

**OKAPI**  
CONSERVATION  
PROJECT

**2022**  
**ANNUAL**  
**REPORT**

# MISSION

*To conserve the okapi in the wild, while preserving the biological and cultural diversity of the Ituri forest*



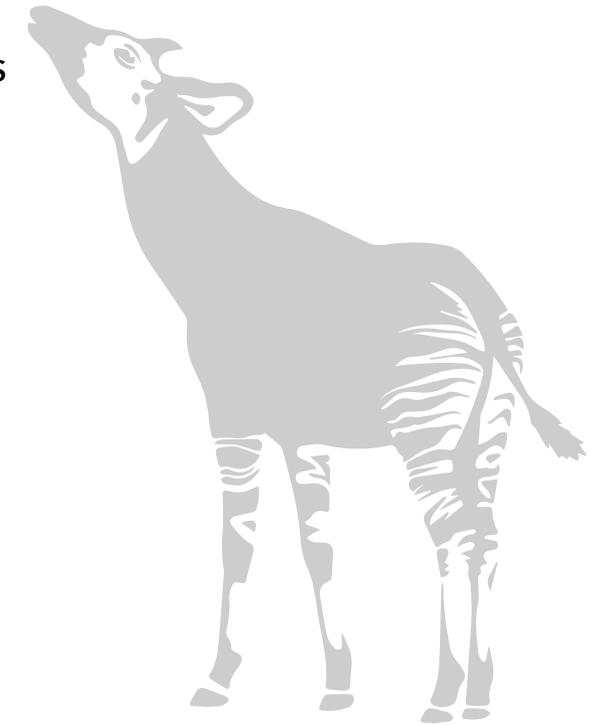
## 2022 WCG/OCP PROJECT STAFF

### WCG BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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- Berce Disiki Nsafuansa
- Mutahinga Mumbere Eleme
- Kambale Katsuva Julien
- Lucas Meers
- Ellen Emrich



### AGROFORESTRY

- Epulu site**
  - Muvi Yalala
  - Makubuli Mwanika
  - Masiyiri Mulawa
- Mambasa site**
  - Mpinda Tchinkunku
  - Enckoto Bameseto
- Wamba site**
  - Nandepa Awelekyelango
  - Jean Baptiste
  - Alingi Baruty Francois
- Niania site**
  - Lobo Lina
  - Nyamisi Clemence
- Byakato site**
  - Muhindo Muliwavyo
  - Kasereka Stongo
- Mungbere site**
  - Apamba Mboy Martin
  - Mawa Ngadumango
  - Antoine
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  - Anzatepedanga Aime

- Mbambu Mituho
- Oyokundhu Alipa Franck
- Kabuya Charles
- Onyane Kimareki
- Rukundo Bimenyimana
- Justin

### EDUCATION

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- Mumbere Kayenga
- Toliba Maseko
- Abdoul Arim KimaKima
- Carine Makonga
- Roger Ozande
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### INFRASTRUCTURE/ MAINTENANCE

- Mbete Nguma
- Airstrip**
  - Kababo Mutubule
  - Panga Madro

- Sagbolo Yuma
- Kasereka Mbange Roger
- Shafiko Moricho
- Muhindo Pilipili

### Carpenter

- Mbusa Mughanda

### Mecanic

- Muhindo Maliro
- Vusike Kiruzi

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- Kasereka Katsuva

### Watchmen

- Katsuva Kaposo
- Yangunapayi Makasi
- Kambale Kavunga Dorack

### Residence

- Abdala Moricho

### Tourists facilities Epulu

- Bayaa Gbama

### Mambasa watchman and clean guest

- Alezo Drudo

# LETTER FROM JOHN

## PRESIDENT, OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT

2022 was a very special year as in June the Okapi Conservation Project celebrated 35 years of continuous support for the brave ICCN ecoguards who protect okapi, our OCP team who manage our programs of education, agroforestry, healthcare and community assistance and the people living alongside okapi. Also, the Okapi Wildlife Reserve commemorated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a protected area encompassing a unique and diverse flora and fauna found in no other place in the world.

