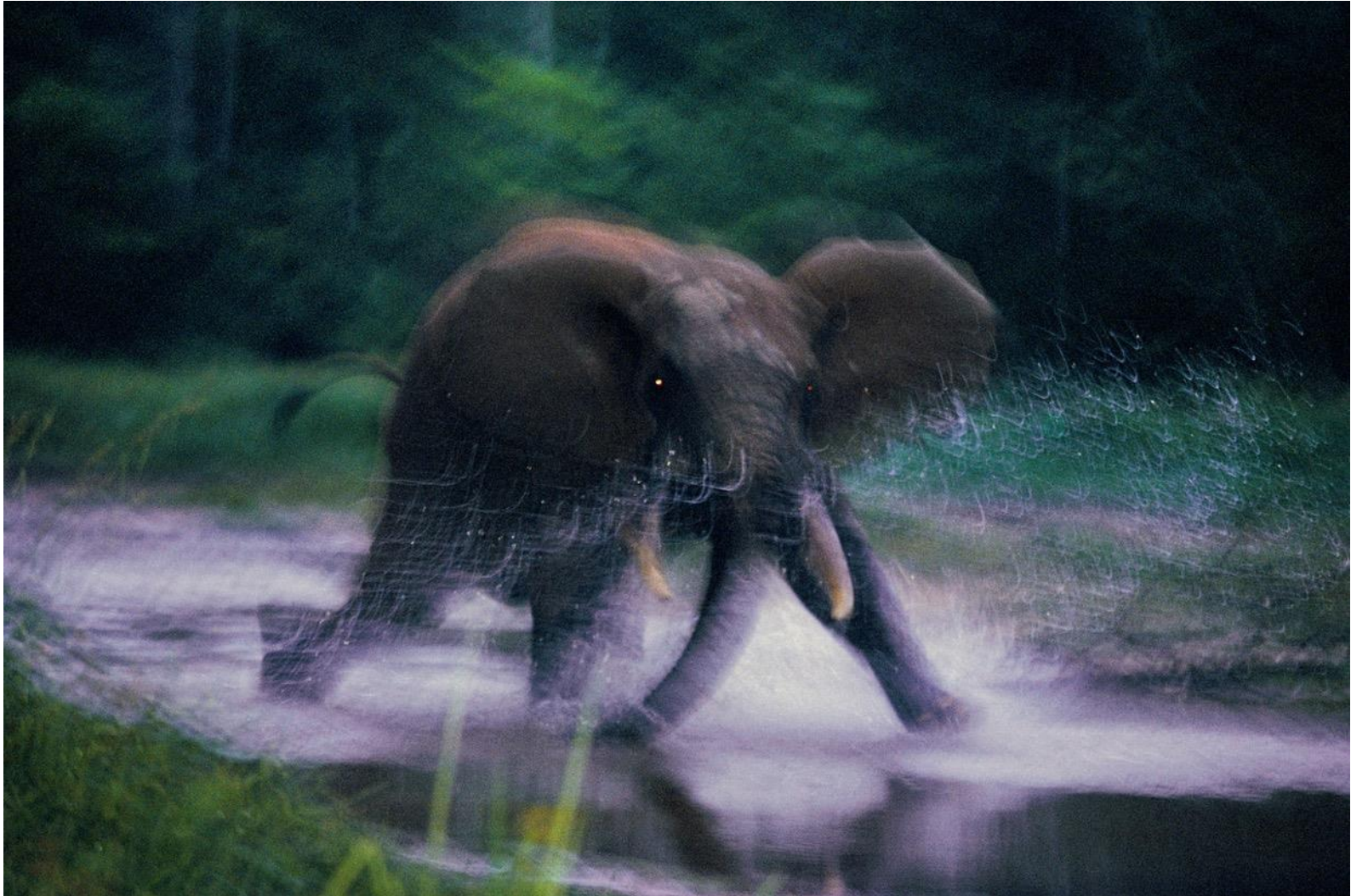




Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas

www.dzanga-sangha.org



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Newsletter December 2020



sacharuna



DECEMBER 29th 1990, DZANGA SANGHA IS DECLARED A PROTECTED AREA

In 1980 the Ministry of the Environment of the Central African Republic asked Richard Carroll, (who at the moment was studying the ecology of the last of the black rhinos in the northern parks of the Country), to explore the forest region of Dzanga Sangha as a potential wildlife sanctuary for bongo and other fauna.

Ten years later, and after having surveyed the area and seeing its richness, at the proposal of the then Minister of the Environment, His Excellency Raymond Mbitikon, it was classified a protected area, including two National Parks, Dzanga and Ndoki, a hunting zone and all these surrounded by a reserve.



