

The bonobo („pygmy chimpanzee“) is the least known great ape. Research on this species in the wild started in the 70s. Unlike chimpanzees and gorillas, bonobo females are dominant in their societies! Mothers with their sons are the core of the groups. Bonobos of all age classes show many sexual behaviours that do not serve reproduction: It rather relaxes tension in conflict situations. Make love - not war!



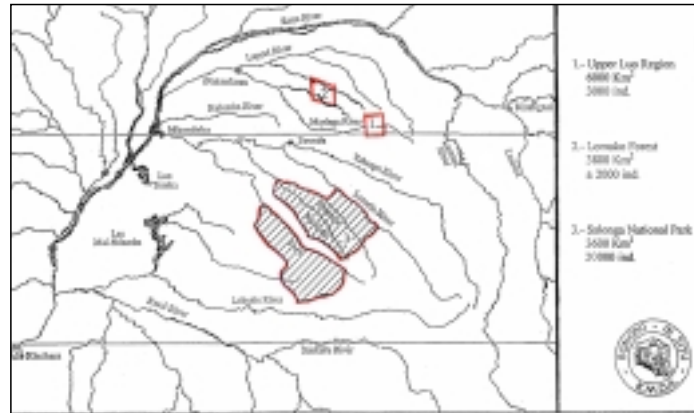
T. Funachi

Bonobos are only found in **an area of 500,000 km²** south of the river Congo in the DR Congo. Their distribution is broken up into isolated patches, and a lot of regions are still unknown. There are only very inaccurate estimates of their population numbers. For 1998 it was **50,000 individuals**.

Just a few zoos worldwide keep and breed bonobos; at the end of 1998 the International Studbook registered a total of 126 individuals in 20 European and American zoos.

Almost the whole of the area of bonobo distribution has been allocated as logging concessions, mainly to European logging companies. One large concession is owned by the German company *Danzer*. Even in areas without commercial logging the bushmeat trade can be a severe threat to bonobos. Nowadays it has become the main source of income for many families in Central Africa.

The Lomako Forest belongs to the Mongo tribe, who traditionally were farmers and planted coffee, cacao and corn. But world market prices for these crops have declined to the extent that it no longer pays to plant them. More and more people take the decision to go back into the forest.



Distribution map of bonobos. Research sites are shown by the circled areas.

They cultivate just a few manioc fields and mainly live from hunting (for themselves and for sale). The commercial meat trade is one of the few avenues to earn money to pay their children's school fees, medicine and other basic needs.



W. Reischel

Kuni and the Starling

In Twycross Zoo (England) the following happened: A bonobo female, Kuni, caught a starling. The keeper told her severely not to harm the screaming bird and to let it free. Kuni brought the shocked but unharmed starling to the outside enclosure and sat it softly on its feet. It continued to sit there, whereupon Kuni threw gently into the air - but it just flattered briefly and then again sat motionless. Thereupon Kuni grabbed the bird with one hand, climbed the highest tree in the enclosure and clung to the top with both feet so as to have her hands free. Than she very carefully spread the bird's wings, holding one in each hand, and threw it as far as she could. The starling landed at the edge of the enclosure but still inside. Kuni ran to it and protected it against the curious youngsters. In the evening the keeper looked again for the bird but did not find it. There were no feathers; the bird had probably flown away after it recovered from the shock.



J. Dupain

Dried, partially eaten bonobo arm.