In August I was finally able to visit DR Congo after two years of travel restrictions put in place by the DRC government to control the COVID pandemic. All in all, in our region the controls were effective and COVID cases were rare and infected people were quickly isolated. I was able to bring in much needed equipment not available in DRC - five computers, camera traps and rechargeable batteries and GPSs for our agroforestry team to monitor the fields of cooperating farmers. All our educators and agronomists made their way to Epulu from our remote field sites around the Reserve to meet with me to discuss what was accomplished over the last two years and proposed activities for 2023 that would respond to

the needs of the population while respecting the mandate of the Reserve to protect wildlife and the forest from exploitation.

The articles in this report give some examples of what our team was able to achieve in such difficult conditions for the people and wildlife of eastern DRC. It is necessary to reflect that every day brings new challenges, unknown obstacles like collapsed bridges, lack of material and rebel attacks along the road requiring constant surveillance of the landscape and adapting with new approaches, new strategies to get the work done. This takes the cooperation of our entire team to overcome these

challenges and thanks to all of our donors we were able to keep all our staff employed during the pandemic contributing to the overall safety of our team as they moved about meeting with school children, women's groups and communities over the vast forests in and around the Reserve.

We reestablished the agroforestry program in Mungbere in the north of the Reserve, a very important access point to the Core Conservation Area where wildlife is totally protected. Having the

community members identify strangers that might be poachers to alert the ecoguards is critical in controlling wildlife trade in this region. And why would community members do this? Because they trust us - we help them provide for their basic needs, provide health care and help educate their children. We established a Women's Group in Mungbere several years ago followed by introduction of sustainable agriculture in 2022 and in 2023 OCP educators will establish a presence in the area working with schools and local government officials to broaden knowledge of the Reserve and why certain wildlife species are protected and how they can be involved. OCP now has five field sites strategically located around the Reserve, each with a team of educators, agroforestry personnel and an associated Women's Group all championing the community's involvement in conserving forests and wildlife.

A priority for 2023 is to have an assistant to our various program leaders who are focused on learning about the program in depth so they can one day lead that Program if required (this includes me).

We have several people who have been with us for 30 years and we need to corral that knowledge and pass it on to the next generation of leaders so the Project can continue to make a difference for many years to come in the lives of people living with wildlife and preserve a place where okapi can live free among the giant trees of the Ituri Forest.

All our staff does is because of your generosity, thank you for caring about the survival of okapi, thank you for giving and thank you for supporting our work to engage Congolese people to care about and protect their unique natural heritage.

**John Lukas, President  
Okapi Conservation Project**

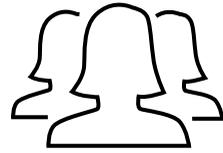


# BY THE NUMBERS



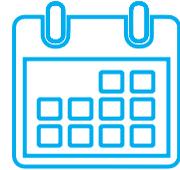
## 13,726

SQUARE KILOMETERS (SIZE OF THE OKAPI WILDLIFE RESERVE)



## 264

WOMEN IN WOMEN'S GROUPS



## 3,000

CALENDARS DISTRIBUTED



## 6,841

STUDENTS REACHED BY PRESENTATIONS



## 11,708

SEEDS DISTRIBUTED (TOTAL KG)



## 192

VEGETABLE GARDENS ESTABLISHED



## 2,694

FARMERS ASSISTED



## 8,968

ICCN ECOGUARD PATROL HOURS



## 15,382

ICCN ECOGUARD PATROL AREA COVERED (KM)

