboration* with ICCN for another five years. This partnership with the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo began nearly 30 years ago with a common goal of monitoring land use changes and providing protection to the wildlife in

this important area of the Ituri Forest, home to endangered okapi, forest elephants, chimpanzees and many other rare and threatened species.

During this past year the security situation in the region has remained generally stable with a disciplined contingent of the Congolese Army (FARDC) working together with ICCN Rangers in joint efforts throughout the OWR. Working together, these joint patrols covered vast areas over difficult terrain, with ICCN rangers focused on collecting snares and destroying poaching camps, as FARDC focused on controlling Maimai militias incursions into the Reserve. Thousands of illegal miners have been removed from the Reserve and their camps were dismantled, reducing threats to wildlife and people.

Camera trap photo of okapi in the forest near Epulu.





Male okapi have ossicones - bony protrusions from the skull.

Of particular note is the recruitment and training of 49 additional rangers. With an expanded ranger force, and the stable security situation, ICCN has been able to increase patrol coverage and frequency throughout the Reserve. Particularly encouraging is the amount of wildlife being observed in and around areas that were recently occupied by miners and poachers, reinforcing the need for a concerted effort in removing all illegal activities and implementing strategies that prevent reoccupation of the mines in the future.

Below: Protecting okapi helps ensure all animals in the forest can survive.

As a direct result of increased patrols, ICCN rangers were able to better monitor the status of key wildlife species, including okapi, elephant and chimpanzee over a broader area of the Reserve. Working together with the German Forest Biodiversity Project, and the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Okapi Conservation Project supports the efforts of the courageous ICCN rangers to improve protection of the endangered okapi, the national symbol of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Below: Pangolins are one of the most trafficked animals in the world and share habitat with okapi.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THEIR FAMILIES

OCP efforts to provide assistance to communities is critically important for building stronger ties with residents of the Reserve and for gaining support for conservation activities and encouraging cooperation with ICCN.

Empowerment through Enterprise

The Okapi Conservation Project continues supporting organized women's associations through programs including the safeguarding of water resources from pollution and overuse, microenterprise development and protecting their rights to collect firewood from the Ituri landscape. As women's groups in the Reserve continue to grow, OCP is providing additional support for administrative costs, sewing machines and materials, beans and vegetable seeds for community gardens to each group. Supporting small business enterprises empowers women to be more active in community governance

and use their collective voices to drive local conservation action. Working with the women's associations provides an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of conservation of natural resources to those that depend most on the land to support the needs of their families.

The associations have expanded to include 161 women with interest continuing to grow as a result of OCP support. Seven women have begun their own sewing microenterprises, while others have begun expanding the types of domestic animals they farm.

By providing opportunities for enterprise, residents can sustain livelihoods within the Reserve.





Providing basic supplies, such as beds and mattresses, improves healthcare conditions in the Reserve.

Health Care Saves Lives

The communities' number one concern inside the Reserve is improving health care. OCP recognizes the importance of connecting overall conservation objectives to improving the provision of healthcare, and to that end, OCP provided 20 rural health centers with a total of 80 new beds and mattresses for their maternity wards. With the new materials, the clinics can now provide better conditions for pregnant women. In some areas, prior to the bed donation, some women gave birth on

the ground or had to walk or travel 20-90 km to the nearest hospital.

OCP operates the medical dispensary in Epulu for use by all OCP and ICCN personnel and their families, while the village of Epulu has a community health center which treats over 2,500 patients annually. The Epulu health center is the only facility within 100 kilometers supported by the OCP physician where minor surgeries can be performed.



Berce Nsafuansa, the son of the first employee of OCP, Jean Nlamba, and whose university degree was supported by OCP staff, received funding this year from OCP for English training in Uganda, is now working for the Wildlife Conservation Society in Epulu. Congratulations!

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

BRINGING TOURISM BACK TO EPULU TO SUPPORT LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Tourism Returns to Epulu

In 2015, we had several adventurous visitors at the Epulu Headquarters. After repairing the guest house and adding a new outdoor kitchen in 2014, the tourism welcome center was the final project completed in 2015. The building was named in memory of Karl Ruf, beloved conservationist and co-founder of OCP. That building, along with clean bathrooms and showers welcome the weary traveler after long days' travelling the challenging roads of the Congo.

Though we have yet to bring okapi back to the station (plans to do so are under consideration), tourists instead take the opportunity for forest walks and to stay overnight and participate in a traditional hunt with the Mbuti Pygmies. People from the village benefit by receiving income for the services they provide such as meals and guiding services.



The newly rebuilt guest house where tourists can stay for a modest fee.



The new Karl Ruf Welcome Center now greets all visitors to the Epulu station.



A nearby Mbuti Pygmy village where tourists can learn about Pygmy life.



A stable and peaceful life allows cultural traditions, like dance, to thrive.

