

Anti-poaching Operation Makes DRC Park Safe for Elephants and People

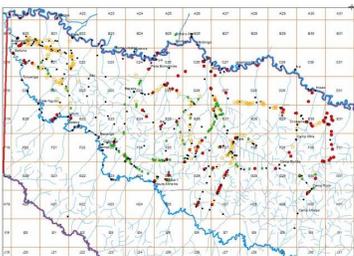


Forest Elephants Bathing in Salonga National Park after Operation Bonobo

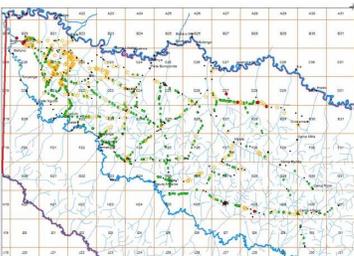
RESULTS OF OPERATION

30 poachers arrested
7 prison sentences
120+ firearms confiscated
1 ton bushmeat destroyed
Elephant circulation tripled
Surveys & patrols resumed

Before:



During:



- KEY**
- ★ Bonobo nest sites
 - Elephant dung piles
 - Human hunting signs

(larger maps on reverse)

Salonga National Park, located in the center of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is home to the endangered bonobo, one of our species' closest relatives, as well as rare forest elephants. USAID partners World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Zoological Society of Milwaukee (ZSM) support the collection of park patrol data and wildlife surveys within the park. During the course of regular park patrols in 2010, they detected a sharp increase in hunting activity and disturbance of wildlife: elephant poachers had infiltrated the park and established themselves along the Yenge River. Under-trained and ill-equipped, park guards were unable to control poaching by the heavily armed and well-organized criminals looking to cash in on ivory worth over \$1000 per kilogram in some international markets.

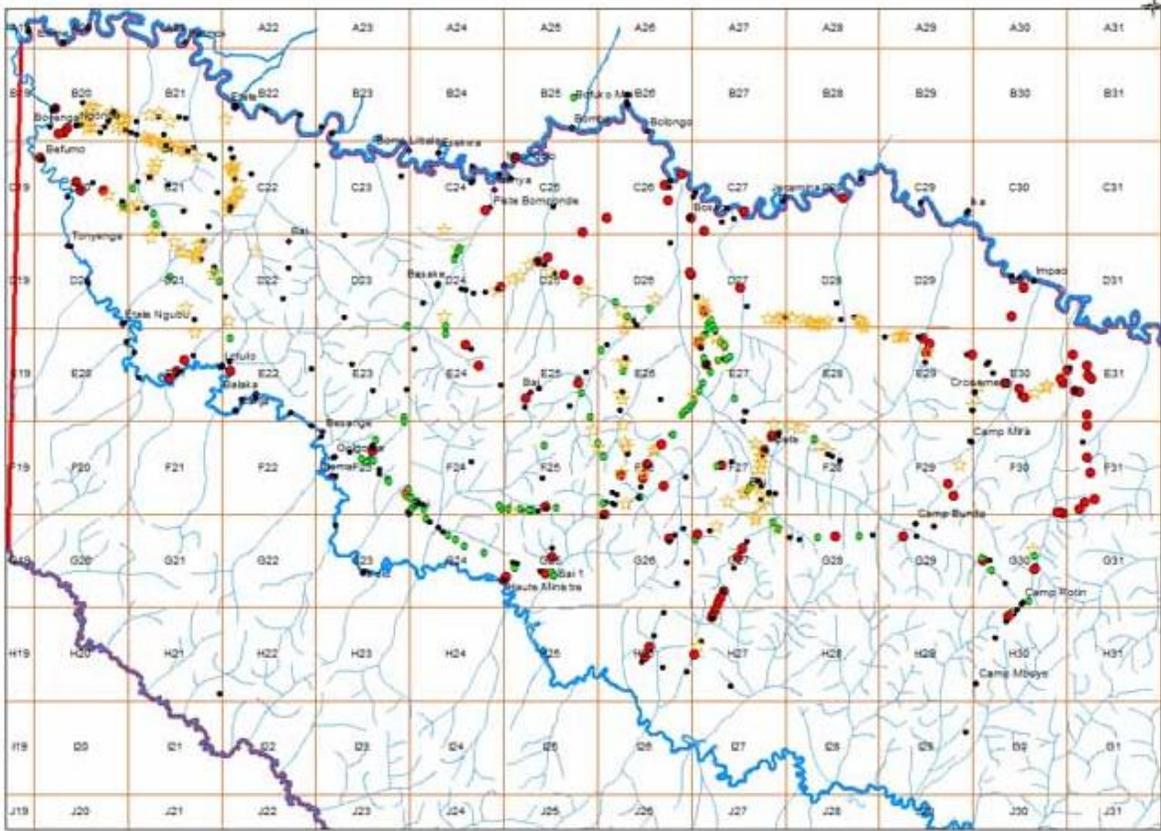
Backed with USAID's evidence of poaching and concerned about reports of illegal weapons, the Congolese government quickly committed over 300 military personnel to root out the poachers through "Operation Bonobo." Starting in October 2011, in collaboration with National Park authorities, the military conducted a sweep of the park and surrounding communities to seize illegal weapons and arrest suspected poachers. As of September 2012, authorities had arrested 30 suspected poachers, seven of whom have been sentenced to prison. In addition, more than 120 high-powered firearms were confiscated, including assault rifles.

