

Update from the Limbe Wildlife Centre

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Introduction

The raining season is always a difficult time in the Limbe Wildlife Centre, because our chimpanzees and gorillas easily get sick when it is wet and cold. But this year we are doing quite well. June was a very wet month, but July and August have been not bad at all. That still means that it rains very often, but at least not days and days without stop. On top of that we have improved the baby chimpanzee satellite with heaters and more shelter. The result is that all our animals have been healthy so far throughout the raining season.

As mentioned, it has not been completely dry in the last months. We don't have the actual data on rainfall in Limbe, but we are close to the wettest place in Africa (second wettest in the world), that has an average annual rainfall of 10,000 mm. Like every other year, the Limbe Wildlife Centre has had flooded areas and the workers have been working in the rain a lot.

The biggest problem we've had this wet season were old climbing structures falling down because of the muddy soil. Thanks to a donation of Pro Wildlife we are able to refurbish the enclosures and build new climbing structures, but in some areas we have to wait till the soil dries up. Last week we were finally able to build a small construction in the adult chimpanzee's enclosure, but most of their space is still too wet to build anything. So while the adult chimpanzees still have to be a bit patient, their younger neighbours are already fully enjoying their new playground.



Animal news

The number of animals in the Limbe Wildlife Centre is slowly increasing and is now up to 195. With the arrival of two infants, we now take care of 50 chimpanzees, while the number of drills has increased to 47, both through births and two new arrivals. Also in the mandrill group two babies were born. On top of that we received three different species of (very) young guenons.

It is not LWC's goal to grow. Through education we try to help the Cameroonian people to save their precious wildlife. Every animal brought to the LWC is a sign that there is still a lot of work to be done. The animals that make it to the LWC are lucky, but the ultimate goal is to bring them back to their appropriate natural habitats. We are therefore delighted that we have taken a first step towards the reintroduction of our endangered species. Together with the two other sanctuaries in Cameroon, the Limbe Wildlife Centre has formed the Cameroon Chimpanzee Reintroduction Group (CCRG). The first focus will be on chimpanzees. Reintroduction is not easy and it is going to take time and very much effort to make this project a success. The CCRG will begin analysing potential release sites later this year. It is hoped that a group of wild-born, rehabilitated chimpanzees from the LWC, the Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue Center and Mefou National Park, will be returned to the forests of Cameroon beginning in 2011.

Nanga Eboko

The chimpanzee Nanga Eboko was brought to in the LWC on the 19th of May after being confiscated from a dealer in the village Nanga Eboko, through a combined action of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife and the NGO Last Great Ape. He is estimated to be born in March 2006.



Upon arrival, Nanga suffered from shot wounds and an old fracture in the leg. He was brought to the human hospital for x-rays, which showed that several lead pellets were still in his body. Two pellets were surgically removed, but some small fragments were embedded too deeply in the bone, so it was decided to leave them there. The fracture was already healing so a plaster was not necessary.

After a period of intensive care by one of our volunteers, Nanga has been introduced to the infants group that lives in the quarantine area. The four older infants soon adopted him as a younger brother and the introduction went very smoothly. He soon learned not to let his food be stolen by the others and to eat faster. He is doing very well, climbing the tree, running around and playing with the others.

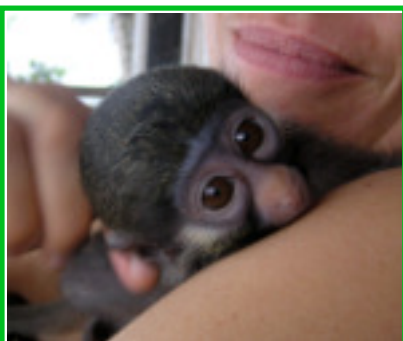
Ilor

Ilor, who is about the same age as Nanga, has only been in the LWC since the 5th of August. He was confiscated in the village Ilor, close to Korup National Park. Ilor had been tied to a rope in someone's house for quite a while, being fed on plums and monkey cola, after his parents had been killed by a hunter. After a very long day of travelling, first by public transportation, then picked up by LWC staff, he arrived late at night in the centre. The first thing he did was taking a long night sleep. In the morning he started eating everything we put in front of him: milk, yoghurt, banana, papaya... A problem was that he was afraid of people. Most young chimpanzees like to be held, but with Ilor it has taken two weeks before he let us pick him up. We could sit next to him and groom him, but not take him in our arms. Now he finally trusts us and we can carry him around and play with him, gently. Soon he will join the infants group and we are sure that meeting the other young chimpanzees will do him good.



