



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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PRESS RELEASE

Carbon finance is key to better protection of gorillas and elephants to maintain health of African rainforests says UN Ambassador

Washington/Bonn, 13 October 2009 - - The United Nations Ambassador for the Year of the Gorilla, Ian Redmond, has called for the inclusion of gorillas and elephants, as important components in African rainforests, in the upcoming climate negotiations in Copenhagen.

Large mammals, such as elephants and gorillas, are keystone species in their relevant ecosystems. Gorillas act as 'gardeners' in the rainforests of the Congo Basin, and protecting them helps prevent loss of flora that are ecologically dependent on them.

Gorillas are second only to elephants in the number of seeds they disperse each day in the forests of Africa. When eating fruit and seeds, the seeds pass through their system and are in this way prepared for germination.

UN Ambassador, Ian Redmond, who has just returned from a fact-finding mission across eight African gorilla range states said: "The gorillas and elephants of Africa are doing the world a service. UNEP has just succeeded in its Seven Billion Tree campaign, but I would estimate that the apes and elephants of Africa disperse some seven billion seeds every day! The full extent of the role they play in maintaining the health of their forest habitat - a central component of the Earth's climate regulation - is still poorly understood."

Fifteen years of armed conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa, accompanied by illegal exploitation of minerals to finance militias, led to a sharp increase in demand for bushmeat. In addition, rapidly growing urban populations accelerated deforestation through charcoal production. Consequently, gorillas and elephants have been poached in large numbers.

A dramatic decline in the diversity of vegetation can be observed in parts of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. As gorillas declined and elephants vanished from the montane area, the forest's flora changed into denser, less diverse vegetation. Weed-like plants, which were formerly held in check by elephants and gorillas, have become much more dominant and are suffocating trees, thereby accelerating deforestation. *Myrianthus* fruit trees, whose seeds had formerly been dispersed especially by large mammals, are being killed by the *Sericostachys scandens* vines and if this continues may become increasingly rare.

By building nests, gorillas break off branches and create gaps in the forest canopy that allow light through to the forest floor enabling smaller plants to grow.

The survival of forests requires the protection of the animals in them as well as the trees. In the long term, deforestation is as much a consequence of over-hunting as of cutting trees for charcoal or timber.

Insights gained from encounters with senior government officials, ex-militia, park wardens, conservationists, poachers, loggers and farmers highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to conserve rain forests and gorillas in the Congo Basin.

Supporting existing national action plans to halt deforestation of gorilla habitat is one of the major objectives of the CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Gorilla and their Habitat during the Year of the Gorilla campaign.

Notes to Editors

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. With currently 112 member countries, many of them in Africa, CMS is a fast-growing convention with special importance due to its expertise in the field of migratory species.

More information is available at: www.cms.int

The Year of the Gorilla 2009

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, declared 2009 the Year of the Gorilla (YoG). Partners in this campaign include the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP), in cooperation with UNEP and UNESCO, and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). The initiative is part of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Its main objective is to raise funds, awareness and political will to implement the CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Gorillas and their Habitats, a legally binding treaty between gorilla range states.

More information and a selection of videos on this topic on the Year of the Gorilla are available at: www.yog2009.org

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