© Michael Nichols (National Geographic)

Since its creation WWF has supported the CAR Government in the conservation of this area and even in the most difficult years this country has known, WWF never withdrew. The fact that DS remains an area of exceptional regional and international significance, reiterates the importance of continuity in conservation. All the work done for decades could be lost in a year of neglect as it has been observed in other parks. Long term planning is essential for conservation projects to succeed.

This continuity observed in DS has been possible thanks to genuine collaboration between the Government and WWF, the efforts of people invested during this period and of course to the donors who have provided the means and trusted the staff. It is worth mentioning Sacharuna and Kombacher and more especially the German KfW and the European Union because without them it would simply be impossible to continue working.

« Why create a National Park in a dense humid forest zone when there were already large areas of protected areas in the savannah zone in the North and East regions of the Central African Republic? » Raymond Mbitikon

(Letter sent by Raymond Mbitikon, former Minister of Water and Forest of the Central African Republic, at the occasion of the DS 30th anniversary and remembers how it all started)

Since the colonial period or even several decades after independence, the protected areas intended for the conservation of large wildlife in Oubangui-Chari, which became the Central African Republic, have only been created in the northern and eastern part of the national territory covered mainly by savannas.



Raymond Mbitikon, Minister at the time

The logging that started in Lobaye developed quickly and forestry permits had practically occupied the entire forest area of the prefectures of Lobaye, Sangha-Mbaéré and part of Mambéré-Kadéi.

In order to preserve the relic of the dense humid forest of the southwest of the Central African Republic against logging on the one hand, and on the other hand to protect the great wealth of biological diversity, the idea therefore came to me to propose to the Government at the time the creation of a national park in a forest zone in the sub-prefecture of Bayanga despite the great envy of the logging companies at the time. This initiative was based on data from the wildlife inventory carried out by members of the American Peace Corps, of which Mr. Richard Carroll, former Director General of WWF USA, was a member.

On December 29, 1990, Law No. 98.017 was promulgated establishing the Dzanga Sangha protected area, which today, after thirty years, is one of the still viable protected areas in the national territory. In consideration of what this protected area represents, we should congratulate the

Central African Government, the Ministry of Water and Forests initiating this classification and all the other actors such as WWF, the Peace Corps and donors such as the European Union, AFD, Federal Republic of Germany, US AID... whose support has helped to create and improve the management of this protected area.

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the creation of the Dzanga Sangha National Park, I would like to express all my satisfaction for having contributed to the conservation of natural resources in the Central African Republic, my country and for humanity, knowing that the Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas have become “UNESCO World Heritage” and are part of the Sangha Tri National complex (TNS) made up of Lobéké (Republic of Cameroon) and Noubalé-Ndoki (Republic of Congo) National Parks.

H.E. Raymond MBITIKON

Former Minister of Water and Forest of the Central African Republic
Former Executive Secretary of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC)

“Mekama taught me the forest, how to read it, hear it, smell it, and see it. He taught me secrets hidden in the plants known only to the BaAka Gangas-medicine people” Richard Carroll



Richard Carroll with Jane Goodall at launch of CBFP at the UN

In the rainy season of 1980, I first arrived in the heart of darkness logging town of Bayanga by pirogue from the town of Nola-the roads were virtually nonexistent.

Along the banks of Sangha River, I stopped at hunting camps to sample the catch. I was offered everything from leopard skins to ivory to Bangui (marijuana), most of which I refused. After three days, I arrived at the edge of Bayanga and stayed the first night in the mud brick house of the quartier chief, drank some palm wine and woke the next morning to an elephant eating papayas in the back yard

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arrived to explore this forest region and Hans Steinfurth, a filmmaker who I met in Manovo-Gounda-Saint Floris National Park and was filming forest clearings and the hornbill-men-hunters wearing the skins and casques of the ground hornbills to approach antelope in DS, had given me two BaAka named Mekama and Mavanda.

Mekama could have been on the cover of any body building magazine as his lean, muscular body seemed to glide as he slides gracefully bare footed, clad only in a breach-cloth on the smooth elephant trails under the high forest canopy.

Graceful he may be, but wily like a fox. Those first days in the forest, he tried his best to lead me in circles within a short distance from the road and village. I kept tabs on the direction of travel and called him on his game

Mekama © Richard Carroll



We gradually gained mutual respect and got deep into the forest together. We walked a good 2000kms of transects, recces on elephant trails, took breaks to climb tall trees for honey, cracked Mokana nuts for the almonds, dug yams, and even a turtle or two and an occasional porcupine became dinner.

Mekama taught me the forest, how to read it, hear it, smell it, and see it. He taught me secrets hidden in the plants known only to the BaAka Gangas- medicine people. There is no hierarchy in BaAka culture, but three respected categories-the Ganga, the Tumba-great hunter-this was Mekama, and Kombeti-or respected elder. In the first months, I asked Mekama about the woven bands he wore on his ankles... at first he wouldn't say. A clear sign that respect and confidence grew between us-as we walked on an elephant trail, he pulled some vines.