# AGROFORESTRY

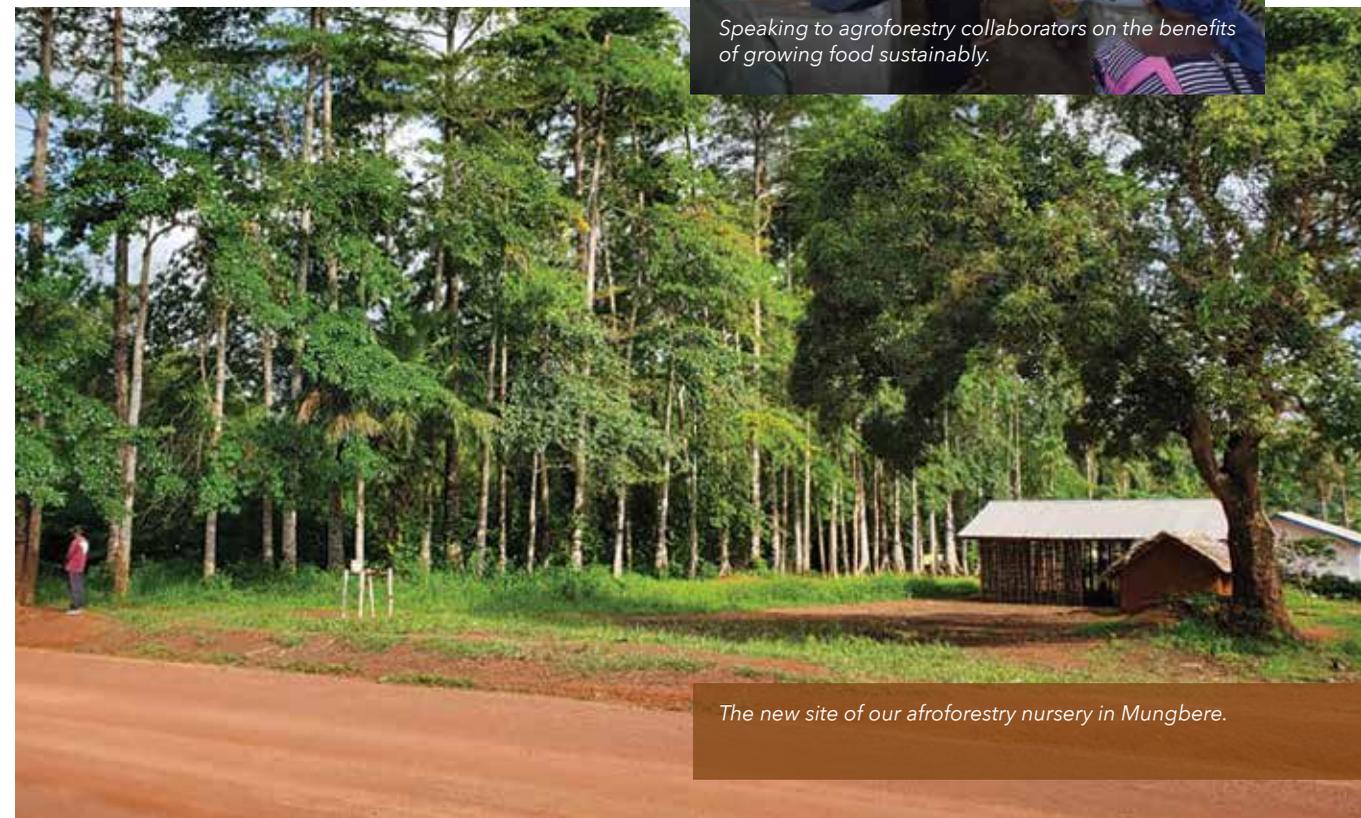
The OCP agroforestry team reopened an extension in Mungbere following a twelve-year closure due to logistical issues with travel as Mungbere is on the northern border of the Reserve. This site will support the northeastern sector of the Reserve with a tree nursery and farmers will have access to an OCP agronomist to help implement sustainable agricultural practices. With this addition, the Reserve and surrounding communities are supported by a total of six active agroforestry sites including tree nurseries that distribute trees for collaborative farmers and reforestation along with seed distribution and seed storage to improve crop productivity.

In June, OCP educators traveled across these sites to meet with local farmers and present on maintaining sustainable agricultural practices within the OWR. The discussions targeted issues such as respecting agricultural zoning, the distribution and sizing of farming plots, and who has rights to

access agricultural zones. Agricultural zones within the OWR are designated only for use by communities who reside in the Reserve, and no commercial crops are allowed. Over 900 farmers and 17 local chiefs and landowners across the Reserve contributed productive feedback on how OCP may continue to improve sustainable agriculture programming, fulfill needs for communities, and protect against harmful practices that destroy the forest habitat of the okapi.



Speaking to agroforestry collaborators on the benefits of growing food sustainably.



The new site of our afroforestry nursery in Mungbere.

OCP's deeply deserving agroforestry team was honored to accept their 2021 Disney Conservation Heroes award in recognition of their commitment to the conservation of okapi habitat and support of local communities. Their work empowers local communities to implement sustainable farming practices supportive of forest protections and food security. The enduring dedication of the agroforestry team was especially visible this year in the face of rising regional insecurity, particularly at the Biakato extension. Programming was heavily impacted in the east and southeast regions of the Reserve resulting in a decrease of 33% of tree seedling distribution compared to 2021's distribution of seedlings, partially attributed to the persistent displacement of farmers.

