

Project Update : October 2013

Mt Hoyo Forest Reserve was gazetted in 1947. It is located in the Irumu Municipality, Oriental Province, DR Congo. GPS coordinates are latitude, 1.24750 N and longitude, 29.80918 E. altitudes range between 1300 and 1500 m (asl). Since its gazettment, no research of any kind has taken place. Management is also recent. The boundary demarcation has also not been done since and this is source of conflicts with local people. The local people supported this reserve some time ago because of the presence of tourists that used them and this was beneficial in that it provided revenue to those who worked as trackers or porters.



Left. A sign post at the top of Mt HOYO Forest Reserve (higher elevation). Right. View of the forest in the Reserve.

At the notification of funding, a plan was made with the team and I was requested to visit the site and meet with the Chief Warden and local chiefs to discuss issues related to its conservation and our bat project.

After discussion over the phone with the Chief Warden, a visit was planned in July 2013 but postponed in August because of some trouble (fighting) in the area, in the Ituri District.

On 27th August 2013, I left Lwiro to Goma and took a flight on 29th August to Beni. From Beni, I met with the Chief Warden and we discussed on how to work this project, mostly, census caves, see which ones have bats inside and monitor bats and possibly, record times of migrations during the year.

On 31st August, when he was going to Kinshasa for a meeting with other chief wardens, I was left with two peoples to visit the site with other colleagues from an NGO (Wildlife Conservation Society) who had some conservation management programs in the Reserve.

After a first day of exploring the Reserve (visiting habitats), we walked with the rangers and a few representative of local peoples led by Mr Emmanuel Bisa Hesini (Head of Bokucha/Mont Hoyo County) and Emmanuel Butubeli (chief of Sabuni/Mont Hoyo Village), Mr Mabili Kokoisa (a pygmy hunter) and Mr Nefu Laibu (farmers' representative). The team wanted take see the boundaries (as stated in the documents) in order to prepare the demarcation and collection of GPS coordinates to make the preliminary (working) map that needs to be approved before a definitive one that will be made after the boundaries will be accepted by all the parties.

While the other peoples continued, I started to work with a tracker and a ranger to explore caves just to have an idea of where and how they are and also, record any sign of other biodiversity (mostly mammals) in the reserve. Information from local peoples are that large mammals such as

Okapi, Buffaloes, chimpanzees, pangolin, elephants, bush pigs and many monkey species were common in this forest.



Left. Rangers at the Guest house of Mt Hoyo. Right. Left, the Local Chief, Andibo (left) at his home during a discussion about the Reserve.

The present situation is that some black and white colobus, red colobus, chimpanzees, antelopes such as bongo and important bat populations are still present (and can be seen) in the reserve. But since some of the species are discrete and cannot easily be found, it is important to consider a comprehensive census to make a list of all the species occurring in Mt Hoyo Forest Reserve. We were requested to consider this with WCS, this is being discussed.

Twenty-eight caves are reported in the reserve, but we only visited 13 of which nine had bats inside.



Left. A cave in the Reserve where bats are roosting inside. Middle & Right: Flying bats and others roosting on trees.

No bat capture was planned at this stage since I did not carry mist nets nor the bat detector. Only exploration of the site and caves was undertaken to discover the importance and the beauty of the site.

It is important to state that being outside between 6.00 and 7.00 pm, one would see flying bats. Bats of many species and sizes were seen. Some flying bats and others on trees were photographed.

Some challenges to conservation are exploitation of forest products such as timber, bamboo and poaching or cutting the forest for cropping by pygmies. Meat is still sold in villages at all time; most of it is from the reserve.



A pygmy village at the vicinity of the reserve and poached meat.

In a discussion with the local Chief and ICCN representatives, it was agreed that all parties must work together to reduce or eradicate poaching. Also, make in place some structures that help local peoples understand the importance of the reserve in the absence of tourism (during this time where the road is not well secured for tourists). If inventories are schedules, some will work as porters or trackers. Others may be employed as guides or rangers if the situation of this parts improves and ICCN decides to employ some additional staffs.

As for us, during site visits, some of the villagers will work in the project and they will be the target for some sensitization to local peoples.

The next trip is planned for late October or early November 2013, depending on security on the way to the site as Ugandan rebels operate on the road. But since conservation peoples have not been a target, apart from fighting on the way, the work in the reserve is not a problem.