

Hunting management in forest concessions surrounding Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, Northern Republic of Congo

Antoine Moukassa, Wildlife Conservation Society, Congo

The Republic of Congo covers an area of approximately 342,000 km². Of that, 63% is covered by forest and 11% is classified as protected area, but only 4% is under any form of wildlife management programme.

Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park and surrounding logging concessions

Covering an area of just under 4,000 km², Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park is one of the largest parks in the forested regions of central-west Africa, containing almost 2 % of all Congo's forests. The Park is rich in flora and fauna, containing many species of large mammals, including elephants, western lowland gorillas, chimpanzees and leopards, more than 300 bird species, 1,000 species of plants and several different forest types.

The spread of commercial logging around the periphery of the Park has resulted in increasing human populations around the Park and increased access to forests and markets. Traditional hunting technology has been replaced by modern techniques, thereby increasing the hunting rate. The combined result has been the development of a commercial wildlife trade, which has increased the threat to the wildlife of the Park.

To try to manage unsustainable hunting and commercial wildlife trade, under a Protocol signed in 1999, an extremely successful collaboration was established between:

- Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS);
- Ministry of Forests and Environment, Government of Congo;
- Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB), a private timber extraction company;
- Local peoples.

The objective of the programme is:

- To elaborate, implement, and monitor a wildlife management system in logging concessions around the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park.

The project comprises four main components:

Wildlife law enforcement

This is done by locally-hired, highly-trained ecoguards. Core activities are:

- prohibition of the use of logging concession roads and trucks to transport bushmeat; Enforcing the system of zoning, especially prohibition of hunting in protected zones;
- prohibition of hunting of legally protected species;
- prohibition of the use of snares as a hunting technique;
- enforcement of the legal requirements to register guns and to pay for hunting permits.

Zoning

The concession has been divided into zones, with the aims of supporting local community tenure systems, and conserving wildlife. The zones are:

- seasonal zones for nomadic people;

- hunting zones for local people and CIB employees;
- protected zones (including clearings; bais; tourism viewing areas and reservoirs);
- sacred sites.

Conservation education

This is done to develop understandings of conservation and the reasons for the different management programmes amongst:

- local people;
- hunters;
- logging company employees;
- local students.

The education programmes are conducted through individual contacts, meetings, nature clubs, films and television.

Alternative activities

To reduce people's dependence on wildlife for protein and income, alternative, substitutes for both are being developed. These have involved:

- identifying alternative potential sources of animal protein;
- promoting traditional activities for subsistence;
- advising the logging company on ways to provide affordable domestic protein to its employees.

Research, ecological and socioeconomic monitoring

This aims to collect data relevant to all aspects of hunting, from the field to consumers. Specific activities are:

- reconnaissance surveys of large mammals, and of human activities;
- monitoring and observation of forest use, especially in and around clearings;
- monitoring and evaluation of law enforcement efforts;
- market surveys, recording the following data for all wildlife being sold: species; number of animals; weight; age/sex; hunting technique used; reproductive condition; price; and cultural value of the animal(s);
- household food surveys, recording composition of their meals, and daily cost of different food items;
- demographic surveys, noting the number of inhabitants in each household.

Difficulties of wildlife management

The programme has been very successful, as evidenced by the high densities of large mammals throughout the concession. Some difficulties remain, notably:

- elephant-human conflict in agriculture zones;
- demographic growth in the different human communities;
- adoption of new strategies by poachers.

Conclusion

This approach gives us hope that we can extend conservation beyond the borders of protected areas, through involvement of the private sector, local communities and local NGOs, in ways which both guarantee sustaining livelihoods of local traditional communities, and also conserving wildlife populations in the face of mounting hunting pressure.