Despite these challenges, OCP has set a goal to distribute 100,000 seedlings in 2023 sponsored by a successful 2022 end-of-year campaign by generous donors. These seedlings will support local communities in their efforts to adopt sustainable practices and improve food security. OCP remains committed to promoting sustainable stewardship within the Reserve, improving the livelihoods of local communities, and ensuring viable okapi habitat is not affected by uncontrolled slash and burn agriculture practices.

## AGROFORESTRY

- Mungbere site opening
- Disney Conservation Hero Award distribution
- EDU conferences with farmers/land owners and their feedback
- Security restrictions in Biakato and Mambasa
- Successful 2022 end of year campaign for seedlings & 2023 goal - to plant 100,000 seedlings

11 concessions were reforested with *Terminalia superba* and *Tectona grandis* in Mungbere, Mambasa, Niania and Wamba covering a total of 12,5 hectares area. Each concession owner received a financial assistance to help maintain the growing trees.

### Mungbere

The OCP agroforestry team proudly reopened an extension in Mungbere following a twelve year closure. The site will support the northeastern border of the Reserve with a nursery and the guidance of an OCP agronomist on sustainable agricultural practices. The addition of the Mungbere brings our total to six active agroforestry sites surrounding the Reserve. Further, this extension will support our goal of distributing 100,000 tree seedlings next year.



Newly planted cabbages on a plot of land near Biakato.



Distribution of tree seedlings is commonly facilitated by motorbike

### Education

OCP educators traveled across the Reserve to meet with local farmers and present on maintaining sustainable agricultural practices within the OWR. Discussions targeted issues such as respecting agricultural zoning, the distribution and sizing of farming plots, and rights to access agricultural zones. Agricultural zones within the OWR are designated only for use by indigenous tribes and communities who resided in Reserve prior to its establishment as a protected area. 935 farmers and 17 local chiefs and land owners across the Reserve contributed productive feedback concerning how we may continue to improve sustainable agriculture programming, fulfill needs, and protect against harmful practices.

### Disney Conservation Hero

We presented our deeply deserving agroforestry team with their 2021 Disney Conservation Heroes award for their commitment to preserving okapi habitat and supporting local communities.



Successful 2022 end of year campaign for seedlings & 2023 goal - to plant 100,000 seedlings



OCP's agroforestry team at the new Mungbere site



# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

OCP's women empowerment program spans five extensions in Epulu, Mambasa, Mungbere, Niania and Wamba. Women's groups encourage women to explore their personal and professional goals, generate sustainable income, and actively participate in land stewardship and conservation education.

Each extension has ownership of a community garden that is designed and cultivated by the women's groups in partnership with the agroforestry team. The gardens grow a bountiful variety of produce, such as cabbage, carrots, eggplant (aubergines), tomatoes, cauliflower, and green peppers. The harvest enriches food security and nutritional diversity for women and their families. Surplus produce is sold to the community, with the profit contributing to each group's shared fund.

These gardens further serve to provide women training in sustainable agriculture practices supportive of forest conservation. The primary threat to okapi and their habitat is deforestation, especially slash and burn agriculture. Women play

*Women's groups encourage women to explore their personal and professional goals, generate sustainable income, and actively participate in land stewardship and conservation education.*

a critical role in the advocacy of biodiversity and forest conservation due to their close relationship with and reliance upon forest resources. By providing women the expertise, resources, and space for community gardens, OCP nourishes enduring resource stewardship and provides a platform for women to grow their understanding of local conservation initiatives and involve other community members in their efforts.

Since 2018, two women's centers have been constructed in Mambasa and Epulu to provide a covered indoor working space and secure storage for the women's groups equipment and supplies. The centers were met with excitement from women as they were able to meet regularly with an increased production capacity. These meetings also provide an opportunity for open dialogue about forest

protection and conservation education, and provide safe, shared supervision for their children during meetings. We hope to raise funds over time to build three additional centers to support the women that are part of the groups in Niania, Wamba and Mungbere.