As part of Operation Bonobo, bushmeat control along the Luilaka River at the Monkoto check point was also strengthened. Over 2,000 pounds of bushmeat were confiscated by park guards and burned publicly in 2012, the first such public destruction of bushmeat since Salonga National Park was created in 1970. The burning of illegal bushmeat sent a strong message within Salonga and to protected areas across DRC that hunting in national parks will not be tolerated. For the first time in two years, ZSM research teams and park guards have been able to safely navigate and survey the Yenge River, where they have established a new control post.

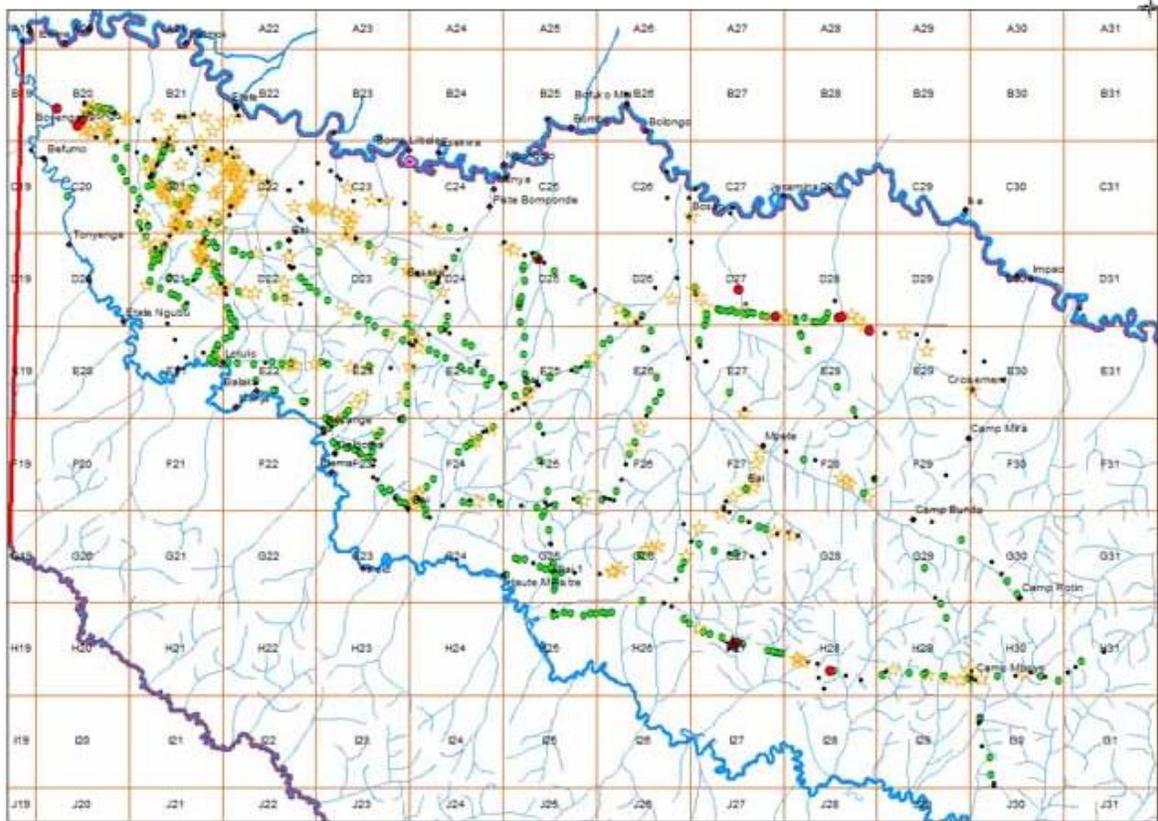
Maps on the next page (and summarized at left) show Salonga Park guard patrol data collected six months before and six months after the start of Operation Bonobo (October 2011). The maps show a dramatic contrast in animal distribution and poaching levels before and after the operation. Not only have human signs virtually disappeared after the operation, elephant circulation (measured by dung counts) appears to have increased three-fold, and becomes more widespread within the sector of the park and adjacent areas. These data support the important utility of combining guard-based bio-monitoring, strong enforcement operations, and long-term commitment to park guards.

USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) supports biodiversity conservation in 10 major landscapes throughout the Congo Basin, including the Salonga landscape in central DRC. CARPE and the WWF-led Salonga consortium work together to reduce the rate of forest degradation and biodiversity loss in the 36,560 square mile landscape, an area the size of the state of Indiana. Salonga National Park, the biodiverse heart of the Salonga landscape, is a World Heritage Site, and is home to important populations of bonobo, forest elephant, bongo, pangolin, Congo peacock and hippopotamus. For more information visit <http://carpe.umd.edu>.

Map 1. State Patrol data six months before Operation Bonobo (April – September 2011).



Map 2. State Patrol data six months during Operation Bonobo (October 2011 – March 2012).



KEY: ★ Bonobo nest sites ● Elephant dung piles ● Human hunting signs

Maps courtesy of Zoological Society of Milwaukee.