

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



**OKAPI
CONSERVATION
PROJECT**

MISSION

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

PROJECT STAFF

President (US): John Lukas
On-Site Director: Rosmarie Ruf
Accountant: Mutahinga Mumbere
 Eleme
Asst. Accountant: Kambale Katsuva
 Julien
Program Manager: Berce Nsafuansa
Program Officer (US): Lucas Meers

AGROFORESTRY

- Muvi Yalala
- Enckoto Bameseto
- Makubuli Mwanika
- Masiyiri Mulawa
- Mpinda Tchinkunku
- Muhindo Muliwavyo
- Kasereka Tsongo
- Sambu Mukandilwa
- Lobo Lina
- Nadepa Awelekyalanga
- Therese Bangeto

INFRASTRUCTURE/ MAINTENANCE

- Mbeté Nguma
- Kababo Mutubule
- Panga Madro
- Sagbolo Yuma
- Paluku Kakule
- Mbusa Mughanda
- Muhindo Maliro
- Vusike Kiruzi
- Abdoul KIMAKIMA
- Kasereka Katsuva
- Katsuva Kaposo
- Yangunapayi Makasi
- Abdala Morisho
- Baya Gbama
- Alezo Drudo

EDUCATION

- Jean Paul Mmonga Kiete
- Gomo Akya
- Kasereka Kyove
- Mumbere Kayenga
- Toliba Maseko
- Carine MAKONGA
- Roger OZANDE
- Eric SIVINA
- KAMBALE MASTAKI
- Faustin Mbuza
- Abdoul Arim Kimakima

HEALTH CARE

- Mulowayi Katalayi
- Anzatepedanga
- Mbambu Mituho
- Oyokudhu Alipa Franck
- Sebuho Bwichebungize





LETTER FROM JOHN

President, Okapi Conservation Project

The year 2019 was one of significant change for the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. A new management partnership between ICCN and WCS was put in place early in the year creating a Reserve Management Unit responsible for protecting and managing the Reserve. OCP continues to operate its programs under separate agreements with ICCN and WCS. It is intended that the new management structure will bring new sources of funding to improve protection and safeguard critical okapi habitat.

Brought on board in 2018, Berce Nsafuansa continued to develop strong leadership skills and as a result

OCP programs were more productive than ever. Berce has been making remarkable head way in forging positive relationships with community leaders, customary chiefs and government personnel around the Reserve. These relationships are necessary to open doors for our staff to be accepted and respected as they interact with community members.

As a project working with communities, OCP staff began making a greater effort this year to include the indigenous Mbuti pygmies in our camera trap program and monitoring the forest for threats to okapi. We have a long-standing relationship with the Mbuti and are



planning to develop, over the course of the next few years, programs that maintain and enhance their role as forest guardians and preserve their cultural identity.

As I write this letter, we are in the middle of the global coronavirus pandemic. Our world has been turned upside down. But I must say that the investment we have made with your generous support over many years, to our programs, in our staff in the US and most importantly

in our staff in DRC, is paying great dividends. We are not missing a programmatic beat due to the skills, efforts, and dedication of our Congolese staff that are getting the job done at a very high level of success amongst the most dangerous and challenging conditions in which to undertake conservation activities in Africa today.

On behalf of all OCP staff I thank you for taking an interest in our work.

Sincerely,
John



NEW MANAGEMENT FOR THE OKAPI WILDLIFE RESERVE

The Okapi Wildlife Reserve is now governed through a 10-year Co-management Partnership Agreement between the Institute in Congo for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Management of the Reserve is delegated to WCS through the appointment of the Director of the Reserve Management Unit. The Okapi Conservation Project (OCP) is a partner of the Reserve and operates our programs through a Collaboration Agreement with WCS and a Contract of Collaboration with ICCN.

This new Private Public Partnership, modeled after similar partnerships throughout the country, should bring much needed financial resources, greater efficiencies in operation and attract leadership with expertise in law enforcement to the Reserve.

