

PRESS RELEASE

Czech specialists, together with the WWF, are starting to map the animals in the last wilderness of The Congo

Prague, February 19, 2020 - **A team of wildlife monitoring specialists from the Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague (CZU) has started a cooperation with the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF). In the forests of the Congolese Basin they will begin to systematically map wild animal populations in the logging area in March. The results will also serve to suggest the creation of a network of corridors between protected areas for elephants, gorillas and other endangered animal species. “We have a unique opportunity to find out what lives in the latest outposts of Africa's wilderness before it will be accessible to people. We know that hunting decimates animals in protected areas, but accurate data is missing,” said the leading researcher Tomáš Jůnek.**

Czech researchers began their first talks with representatives of WWF Regional Office for Africa during an expedition to the Congo in August. The local forests are subdivided into concessions and are of interest to companies that extract timber and mineral resources. Today, protected areas can be isolated by a landscape in which some species do not survive. In addition, wild animals are the main source of animal protein for the locals as well as a commercial item that ends up in Europe or China. Forest elephants are threatened by the demand for ivory, and gorillas by diseases such as Ebola.

“This all contributes to a process called defaunation. The more the forests are open to people, the faster the animals disappear. The forest is literally consumed. Theoretically we know the mechanism, but we do not have sufficient information about the state of fauna from managed reserves - not even from the landscape around. Therefore, it is urgent to obtain this data before timber makes the forest available to hunters by road. We still go to places that can only be reached by rivers or animal trails, but with a machete,” added Jůnek.

Scientists with WWF workers plan to deploy 180 camera traps along the north-western border of the Republic of Congo and Gabon in an area larger than London in three phases. In the field, they will also record the footprints of mainly forest elephants and apes, and evaluate human activities and their impact on fauna. “The site lies in the area called TRIDOM, where elephant populations have fallen by 60, sometimes even 90%, in the past decade due to poaching. Data on forest elephants is our priority. This international cooperation will provide information useful as a tool for designing corridors between protected areas and for their sustainable management,” said Kouame Paul N'Goran, Coordinator of the WWF ROA Monitoring Programme.

The project, funded by the Neuron Endowment Fund to support science within the Neuron Dzamba Ya Lobi Expedition, also involves specialists from the Liberec Zoo and Save Elephants, z.s. This is another activity of experts from the Faculty of Environmental Sciences in Sub-Saharan Africa, where they monitored the fauna in the Niokolo Koba National Park in Senegal, or helped develop ecotourism in the Zambian Kafue National Park. “Our faculty is clearly aware of the urgency of protecting the environment in the tropics. Cooperation with the world's most important conservation organization enables a completely new impact of our applied research, which is a priority,” said Vladimír Bejček, Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Sciences.

Contact:

Jana Kašparová, tel: +420703182901, e-mail: kasparovaj@rektorat.czu.cz

Tomáš Jůnek, tel: +420777135577, e-mail: tjunek@fzp.czu.cz