Ebo

In the same week Ilor arrived, we also received Ebo, a six weeks old red-eared guenon. A hunter gave her to a woman in a village near Ebo Forest, who donated her to the Limbe Wildlife Centre.



From the first day Ebo's favourite activities have been eating and sleeping. The first nights she needed a lot of attention, but after a week she slept through the night without waking anybody up. Now after a few weeks she is more and more playful, trying to jump and putting everything in her mouth. She is exploring her surroundings, looking at everything that moves with her big eyes. This week she also started to climb the branches we have put in her cage.

When she has gone through her first health checks we will try to introduce her to two other young guenons in quarantine: a mona monkey and a tantalus monkey.

Education

The Holiday Workshops 2007

After the completion of a very successful outreach and nature club program, the LWC education team started to organize the 2007 Holiday Workshops, in collaboration with and sponsored by Busch Garden Zoo in Florida. Four workshops were held for different levels, from the first classes of secondary school to university level. The theme of this year's workshops was: 'Mount Cameroon National Park, a welcome idea for nature and people!'

Mount Cameroon is very rich in biodiversity, which is the reason why it is in the process of being gazetted as a National Park. But full protection of wildlife is only possible with the cooperation of the people that live on the mountain. This is why we decided to focus both on the ecology and on the human aspect of this new National Park. The highlight of the workshops was a field trip to Mapanja, a village on the edge of the proposed protected area, and the nearby forest. The villagers explained and showed to the students how they use the forest and why it is so important to them. Possible conflicts concerning the new National Park were discussed, but also the definite benefit of it for the villagers and their future generations.



Also much appreciated is the internet chat session with students who are doing a workshop in Busch Garden Zoo, Florida. This activity was first introduced in last year's program and is turning into a classic. Our students learn a lot from their colleagues abroad, but it is also a good teaching tool to make the students explain what they have learned so far. They get all kinds of questions that make them look at matters in a different way.

Staff Training

The period March, April, May of this year was quite busy with exchange programs. Two technicians from Chester Zoo in the UK visited the LWC to train our workers and to help them build a crush cage in the new chimpanzee enclosure. While all people involved had a lot of fun together, they also learned a lot from each other and the result is a great tool that will help us manage the chimpanzees. When Kevin and Dixie went home again, they took two of our keepers with them, for a training period in Chester Zoo. Mr. Andreas Mbong, Head Keeper of Chimpanzees, and Mr. Alfred Bama, Head Keeper of Gorillas, worked for one month with their colleagues in the UK. Both the work and the country gave them a lot of new experiences and they returned full of stories and new ideas. It is impossible to describe in a few words what it means for our keepers to have the opportunity to take part in this exchange program. We are therefore very grateful to Chester Zoo, that fully sponsors this program.

In April we also made a start with a new exchange program between the New York City Bronx Zoo and LWC. The Bronx Zoo is part of the World Conservation Society, that also has a branch in Limbe. Two zoo keepers came to Limbe for a combined program: work with the keepers in the LWC and go on a field trip with WCS researchers. Noel and Sabrina gave several presentations for the LWC staff about primate management and enrichment. Although short, the visit was quite advantageous and we are looking forward to the next step of this collaboration later this year, when one or two LWC staff members will be invited to visit the Bronx Zoo.

Workshop for hunters

In August the second hunters workshops was held, in collaboration with the Ebo Forest Research Project of CRES. Eighteen villagers, all more or less dependant on hunting, travelled the long distance from Ebo Forest to Limbe and took part in the two days program. The goal of the workshop was to raise awareness about endangered species and discuss alternatives for hunting.



The participants were very eager to learn. They enjoyed the guided tour, because it gave them the opportunity to have a close look at primates that they normally only see from a distance. The hunting debate, where half of the group plays the role of conservationists, went very well. Arguments pro and contra hunting were all presented. Halfway one of the 'hunters' deserted to go to the other group, so the conservationist group outnumbered the hunters group. But more importantly, at the end of the workshop all participants promised not to go hunting any more. Even if this statement will prove to be not entirely true, we believe that workshops like this can help people to change their lifestyle and develop new income generating activities.

Conclusion

This update can never complete, because there is too much going on in the Limbe Wildlife Centre. Our volunteers give wonderful tours, the keepers find new methods of enrichment for their animals, cages and fences are repaired and improved, chimpanzees are shifted from the infants group to the youngsters group or up to the adults, etc. And all this would not be possible without the help of our sponsors. In the last months we received money from old and new friends, a container full of donated materials from Born Free Foundation and many other gifts. We would like to thank you all very much for your support and hope you will support us with our future plans as well.