Harvesting eggplants (aubergines)

# HEALTHCARE

The Okapi Clinic in Epulu continues to be a vital resource, providing essential healthcare for all Reserve staff including ICCN ecoguards, OCP staff and WCS staff, their families, and the indigenous Mbuti. In 2022, OCP healthcare staff treated over 4,000 patients for various ailments and afflictions, including malaria, wounds, burns, and other minor injuries. Ecoguards can only be in the field protecting the biodiversity of the forest if they are strong and healthy as it is extremely arduous to walk through the overgrown jungle for 21 day patrols.

As part of OCP's ongoing efforts to improve healthcare services, the old wing of the Okapi Clinic underwent a recent renovation, generously supported by a WCN donor. Originally built in the 1990s, the wing is an important multi-purpose structure housing the pharmacy, laboratory, and office of the OCP healthcare coordinator, Mulwayi Katalayi Jean Claude. The clinic's open-air reception and waiting room are designed to welcome patients while adhering to Ebola and COVID-19 precautions. Additionally, it accommodates two consultation rooms and three rooms for pediatric care. The updated wing significantly enhances the capacity of the Okapi Clinic to provide comprehensive, coordinated treatment, ensuring optimized patient care and comfort, particularly at a time when the Reserve is expanding the number of ecoguards patrolling the Reserve forests.

OCP healthcare efforts further extended to supply formula for two newborn daughters of ICCN ecoguards who were killed in the line of duty. These initiatives demonstrate OCP's sincere commitment to improving the well-being of the dedicated conservationists working in the remote Ituri forest with accessible, quality medical treatment.



*The new building of the Okapi Clinic constructed in 2021.*

## EDUCATION

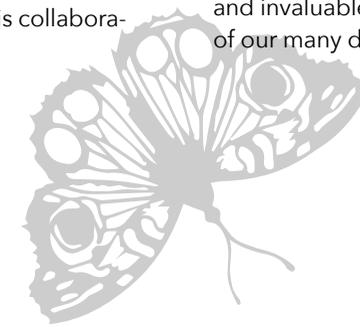
OCP education initiatives had an extensive reach this year, educators conducted programs to nearly 7,000 primary and secondary students across the Reserve. In early 2022, students of the Epulu Okapi Primary School participated in interactive lessons on protected species identification. The lessons enhance students' awareness and identification skills of threatened species to promote their conservation. In partnership with FHI 360, the Mambasa education program honored International Women's Day by holding discussions on the importance and impact of reforestation with specific emphasis on the role of women. The presentation was designed to inspire young girls and present avenues for forest conservation action. Between April 24th and May 5th, OCP educators visited 70 secondary schools presenting the historical, ecological, and cultural significance of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and current conservation initiatives to protect it. This early awareness and knowledge is crucial to fostering future native conservation leadership and continued community engagement.

With immense gratitude to WCN donors, OCP was able to partner with the Institute in Congo for the Conservation of Nature/Okapi Wildlife Reserve (ICCN/OWR) to rebuild part of the Epulu-Okapi Primary School after it endured significant damage to its roof and structure following periods of intensive wind and heavy rain. Through this collabora-

tive effort, full repairs were completed, providing a secure learning environment for 857 students and their educators. In this space, the students will continue to receive a course entirely dedicated to nature conservation, with lessons specific to the biodiversity of the OWR and the need for environmental protection. Special attention is given to endangered okapi as the flagship species of the nation with significant cultural value for indigenous peoples.

OCP's efforts extended beyond the classroom, as educational radio broadcasts on native wildlife and forest conservation, sustainability, local stewardship, the destructive effects of poaching and mining, and COVID-19 and Ebola precautions were transmitted to seven radio stations across the region, reaching an estimated audience of over 50,000 listeners. Additionally, educational resources including species identification posters and 3,000 calendars featuring OCP conservation messaging, were distributed in and around the OWR to local and indigenous communities.

OCP's education program has made remarkable strides in promoting conservation awareness across the OWR. With continued efforts to engage and educate local communities, OCP staff are able to contribute to the conservation of this unique and invaluable ecosystem because of the support of our many donors around the world.



# WORLD OKAPI DAY - 18 OCTOBER EVERY YEAR

On October 18th, celebrations of World Okapi Day cascaded across the communities surrounding the Reserve. Nearly ten thousand people in Mambasa, Epulu, Niania, Wamba, Munbgere, Nduye, Dingbo, and Watsa gathered to engage in games, educational conferences, and awareness messaging centered around the conservation of okapi. Those who could not attend in person could join via their local radio station, where broadcasts highlighted okapi and their critical forest habitat. Conservation outreach additionally scaled to interviews on national and international radio stations (Radio Okapi and Radio France Internationale).