Through this agreement, WCS, ICCN and OCP work together as a Reserve Management Unit with the government of DRC's plan to bring greater stability to the Reserve and surrounding forests, improve the welfare and operations of its eco-guards, and enhance the social well-being of the resident communities.

OCP staff continue to be responsible for conservation education, community relations and assistance, women's groups, agroforestry, okapi management and camera trapping to foster interest in the wildlife of the Reserve. OCP donors have generously supported the ICCN eco-guards and their patrol efforts for 20 years and that responsibility will be transitioned over to WCS as funds become available. For the time being, OCP staff will continue to operate the health clinic for Reserve employees





Director General of ICCN, Cosma Wilalunga (left), formally transferring management of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve to Tom Muller of WCS (right).

and their families as well as maintain the airstrip and the Epulu Station.

OCP educators are based in four offices around the Reserve interacting with the communities regularly and will represent any concerns from the local communities to the Reserve Management Unit. Interacting with and educating the 50,000 people living inside and around the Reserve is critical to improving land stewardship practices that reduce slash-and-burn agriculture which is the number one threat to okapi survival.

Despite the challenges, conserving the Okapi Wildlife Reserve is crucial if the remarkable level of biological

diversity which supports a viable population of okapi is to remain a functioning part of the Ituri Forest landscape for decades to come. Protecting the forest from exploitation and rallying communities to value okapi is the goal of OCP's brave staff who travel thousands of kilometers a year to reach the people living in and around the Reserve with a conservation message to protect okapi, 'the pride of DRC.'

Through the new management partnership, there is framework now in place to improve the protection of the most important place for okapi conservation in central Africa.



BERCE NSAFUANSA

OCP PROGRAM MANAGER

Funding from Tusk Trust allowed OCP to hire a new program manager, Berce Nsafuansa, to represent OCP among the Reserve partners as well as to spearhead biomonitoring operations. Berce is the son of Jean Nlamba who was a dedicated co-founder of OCP but was tragically killed in a car accident in 2003. As program manager, Berce acts as a bridge between OCP staff and the In-country Director, Rosmarie Ruf. His role encompasses both technical and administrative responsibilities – facing problems head-on while in the field and working with OCP’s agroforestry and education team to propose solutions to any issues that arise. Most of Berce’s time is spent on the ground ensuring our programs run smoothly, implementing new ideas and providing support to OCP staff. Just like his father, Berce’s genuine nature and passion for the project makes it easy for him to facilitate trust and a positive rapport

between OCP staff and the surrounding communities of the Reserve.

If you spend any time with Berce, it becomes clear he truly thrives as a motivator and source of encouragement for the team. Always pushing to achieve new levels of success for the project, Berce’s dedication to okapi conservation is evident. He has been excelling in his position, helping facilitate OCP’s role in the transition of the Reserve management. In 2019, he arranged the hand-off of newly constructed buildings from OCP to ICCN, expanded the camera trap program, assisted with World Okapi Day events and facilitated new initiatives involving Mbuti pygmies. Berce has had a role in accomplishing much of what is covered in this 2019 Annual Report and we are fortunate to call him part of the team.

Berce with Mbuti pygmy children



ICCN HIGHLIGHTS

Twenty nineteen was a quiet year in the Reserve in terms of security breaches, and as such, ICCN was able to mount over 500 patrols throughout the Reserve to thwart illegal activities, bring poachers to justice and document key wildlife observations. While on patrol, eco-guards covered 17,500 kilometers removing over 2,100 snares and dismantling over 1,250 active and abandoned poaching and mining camps. Poachers are immediately arrested when found and miners are peacefully removed and provided a warning. If they are reported mining for a second time, they are arrested on site.

These impressive numbers were accomplished due to the recruitment and training of 50 additional eco-guards to join the force this year.

With the OCP investment in infrastructure during the years since the 2012 attack, combined with the increase of eco-guards and improved communication between eco-guard patrol posts, ICCN eco-guards have consistently increased their ability to improve security across the Reserve this year compared to 2018.

