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Zoo Director

## **FIELD PROGRAMS TAKE CONSERVATION OUTSIDE ZOO GATES**

ASHEBORO--The North Carolina Zoo's field programs take conservation beyond the park gates by working "hands-on" with conservation organizations, community groups and government agencies both within North Carolina and internationally.

The zoo's international conservation programs are focused in Africa because of the zoo's large African exhibit region and the many African species in its plant and animal collections. Africa is home to some of the world's richest wildlife areas and is a continent where growing human populations, extreme poverty, expanding farms, logging and unregulated hunting threaten to destroy the wildlife and natural resources.

The N.C. Zoo's Field Conservation Program seeks to ensure the preservation of wildlife in its natural habitats while also recognizing the interdependence that exists between people and their natural environment. The zoo's field projects promote conservation of Africa's biodiversity through protection and management of wildlife and wild places, education, field research and developing the capacity of people and organizations in Africa to manage their own natural resources. Working directly with the people who live in these biologically rich areas and providing them with the skills and tools to conserve wildlife is the best way to ensure the long-term survival of Africa's many endangered species.

### **North Carolina Zoo's Flagship Conservation Projects:**

#### **Elephant Conservation in Cameroon**

Elephant populations across Africa are increasingly threatened by accelerating competition for land and food with humans. Elephant populations are shrinking as people gradually erode their habitat and hunt elephants for their meat and ivory.

The N.C. Zoo has been involved with the conservation of elephants in the central African country of Cameroon for ten years. The project, led by the zoo's Chief Veterinarian Dr. Mike Loomis and conducted in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund, focuses on monitoring elephant behavior using satellite tracking collars.

By placing tracking collars on elephants, the project is able to document annual elephant ranges and identify important areas for conservation. The project also works to reduce conflicts between elephants and people, primarily due to crop raiding by elephants. By studying elephant movements and involving local people, the project has reduced the number of elephants killed annually due to conflicts with farmers from 20 to less than one. At the same time, the number of humans injured or killed by elephants each year in the project areas has been cut from 10 to zero and the annual value of crop losses has been reduced from \$200,000 to \$80,000.





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### **Cross River Gorilla Conservation in Nigeria and Cameroon**

Inhabiting the rugged highlands on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, the Cross River gorilla is the most critically endangered of all the African apes and one of the 25 most endangered primates in the world. These animals are threatened by both habitat loss and hunting for meat. Led by Dr. Rich Bergl, the N.C.Zoo's Curator of Conservation and Research, in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society, the project's focus is providing training and equipment for wildlife conservation staff working on the ground in Cameroon and Nigeria.

Currently, wildlife managers lack the tools and capacity to adequately monitor the Cross River gorilla population. Even the most basic tools such as reliable maps of the gorilla areas are not available. These deficits prevent adequate protection of the gorillas. The N.C. Zoo's Cross River gorilla project is developing a geographic information system (GIS, or computerized mapping database) for gorilla conservation. The project is also creating detailed maps of the gorilla areas using satellite imagery and aerial photography which will be used by conservationists involved with Cross River gorilla conservation. Doing so will allow for better protection of the Cross River population.

### **UNITE Conservation Education Program in Uganda**

Uganda and North Carolina International Teaching for the Environment (UNITE) is the N.C.Zoo's conservation education and teacher training project in Uganda. The project has been operating in the villages around Kibale National Park for almost 10 years. Coordinated by the zoo's Education Department, UNITE is committed to conserving wild areas in and around Kibale by promoting environmentally sound attitudes, knowledge and skills of people living in the area.

The UNITE project works with local schools around the national park to help teachers develop an environmental curriculum. The project trains teachers, provides teaching materials and builds schools in the villages which surround Kibale. By promoting environmental and conservation education we are helping to build the next generation of conservationists in Uganda.

### **Tooro Botanical Garden**

To further the conservation of biological diversity in Uganda, the N.C. Zoo is supporting the development of the Tooro Botanical Gardens (TBG). The TBG will become a resource for biodiversity conservation in eastern Uganda and will include a herbarium, educational programs, living collections and ecotourism opportunities.

The major objectives of the garden are training, research and education focused on the conservation of the unique and endangered plants found in this area. The zoo is





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providing training for TBG staff in plant collection and herbarium management, development of educational programs and raising money for the construction of TBG facilities.

The Tooro project also helps to develop the N.C. Zoo's plant collections through export of samples from Uganda and captive propagation. The project is led by N.C. Zoo Curator of Horticulture Gin Wall.

### **Support of Chimp & Ecological Research in Kibale National Park**

The zoo has supported the research of Dr. Jeremiah Lwanga in Kibale National Park, Uganda for more than five years. Dr. Lwanga, a native of Uganda, works at the Ngogo research site at Kibale and conducts research on rainforest trees and plants used by chimpanzees. He is also involved with conservation monitoring of the Ngogo chimpanzee population.

In addition to his field research, Dr. Lwanga has helped to develop educational materials at the zoo's chimpanzee exhibit focused on chimpanzee conservation. The N.C. Zoo and Dr. Lwanga are also exploring ways in which he can collaborate with the UNITE and TBG programs in Uganda. Support for Dr. Lwanga comes entirely from the donation box at the N.C. Zoo's chimpanzee exhibit.

### **Wildlife surveys and National Park Planning in Southwest Nigeria**

The forests of Southwest Nigeria may be among the country's most important areas for rainforest conservation. Some of the last remaining forest elephants in West Africa are found in these forests, along with chimpanzees and other endangered primates. However, these forests have been largely neglected by local and international conservation efforts.

The N.C. Zoo is partnering with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation to conduct biodiversity surveys of these forests, particularly the Omo and Oluwa forest reserves. The goal of the surveys will be to determine what wildlife remains in the forests and develop a plan for its conservation. By determining what wildlife remains in these forests, the project will help to develop a plan to establish a new national park or wildlife reserve.

Partnerships like those between the zoo and conservation organizations, local communities and government agencies across Africa are essential to developing effective conservation programs. These types of partnerships offer the best hopes for preserving the last remaining habitats of hundreds, if not thousands, of unique and endangered wildlife species.