In light of the rising illegal wildlife trafficking of okapi, the event focused on raising awareness of the immense cultural and ecological significance of okapi, their protected status, and local conservation efforts. Okapi Conservation Project organized public conferences with local authorities and community leaders at each site to discuss the threats facing okapi and their forest home as part of the event's activities. World Okapi Day will continue to spread awareness for okapi on a national scale to promote conservation action and inspire the next generation of local scientists and conservationists.

The Education Program took part in the Okapi Day celebration evaluation meeting with all OWR workers who were involved in the activity on October 25, 2022 to bring out strengths and weaknesses noticed during the activity.

Recent reports released by the NGO Conserv Congo in 2021 and 2022 revealed that apart from okapi's meat and skin which have been the basis of its poaching, there is to date the emergence of the animal's fat and bones trade which are dearly sold for various purposes at both a national and international level. But it is clearly established that any

living wild animal has an ecological, cultural and touristic (economical) value for the benefit of the whole community, territory, province, country, and world, and unlike poaching, trafficking and other illegal practices that only benefit to a small number of individuals (mafia network).

Given the above, in 2022 as in 2021, OWR planned to celebrate world Okapi Day through short conferences with various authorities and community leaders on okapi's ecological, cultural and touristic values.



# INDIGENOUS MBUTI

In a momentous move, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) proposed a new law in May 2022 that recognizes and safeguards the customary rights of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and promotes protections for land rights and livelihoods. This marks the first legislation of its kind in DRC. The law will have strong implications for conservation as it acknowledges the crucial role of IPs in the conservation of natural resources and mitigation of climate change. OCP looks forward to supporting this vital legislation and empowerment of IPs through their continued work with the indigenous Mbuti and Efe of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.

Currently, OCP continues to collaborate with the indigenous communities of the Reserve on conservation efforts, including wildlife monitoring and education. The indigenous Mbuti and Efe of the Reserve are also offered free healthcare at the Okapi Clinic. The Clinic is designed to accommodate traditional practices to ensure the indigenous community can receive high-quality care in alignment with their needs and traditional practices.

This year OCP educators met with a total of 1,939 indigenous Mbuti and Efe peoples to deliver refresher courses on the authorized hunting methods and seasons, which species are protected, and rules of the Sustainable Hunting Zones of the Reserve. The gatherings further served to provide a platform for open dialogue on the advantages of sustainable hunting and to address questions and feedback.



# WILDLIFE PROTECTION

## Unified for Okapi

This year welcomed the 30th anniversary of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, a testament to its enduring efforts in the conservation and protection of the Ituri Forest and all who call it home. In celebration of this milestone, OCP met with customary chiefs and local leaders to reflect on lessons learned and promote collaborative conservation action for the future. 2022 also marked the 35th anniversary of OCP. As one of the longest continually-running NGOs in the region, and the only one dedicated to the conservation of okapi in the Ituri Forest, the past three and a half decades have granted a wealth of knowledge and invaluable relationships with indigenous and local communities.

This experience and unified front are especially important in the face of an emerging trend in the illegal trafficking of okapi. Recent reports have indicated a rising trade of okapi skins, meat, bones, and fat to Uganda, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. To address this issue, OCP has collaborated with Conserv Congo, a local NGO dedicated to combating illegal trade in partnership with local authorities. Their initial investigation has resulted in four arrests and six ongoing cases. Okapi have full legal protection under the law and were classified as endangered by the IUCN Red List in 2015, following evidence of population decline by 50% during the previous three decades. An increase in illegal trade could prove detrimental to the species' survival.

Fortunately, the Okapi Wildlife Reserve is protected by a dedicated force of ICCN ecoguards committed to enforcing Reserve protections. OCP provides healthcare to all ICCN ecoguards at the Okapi Clinic in Epulu as well as rations on patrols funded through a grant provided by Fondation Segrè. In the past year, ecoguards completed 220 foot patrols

covering 15,382 km. Patrols resulted in the removal of 672 snares/traps and 53 arrests for illegal activity within the Reserve boundaries, including poaching, mining, and fishing. OCP will continue working with Conserv Congo to learn more about this trend and support ICCN to implement protective measures that target wildlife trade.