Reducing security risks allows eco-guards to focus on patrolling the Reserve and dismantling illegal mining/poaching operations, further securing protection of wildlife. This allows OCP community assistance and conservation education program staff to move around safely and on schedule to reach communities spread over 20,000 km inside and around the Reserve.



Illegal gold mining is a threat to habitat loss in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.



Fifty new ICCN eco-guards were sworn in to service in 2019.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE RESERVE

Throughout 2019, the sound of construction work rang through Epulu. Determined to restore and update facilities around the Reserve, investment in developing permanent, high quality infrastructure was a priority for the year. Through grants from Fondation Segré and USFWS, OCP was able to construct key buildings to enhance operations and increase capacity for ICCN eco-guards and, thanks to a generous donor through Wildlife Conservation Network, OCP was able to renovate a dilapidated wing of the Okapi Dispensary in Epulu that OCP originally built in the 1990s.

Early in the year, focus remained on completing the ICCN depot for confiscated items. The depot's construction began in 2018, and the completed structure is now used to securely store contraband, weapons, and evidence seized from illegal

mining, logging, and poaching operations. Previously, these items were stored in the Assistant Warden's office that was partially destroyed in the 2012 attack on Epulu Station. There, the items were left unsecured and subjected to the elements. By utilizing the new depot, evidence will no longer degrade due to the weather, and it is now documented in a more structured process, leading to more convictions when cases of illegal mining or poaching go to court.

The Okapi Dispensary in Epulu was the second focus of our infrastructure improvements in 2019. Healthcare is the most important need in the community and providing access to doctors, nurses and even the most basic medications helps improve the communities' standard of living.



ICCN Storage Depot to safely store confiscated items as evidence for future convictions.



Grand opening of the Okapi Dispensary in October.

The new wing now allows for 24-hour care, comfortable beds for maternity needs and modern facilities for all patients. We also recognized the importance of Mbuti pygmy traditions and constructed an additional building that features rooms capable of supporting open-air fire pits. These fire pits are significant in Mbuti culture and allow them to feel comfortable during medical treatment and allow family members to join them which is an important part of their cultural traditions.

Following the construction of the dispensary, providing a new ICCN

Assistant Warden's residence was the final piece in the restoration of the Epulu Station after the attack in 2012.

The new building is located across the road from Epulu Station (the Warden's residence is located near the headquarters building) providing the oversight that is necessary to keep ICCN operations running smoothly. Constructing the Assistant Warden's residence near the Epulu Station ensures that an Officer of ICCN is readily available to provide a quick and efficient response time in the event of an emergency.



John Lukas with Mbuti pygmy chiefs outside their new wing at the Okapi Dispensary.



ICCN Assistant Warden's residence under construction.

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S GROUPS

Community engagement is critical when working to conserve endangered species. Since 2006, OCP has supported women in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve through providing opportunities in small-scale business development and training on environmental stewardship to improve their standard of living. The 250+ women who are part of the five Women's Groups located around the Reserve have become vocal advocates of sustainable agriculture and led the way in protecting the surrounding forest. Women's Groups actively improve food security, safeguard clean water sources, and provide alternative income generating opportunities through small business enterprises. Membership in Women's Groups has steadily increased since the inception of the program as they learn how their livelihoods can improve.

The success of the Women's Group office complex in Mambasa, which opened in early 2019, has led to an interest in similar facilities in other villages where our groups are located. OCP hopes to provide more of these buildings as funding is secured. The Mambasa office complex was the first building for the five Women's Groups around the Reserve to be built with an indoor workspace to continue working during inclement weather and covered storage to protect their equipment and materials. We intend to construct a building for the Epulu's Women's Group during 2020.

OCP also aids women's groups by covering the required registration fees with the Congolese government, offering administrative guidance, and providing supplies in exchange for their support of our ongoing conservation programs.