Peace and Reconciliation

STAREC, or the Stabilization of the Eastern Region of Congo, is an international peace program which works with many different UN agencies, including UNESCO, International Organization of Migrations, UN-Habitat, World Food Program, United Nations Program for Development, Provincial Government, Mambasa Civil Society and other local NGOs, including OCP.

In 2015, OCP was chosen to work alongside the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), under the direction of UNESCO, for democratic dialogue in villages situated along the Mambasa-Niania road (the main road through the

Reserve). During the first phase, three public meetings were organized in Epulu, Salate and Bandisende to solicit community input on what was needed to help mediate conflict with a total of 452 people participating.

A component of STAREC is community development assistance. This is implemented through empowering 600 women in different microenterprises, assisting those suffering from sexual harassment, encouraging literacy among women and diversifying food security microenterprises working with OCP and WCS Agronomes.



M'Monga Kiete, a WCN scholarship recipient, was appointed to lead OCP's role in the U.N.-funded STAREC peace and reconciliation program that reached over 23,000 people in and around the Reserve. Through a grant from the Houston Zoo, OCP was able to hire him full time to continue his valuable work throughout the OWR.

CONSERVATION & EDUCATION

HELPING LOCAL COMMUNITIES LIVE SUSTAINABLY, WHILE
TEACHING THE IMPORTANCE OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



Left: A teacher shares a calendar with her students.
Right: Students line up outside school to collect chalk provided by OCP.

Education is Key

OCP educators continuously travel around the Reserve meeting with community leaders, women's groups and school children sharing information on sustainable living and increasing awareness on the value of protecting the resources of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. These forums are important venues for productive dialogue between community members and OCP as we teach residents how they can live sustainably in this biologically diverse landscape and adequately provide food for their families. This year, educators produced 2,000 calendars and 1,000 posters on the protected animals of the Ituri Forest which was shared with many stakeholder groups including subsistence hunting Mbuti pygmies.

Additionally, OCP has been providing education materials and supplies to the 120 primary, secondary and high schools in the region. As a response to the acceptance of the conservation lessons, OCP lesson plans are now part of the national curriculum in public schools in eastern DRC. OCP educators reached over 35,000 students this year with conservation lectures and activities.

Children act as message multipliers when they talk about conservation with their friends, family and relatives. Taking a long-term view, we hope the children will be prepared when they are adults to respect conservation laws and the rights of wildlife to live unfettered by human activities.

Agroforestry Assists Communities and Protects the Forest

OCP agronomists and educators organize regular meetings with farmers in remote villages to discuss sustainable agricultural practices. It is widely known that a slash-and-burn approach has long lasting negative impacts on soil fertility. Crops are more likely to fail due to wind damage, and incompatible crop associations were contributing to impoverished soil fertility in a short period of time. OCP agronomists explain the benefit of crop rotation, adding nitrogen fixing plants and timing of planting seasons as ways of improving crop production and increasing the length of time the soil

remains fertile. These practices reduce the need to continuously expand their farmlands into the protected rainforest.

In 2015, OCP supported the communities by assisting 256 farmers with tools and distributing over 1,282 kg of seeds. OCP distributed 50,492 tree seedlings around the Reserve, and on World Tree Day in early December, OCP provided students with 2,307 seedlings to plant around their schools. As a result of OCP support, all agricultural activities remained within the designated agricultural zones and did not spill over into the forest.



Tending to seedlings that will eventually be given to farmers that are part of OCP's agroforestry program.

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THE WORK WE DO IS ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH THE ASSISTANCE YOU PROVIDE

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Amazon Smile	KfW	U.S. Fish and Wildlife
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Blank Park Zoo	Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens	Utah's Hogle Zoo
Bronx Zoo	Nashville Zoo at Grassmere	White Oak Conservation
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YEUNG, Karen

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Zych, Noah

Bold = \$250 and up

BOLD CAPITAL = \$500 and up

SPECIAL THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



WCN for providing longstanding support, guidance and fundraising opportunities.



Dallas Zoo for their 3-year commitment to support OCP.



Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens for their ongoing partnership by providing office space and administrative support.

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers!