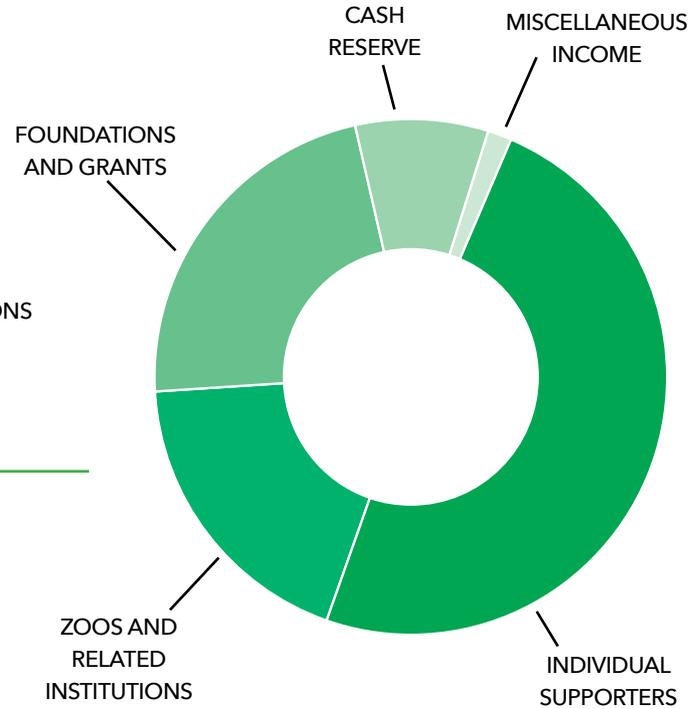


# 2022 FINANCIALS

## REVENUE

\$155,817	ZOOS AND RELATED INSTITUTIONS
\$297,163	FOUNDATIONS AND GRANTS
\$586,601	INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERS
\$50,753	CASH RESERVE
\$13,695	MISCELLANEOUS INCOME

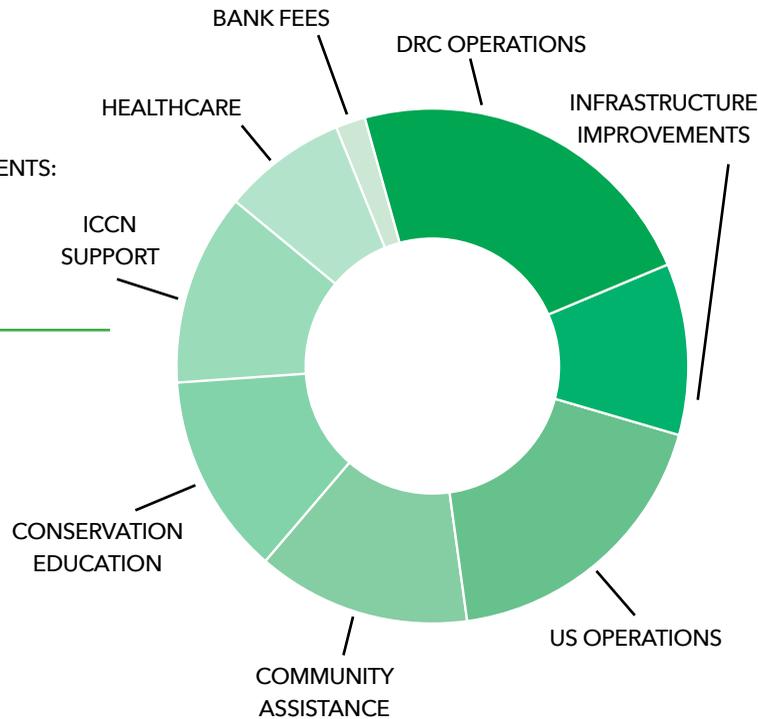
**\$1,104,029 TOTAL**



## EXPENSES

\$135,374	ICCN SUPPORT
\$149,726	COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE
\$142,690	CONSERVATION EDUCATION
\$103,396	INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS:
\$28,687	HEALTHCARE
\$260,330	DRC OPERATIONS
\$266,824	US OPERATIONS
\$17,002	BANK FEES