Distribution of materials to Niania Women's Group

Mambasa Women's Group

EXPANDING EDUCATION

OCP employs 15 educators that travel around the Reserve and develop curricula for schools focused around conservation education and the interdependence of health and sustainability including securing clean water sources, maintaining sustainable agriculture, and the negative impacts of mining on the forest. Education is not exclusively centered around children, either, as community leaders and government officials are contacted regularly to discuss issues they face and how we can help them.

Due to the Reserve's remote location, radio broadcasts are the most effective method to disseminate information to large numbers of

people. OCP educators develop and record broadcasts focused on protecting the forest and generating excitement for protecting okapi and other wildlife. These broadcasts are played on five stations around the Okapi Wildlife Reserve reaching many of the 50,000 residents in the area.

This year OCP also designed and distributed over 3,000 of our extremely popular educational calendars to highly visited areas. Each calendar features captivating photos of the Reserve with conservation messaging centered around protecting the forest and wildlife.



Students at the Okapi Epulu School
in Epulu.

GROWING AGROFORESTRY

Trees couldn't grow fast enough at the nurseries around the Reserve to supply the needs of farmers. Over 70,000 seedlings were distributed in 2019 contributing to sustainable agriculture and reforestation efforts by engaging communities in five key regions around the Reserve – Epulu, Mambasa, Biakato, Wamba and Niania. At any given time, OCP has 550 farmers in our Agroforestry program that are trained to use basic techniques that increase their crop yields and lengthen the life of the soil by up to 10 years.

These strategies keep farmers in the community-chosen agroforestry zones and out of the forest, ensuring the critical okapi habitat remains protected. Once they become self sufficient, new farmers are brought into the program.

Just as in Epulu in 2018, goats became an issue in Mambasa this year.

To protect against inquisitive goats and potential wanderers from the community, our team built a fence around the nursery to protect the seedlings for distribution for our programs.

An exciting development this year was the expanded involvement of children on International Tree Day in December. Children in each of the five regions participated in reforestation efforts of abandoned plots of land to expand wildlife corridors for animals and around their schools to provide shade for teachers and students. Children are message multipliers and instilling a passion for conservation of the environment while at school is carried with them when they go home, influencing their families and enacting small changes in behavior that make them better stewards for the surrounding environment.



The new fence in Mambasa to prevent curious goats from grazing.



Inquisitive goat



Collecting seedlings from our nursery in Niania for distribution to farmers in our Agroforestry program.



Therese is our newest employee in Agroforestry, leading the nursery in Wamba.



Leucana sp. is a nitrogen-fixing tree that is planted between rows of crops to naturally add nutrients to the soil.

INDIGENOUS MBUTI PYGMIES

Mbuti pygmies have lived in harmony with nature in the Ituri Forest for over 40,000 years. Their knowledge and understanding of the forest is critical to protecting the ecosystem and biodiversity long into the future. OCP has been working with villages around the Reserve for over 32 years to protect the Ituri Forest, and in recent years, we have learned how important the Mbuti perspective is to preserving the forest and understanding the near untouched state of the forest before we started our work.

Now, the Mbuti are involved in more activities and protection measures than ever before. Mbuti play a critical component in World Okapi Day events, bringing their

traditional dances to the celebrations, they participate in the ceremonies of new buildings constructed within the Reserve, blessing them for a positive outcome in the future, and recently, Mbuti pygmies have been recruited as ICCN eco-guards that are trained in military tactics and take part in patrolling the forest thwarting illegal activities and documenting key wildlife.

OCP employs Mbuti pygmies on Team Okapi to utilize their incredible knowledge of the forest and animal tracking skills to identify key areas to deploy our camera traps. In late 2019, OCP employed six Mbuti pygmy chiefs to find any sign of okapi in the area around Epulu.



Mbuti pygmy child at the ceremony celebrating the transfer of management of the Reserve.



Mbuti pygmies participating in World Okapi Day.



John Lukas with Chief Zaire - the oldest Mbuti pygmy chief in the region.