When we came to a clearing, he instructed me to sit down and roll up my pant legs. He took the vines and rolled them with his palm over his lithe thigh until they formed a tight rope. He tied one on my right ankle and said, Richard, when we wear a band from this vine, we find lots of animals, have great luck in the hunt and are protected from being stomped by elephants or mauled by gorillas. Well, this certainly seemed to work as we saw lots of wildlife and I'm alive to tell about it. The other band, he tied on my left ankle and said-this is for virility-2 weeks later my daughter was conceived, so I am a firm believer in BaAka medicine and magic. Up until the day he died, whenever I returned to Mossapoula, I would bring him tributes of cloths or money as he took credit for my daughter's birth-although I did have a role to play!

Mekama at once was my mentor and nemesis-always wonderful, never easy. He would resist walking in the cool mornings with mist on the vegetation, then show me something, some fantastic detail of the forest that was contained in his head. How to get water from a vine, honey from a hollow tree and how to evoke the forest spirits at night. We danced the jengi, watched the bodies glowing with phosphorescent fungi, glowing in the dappled moonlight becoming spirits, not men, as the drumming, clapping, glowing fire light and smoke and spirit rose through the canopy. I was with him when his son was circumcised, when his wife speared him for infidelity, treated his leprosy, and grew to be named Kombeti by him and all the BaAka. He was my friend, my brother, protector of my children. Now his spirit has merged with the jengi and because of him, the forest survives and the song of the forest still echoes in the trees.

Richard Carroll

First Director of Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas



Richard Carrol with Minister Raymond Mbitikon (in white), Chef de PCA behind Mbitikon and Minister of Health in the grey shirt. They were both at Dzanga-Sangha, to see the biodiversity and explore integrating health and social development into a conservation program.

“We have to be proud that Dzanga Sangha is so well preserved” Ndagbino Pascal

In the beginning it was very difficult to work here, we had no vehicles or means to work and there were many poachers. Over time things have improved enormously and now more elephants can be seen than before. It makes me sad to know that in the other parks in the country there is almost nothing left. We have to be proud that DS is so well preserved.

I hope that the pandemic ends soon and that tourists can return and see the Park. I also hope that donors continue to help us protect it.

Ndagbino Pascal
First ranger at Dzanga Sangha



Ndagbino Pascal arrived Bayanga in 1987 to visit a friend and started to work as a gardener and in rabbit farming before being recruited into the Project in 1988. First helping in opening the road and building the camp in Bai Hokou and then, as an ecoguard.

He was part of the first group of 10 guards to be recruited and till now, has continued to serve in that purpose. Today he serves as the discipline manager for the ecoguards. In 2018 Pascal received the African Ranger Awards for his outstanding commitment to the protection of Africa’s wildlife and wilderness areas

Ndagbino Pascal, has been dedicating 30 years of his life to the protection of Dzanga Sangha © Luis Arranz



Ndagbino Pascal second from the left standing up © Richard Carroll



Wildlife

Research conducted by Tessa Ullmann of the Sangha Pangolin Project (SPP) – a group dedicated to protecting the three pangolin species which occur in Dzanga Sangha – quantifies the impact of the illegal pangolin scale trade in DSPA.

Despite all three species being protected, pangolins are consumed as traditional bushmeat and pressure from the illegal trade in their scales is reducing their populations. As of December 2020, the seizure held by DSPA contains 108.7 kg of pangolin scales; a volume accumulated over the last three years from confiscations made by rangers during patrols.

Sampling and analysis conclude that the entire seizure represents approximately 463 killed pangolins; 445 white-bellied pangolins (*Phataginus tricuspis*), 15 black-bellied pangolins (*Phataginus tetradactyla*), and 3 giant pangolins (*Smutsia gigantea*).



The amount of scales being intercepted by rangers is likely only a fraction of what is being poached and trafficked outside the country and the presence of a local trade remains a threat to pangolins in DSPA. SPP, in collaboration with DSPA, is working to combat this trade by providing education and awareness campaigns in local villages as well as community engagement activities to reduce hunting pressure.

DSPA pangolin scale seizure taken in December 2019 @Tessa Ullmann



White-bellied pangolin (phataginus tricuspis) © Tessa Ullmann

Discover the Biodiversity of the DSPA



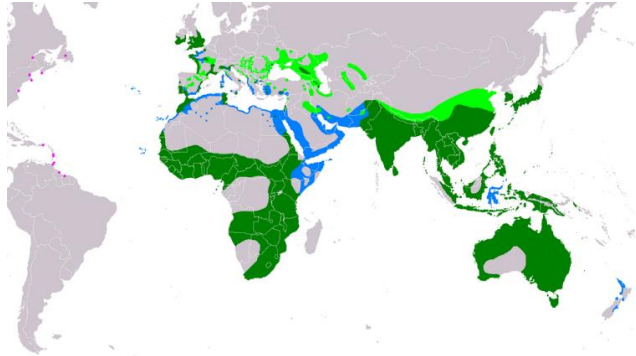
© Miguel Bellosta

Scientific name: Egretta garzetta

English name: little egret

Taxonomy:

- Class: Birds
- Order: Pelicaniforme
- Family: Ardeidae
- Genus: Egretta



© Wikipedia

The little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) is a small white heron 55–65 cm (22–26 in) long with a slender black beak, long black legs and, in some places, yellow feet.

