

# Living with the bonobos

## Olivia's Diary


**Near the remote village of Malebo, three days of driving on rough, bumpy roads, north of DRC's capital of Kinshasa, a young couple from Europe works on the protection of bonobos, living in the rainforest with their nine-month old baby.**

On behalf of the Worldwide Fund for Nature WWF, project manager Olivia Haggis (34) from the UK and scientific coordinator Charles-Albert Petre (35) from Belgium, closely cooperate with local communities and with the local NGO Mbou Mon Tour (MMT). Charles-Albert focuses on research on bonobo behaviour. Findings in Malebo and elsewhere in DRC are the basis of measures to protect them. Olivia works on further development of sources of income that should raise the standard of living in the local communities and leave poverty behind. Community-based eco-tourism to see bonobos and scientific tourism are the main potential sources. Therefore, habituating bonobos to the presence of humans is important in Malebo. Olivia also works closely with other WWF projects in the area, such as the development of sustainable agriculture and agroforestry. In the spring of 2016 Olivia keeps a diary about the project. She tells about her daily life, far away from modern comforts and reflects on the co-existence of humans and bonobos. Her diary is a personal report about the road to a sustainable future for local communities.

### 15 MARCH 2016 - HEALTH OF THE BONOBOS

There are many advantages to habituating great apes, a good example being the successful increase in the population of mountain gorillas in Virunga National Park thanks to well-managed tourism. However, one of the major risks is disease transmission from humans (trackers, researchers, visitors) because great apes are so closely related to us. Worryingly, they can get infected with a human virus that just causes us to cough and sniff a bit, but can prove fatal for them. Obviously many precautions have been made to avoid this transmission happening, such as wearing masks, but our sites have an extra risk factor since they are so close to villages and local communities also use the same areas of forest as the bonobos. Last year one of our volunteers took a video of the group of bonobos playing in a pile of the remains of fresh leaves and stems that had been cut by local village women to weave mats earlier in the day, which also included the leaves that had been used to wrap their food which had been consumed at the same place. Imagine some of those women were ill, probably with sick children at home. The bonobos could then also become sick from playing in these remains.

Since the health of the bonobos is a top priority, we have a bonobo health monitor, Tonton. He comes from here and goes out with the bonobos each week day. His role is to observe the bonobos for signs of sickness and report to us as soon as any individual seems to be unwell. He collects observational data, but also routine faecal samples which are sent away for parasite and virus analysis. When a bonobo



Olivia Haggis with her nine-month old daughter Fleur and their two friends, red-tailed monkeys.