Almost immediately, Chief Musa sighted tracks of a female okapi and her calf, and we continue to track the pair. Chief Musa was able to creatively provide hoof print measurements using grass, in addition to collecting fecal and browse samples from the pair. This exciting development gives OCP and

the Mbuti a new opportunity to work together and share knowledge that benefits everyone, including okapi. OCP is now training the Mbuti to set up and check camera traps in the area, as we hope to learn as much about this mother/calf pair as possible.



Chief Musa sharing the data he collected on the mother and calf pair.



Fecal pellets and hoof print size collected by Chief Musa.

WORLD OKAPI DAY

Since 2016, World Okapi Day has contributed to increasing OCP's reach around the Reserve promoting our conservation messaging and advocating participation in our sustainable community assistance programs. This year provided our largest audience to date, reaching an estimated 18,000 residents around the Reserve exposing communities to conservation messaging focused on the importance of protecting the forest and using natural resources sustainably.

OCP educators, ICCN eco-guards and community members organized celebrations in six villages around the Reserve, each sponsored by a zoo around the world. Despite poor road conditions due to flooding, the staff and residents banded together to ensure celebrations reached each town, even creating makeshift rafts to navigate the flooded roads.

The event has proven to be an excellent way to bring people and their communities together, celebrating the okapi and their forest home. This year, Mbuti pygmies joined the reverie, sharing their traditional song and dance and celebrating alongside the villagers. The Mbuti possess a deep connection to the Ituri Forest, and consider okapi to be sacred and representing spirits of the forest. Their respect for the ecosystem and relationship with their environment is deeply aligned with the message of World Okapi Day.

We want to thank Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Dallas Zoo, Roosevelt Park Zoo, St. Louis Zoo, Tanganyika Wildlife Park, and Zoo Antwerpen for sponsoring the celebrations and educational activities to inspire and motivate communities around the Okapi Wildlife Reserve to protect the Ituri Forest and the wildlife within it.



Mbuti pygmies on World Okapi Day



Each village had a World Okapi Day banner displayed for the events.



Women's Group participating in a soccer match in Niania.



The poor infrastructure required several days' travel to villages around the Reserve.

CAMERA TRAPPING

In June 2019, Team Okapi, a group made up of seven ICCN eco-guards, six OCP staff, and six Mbuti pygmies set off on a journey to setup camera traps in the Mehwa edo. An edo is a natural clearing in the forest similar to a glade which provides animals of all species to congregate because of the plentiful access to water and mineral-rich soil. Based on intelligence gathered by indigenous Mbuti pygmies, this edo was a promising area to observe animals with minimal human interference. The team set out on a 5-day bushwhacking hike through the dense rainforest, and set up 10 camera traps in the area.

Camera traps provide us the opportunity to collect information on animal activity in a given region. They also provide extraordinary footage of local wildlife to share with

the communities in and around the Reserve showing them the importance of protecting this globally important ecosystem. It also allows us to connect this biodiversity hotspot with our wider community of global supporters educating them about the importance of investing in this region and supporting conservation.

We were hopeful Mehwa's seclusion would provide a window to how species behave without the influence of human activity, and provide a general baseline on types and abundance of species. After a few months, the memory cards were collected and we received a remarkable amount of footage including clips of okapi, elephants, forest buffalo, and leopards.





Okapi



Forest Elephant



Herd of Forest Buffalo

EBOLA THREATENS THE RESERVE

Ebola was identified in the Butembo area of Eastern DRC in August 2018 and continued to spread throughout the region during 2019. In the town of Mambasa, just a 1.5-hour drive from Epulu, an outbreak occurred after infected miners came out of the forest carrying the disease. In response, ICCN put strict access to the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and the Epulu Station Headquarters. OCP staff helped lead the charge on health safety, with healthcare workers receiving the vaccination, and educating communities to wash their hands frequently, avoid physical contact, and checking their temperature each time they entered or left the area.