**\$1,104,029 TOTAL**



# DONORS & SUPPORTERS

## ZOOS AND RELATED INSTITUTIONS

- |  |  |                                       |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| AAZK Jacksonville                                    | Dublin Zoo                             | The Greater Baltimore Chapter of AAZK |
| Association of British and Irish Wild Animal Keepers | Fort Worth Zoo                         | Wilhelma Zoo                          |
| Beauval Nature Foundation                            | Greensboro Science Center              | Wroclaw Zoo                           |
| Bioparc Conservation                                 | Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens           | Wuppertal Zoo                         |
| Bioparc Doue La Fontaine                             | Kralove Zoo                            | Zoo Antwerpen                         |
| Branféré   | Lisbon Zoo                             | Zoo Basel                             |
| Cheyenne Mountain Zoo                                | Longneck Manor Conservation Foundation | Zoo Berlin                            |
| Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden                  | Maryland Zoological Society            | Zoo Falconara                         |
| Cologne Zoo  | Potowatomi Zoo                         | Zoo Miami                             |
| Columbus Zoo and Aquarium                            | Rotterdam Zoo                          | Zoo Mulhouse                          |
| Dallas Zoo   | Sacramento Zoo                         | Zoo Tampa                             |
| Disney's Animal Kingdom                              | Saint Louis Zoo                        |                                       |
|  | Stichting Wildlife                     |                                       |

## FOUNDATIONS AND GRANTING ORGANIZATIONS

- |                         |                     |                               |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Benevity Fund           | Network for Good    | The Walt Disney Company       |
| Customink LLC           | PayPal              | Tusk Trust                    |
| Facebook for NonProfits | Qualcomm Inc        | Wildlife Conservation Network |
| Foundation Segré        | Synchronicity Earth | Wildlife Conservation Society |
| Naviprojects, LLC       | Target Cybergrants  |                               |



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### \$10,000+

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Rabb, George & Mary  
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Terk, Mitchell

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### Up to \$250

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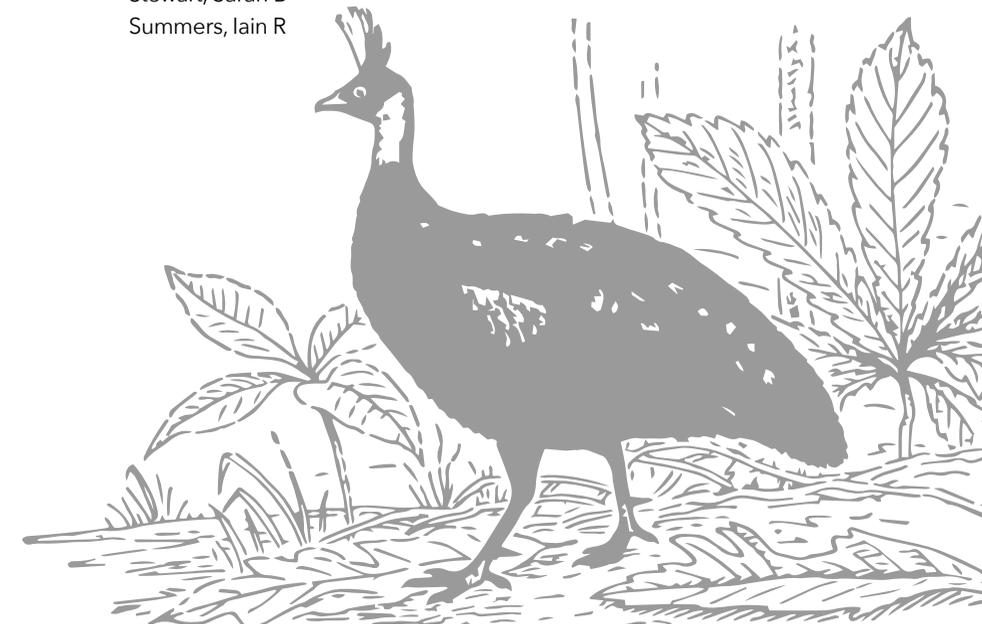
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Veed, Richard  
Victorine, Alie  
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Zezula, Victoria  
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# OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT

1615 RIVERSIDE AVENUE :: JACKSONVILLE, FL USA 32204  
EPULU STATION :: OKAPI WILDLIFE RESERVE, DRC

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