Brandy Carvalho
Derek Citino

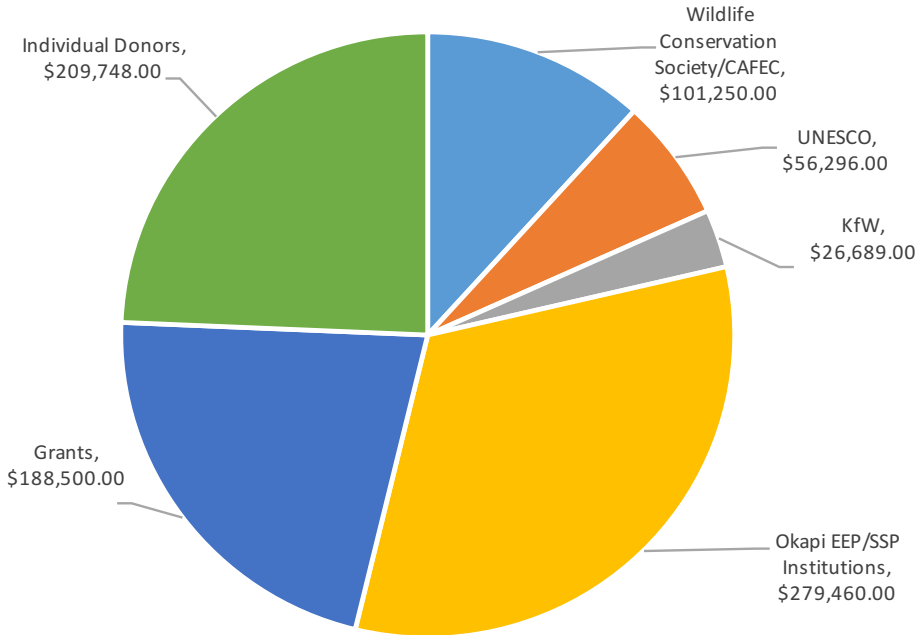
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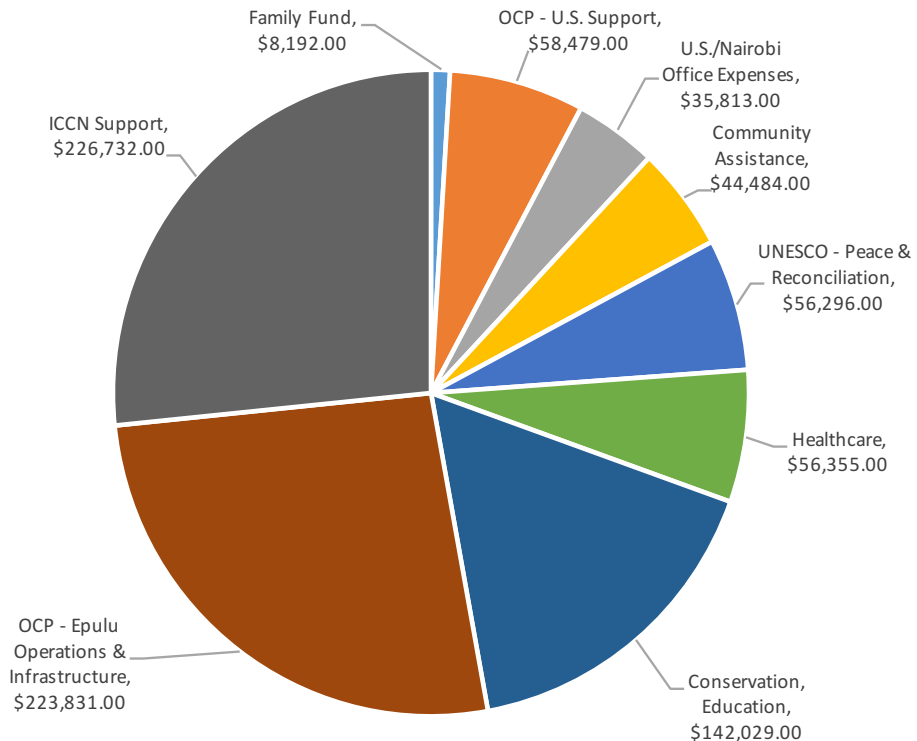
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2015 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT REVENUE - \$861,943



OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT EXPENSES - \$852,211



WHERE ARE WE LOCATED?

THE LUSH RAINFORESTS IN THE HEART OF AFRICA

The Okapi Conservation Project works in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR) in the northeastern sector of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Encompassing one fifth of the Ituri Forest, the OWR was established in 1992 and declared a World Heritage site in 1996 because of the high amount of biodiversity it contains. In addition to the many species of plants and animals, the OWR is also home to the indigenous Mbuti Pygmies, a population of hunter-gatherers that share the forest with the endangered okapi.





OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT

Protecting the endangered okapi, and its habitat, in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Okapi Conservation Project is represented by Wildlife Conservation Global, Inc. (WCG), a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization. One hundred percent of gifts made to the Okapi Conservation Project directly support the management of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, help local communities find sustainable ways of living and provide an extensive refuge for the region's endangered creatures.

As an endemic species of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the okapi is the national conservation symbol of the country. A flagship species, it serves as an ambassador representing the incredible diversity of life found in the region.

- The okapi has only been known to the Western world since 1901.
- Classified as 'endangered' by the IUCN Red List.
- Approximately 3,000 okapi live in the Reserve.
- The stripe pattern is unique to each individual.
- They communicate via sound waves below human hearing.