After traveling from Mambasa with his grandmother, a child was diagnosed with Ebola and subsequently died in Epulu, resulting in a 21-day quarantine for the town. During this period, additional OCP staff and community members were able to get vaccinated, since

vaccinations were only distributed to community members if they were in an active Ebola zone.

Fortunately, no further cases occurred during the 21-day quarantine, and Epulu was declared Ebola-free. Still, the devastating disease continued to be a threat to the safety of the Reserve, especially with the outbreak continuing in nearby Mambasa.

Difficulty controlling the outbreak was attributed to high levels of insecurity which hampered the efforts to distribute vaccines to control the spread of the disease. Community mistrust and confusion around the validity of the outbreak led to multiple violent attacks on treatment centers and healthcare workers. These attacks also discouraged people from seeking treatment for the disease, choosing to stay home and risking the transmission to family members.



Ebola Handwashing Station



OCP Healthcare Staff at the opening of new Okapi Dispensary wing

RESCUING PRIMATES

Bushmeat poaching remains a threat to wildlife in the Reserve and occasionally ICCN eco-guards will confiscate chimpanzee infants while on patrol or within neighboring communities. Typically, when chimpanzees are hunted as a source of food, the adults will be killed and the infants are sold as pets to provide additional income for the poacher. Usually the infants have injuries or illnesses that need to be treated. During these instances, OCP staff in Epulu will provide immediate, short term care to stabilize the animals before they are transported to Lwiro Primate Sanctuary for integration into similar age groups of young chimps.

The most recent chimpanzee confiscation occurred in November of 2019 when two chimpanzees, a male and female were confiscated from near Maiko National Park and the town of Mambasa, respectively. The male chimp's fur appeared much lighter in color, a sign indicating malnourishment. Caretakers Mokonzi and Mao at Epulu Station immediately went

into action nursing the chimps back to health while they were waiting to be transported to Lwiro.

Ebola remained a looming threat during this time, even for non-human primates. Due to the areas these two chimps were recovered, they were subjected to a minimum 21-day quarantine period before they could be transferred to the Lwiro Primate Sanctuary. After their quarantine at Epulu, both chimps were flown to Lwiro Primate Sanctuary with the help of Virunga National Park pilot Anthony Caere where they currently reside.

It is moments like these where we can truly reflect on the hard work ICCN eco-guards commit to, and the dedication of the OCP staff who care for the infants around-the-clock. These men and women work every day ensuring a better future for wildlife in the Ituri Forest. We'd like to thank ICCN, Virunga National Park, Kahuzi-Biega National Park and Lwiro Primate Sanctuary for the collaborative effort to save these chimps.



The female (left) and male (right) chimpanzees in the plane on their way to Lwiro Primate Sanctuary. Photo by Anthony Caere.

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Szymanski, Nancy
Thomas, Deborah
Tissot, Tatiana
Tjugito, Rani
van Nice, Amy
Verma, Sumita
Vizcaya, Zugaitz
Walker, Ilona
Walker, Margaret
Wang, Joyce

DONORS & SUPPORTERS

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERS

Warner, Kathryn
Warren, Trina
Warriner, Joyce
Weittekemper, Anne
Weittekemper, Hartwig

Wheeler, Susan
Wieczorek, Diana
Wilcox, Clinton
Williams, Sarah and Sam
Wood, Patricia