It is the most common of the 3 egrets living in the region and need water as it is a fishing bird, eating mainly fish and frogs but also sometimes big insects and lizards.

Little egrets are mostly silent but make various croaking and bubbling calls at their breeding colonies and produce a harsh alarm call when disturbed.

Little egrets are sociable birds and are often seen in small groups. They nest in colonies occasionally with other wading birds.

They are generally migratory birds but in warmer locations can be permanent residents

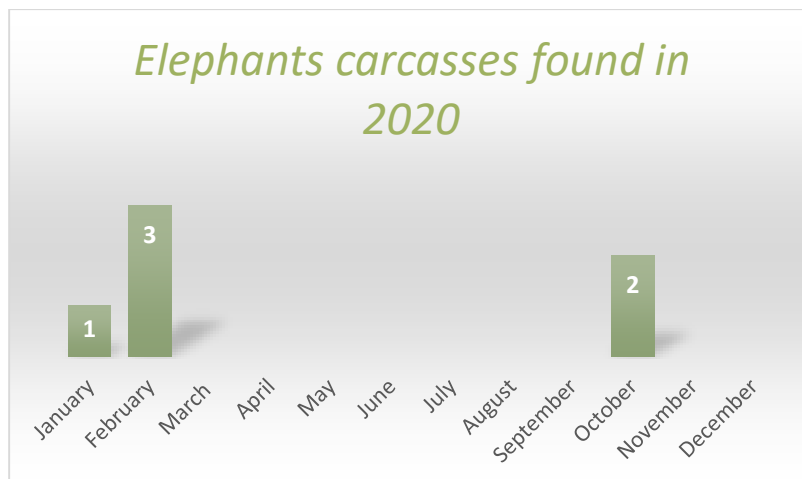
Anti-poaching

Despite the political situation at the moment, the guards continued daily patrols. This month they participated also in activities marking the celebration of the Central African Republic proclamation day.



DSPA rangers during the celebration © Luis Arranz

December was another month where we didn't find any elephant carcasses and 2020 a year with only 6 carcasses.



Main DSPA Patrols data:

45 regular patrols and 3 BLAB patrols. In total 1.710 rangers/days, 2.369 km traveled on foot and covering an area of 1.828 km². No one bi or tri national patrol because of the COVID 19. This resulted in the seizure of 3 manufactured 12-gauge shotguns, 7 homemade 12-gauge shotguns, 35 12 gauge cartridges. In addition, 3.718 metal snares were dismantled and 760 kilograms of meat and 2 kilograms of pangolin scales were confiscated.

No elephant carcasses were found.

2 small scale poachers were arrested, sensitized and liberated.

Community Development

This month a capacity building workshop for future BaAka and Sanga-Sangha leaders was held in Bayanga. In total, 29 participants including 9 women from 9 localities took part in this training aimed at preparing the next generation of leaders in the management of forest resources.



©Franck Mavinga

We still have no cases of COVID-19 in the area. However, as a result of the Presidential and legislative elections planned for December 27th, many people were traveling to carry out campaigns. We therefore canceled most of our planned activities that involved gatherings of people to minimize transmission risks. We also reinforce hygienic safety measures in the area.

<i>Main DSPA Health Data Number of patients</i>	
Structure	Number of patients
Lindjombo Health Post	46
Monasao Health Post	214
Belemboke Health Post	342
Bayanga health post	35
Mobile clinic	223
Total	860



Park Administration

We received information about the coalition of several armed groups aimed at obstructing Presidential and Legislative elections scheduled for December 27th and with rumors that this coalition was moving towards our area, we decided to activate our emergency plan.

We suspended all activities except ranger patrols and gorilla tracking, secured equipment and supplies, and prepared for the worst case scenario.

Fortunately, no armed groups have arrived at DSPA so far, and the elections were held. However, we remain on alert while monitoring closely what is happening in the rest of the country.

The Wonga bridge, on the way to Dzanga bai, is already operational



© Franck Mavinga



© Franck Mavinga



Tourism and Marketing

Michael "Nick" Nichols, resident photographer and one of the best known of National Geographic, who worked at DS has left us some of the photos that have made him famous



© Michael Nichols (National Geographic)



© Michael Nichols (National Geographic)