Wyckoff, Robert
Zuckerman, Andrea

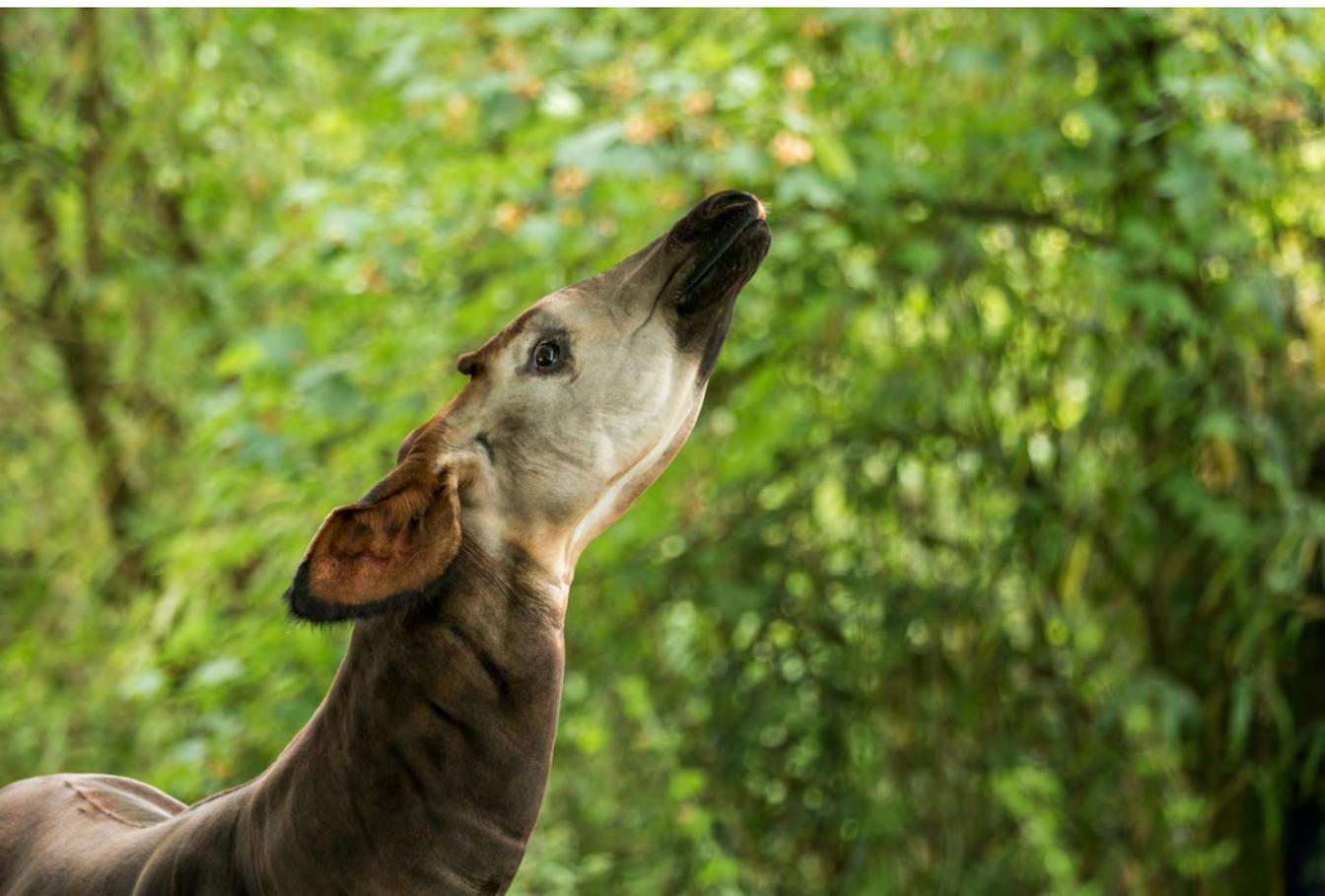
VOLUNTEERS

*We'd like to give a huge thank you to our volunteers
who have supported us over the past year.*

Scott Citino
Ellen Emrich
Evan Hale

Vanessa Lukas
Joel Masselink

Wildlife Conservation Global BOD
WCN Staff

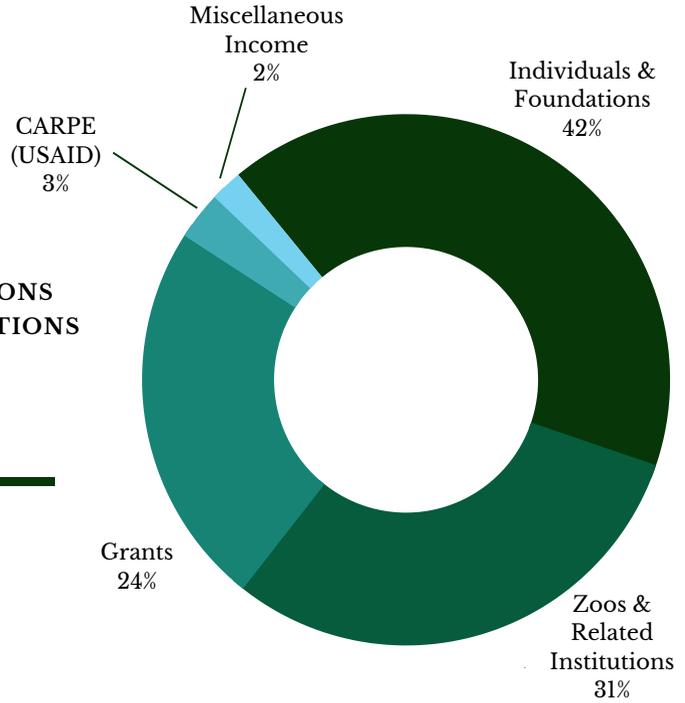


FINANCIALS

REVENUE

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
| \$318,940 | INDIVIDUALS & FOUNDATIONS |
| \$236,830 | ZOOS & RELATED INSTITUTIONS |
| \$185,978 | GRANTS |
| \$20,884 | CARPE (USAID) |
| \$15,850 | MISCELLANEOUS INCOME |

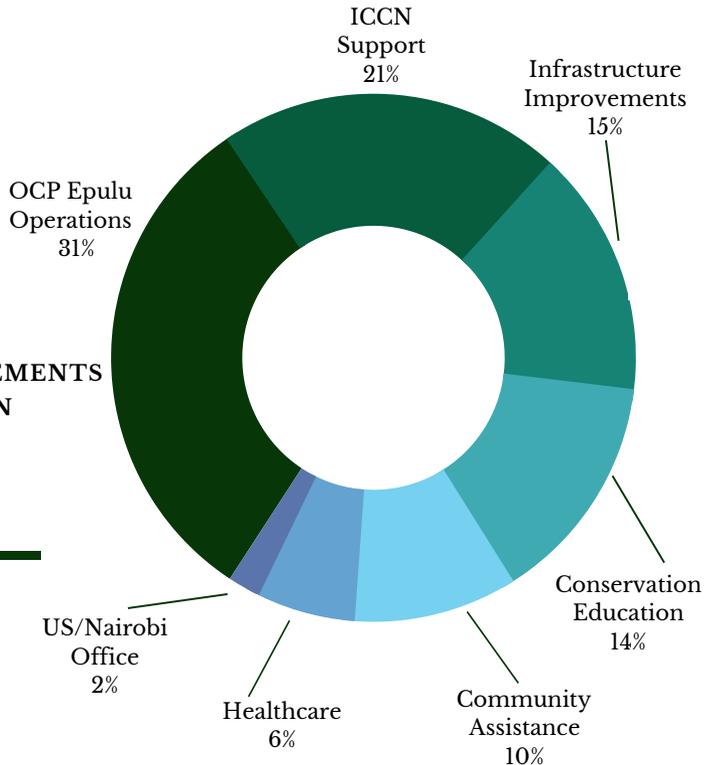
\$778,482 TOTAL



EXPENSES

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
| \$237,863 | OCP EPULU OPERATIONS |
| \$166,905 | ICCN SUPPORT |
| \$119,393 | INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS |
| \$109,684 | CONSERVATION EDUCATION |
| \$81,031 | COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE |
| \$44,994 | HEALTHCARE |
| \$18,500 | US/NAIROBI OFFICE |

\$778,370 TOTAL







OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT

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WWW.OKAPICONSERVATION.ORG