

## **IPS Education Committee Announces the Following Award Recipients August 2004**

In honor of Dr. Charles Southwick's longstanding commitment to conservation education, we have developed the Charles Southwick Conservation Education Commitment Award. This award is dedicated to recognizing individuals living in primate habitat countries that have made a significant contribution to formal and informal conservation education in their countries. The amount of the award is \$1,000: \$750 is given to the recipient and \$250 will be given in the recipient's name to a project of their choosing in their community.

The IPS Education Committee is pleased to announce the 2005 Charles Southwick Conservation Education Award to:

Gregoire Nohan for his long term involvement and commitment to chimpanzee conservation and research.

Gregoire Kohou Nohon recently celebrated his 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the Tai Chimpanzee Project where he has been working as a field assistant since February 1984. Gregoire was the first local guide recruited by Prof. Christophe Boesch to study the behavioural diversity of chimpanzees in the Tai National Park. Since 2002 he has also assisted the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation in carrying out their environmental education program, including organizing theatre performances, village discussions, film shows and educational school visits.

Starting in 1983, Gregoire quickly became interested in learning more about the chimpanzees that the Boesch's were following day after day. Thus, in 1984 he was trained as a field assistant and by 1986 he was collecting scientific data, first on aggressive and social interactions and then on mother and child relations. Since then Gregoire himself has trained over 20 local field assistants and introduced more than 60 international students to the Tai chimpanzees. His knowledge and talent to communicate his own experiences to others has contributed to many successful studies, as well as numerous scientific and popular publications and books on the chimpanzees in Côte d'Ivoire. In the Tai National Park, Gregoire initiated the creation of a union (Amicale de Parc National de Tai), which counts amongst its members all of the assistants working on the various projects within the Park (Monkey Project, Ecotourism Project, Projects on other mammals, birds, amphibians, birds, insects, plants, etc.). Among other tasks, the union's role is to inform the people in the villages surrounding the park about the activities going on within the Park.

As well as being a research assistant, Gregoire has also been active in environmental education over the past 20 years. The WWF and other local NGOs have invited him on numerous occasions to present talks on the behaviour and conservation of chimpanzees and their habitat to teachers, schoolchildren and villagers in the regions around the Tai National Park. He is an active member of NGO's such as SOS Forêt which promotes the

conservation of the Taï National Park and all surrounding village forests. He also leads education campaigns for local NGO's like AVS (Action a Haute Valeur Symbolique), which has encouraged cooperation between all projects, NGO's and government institutions with development and conservation activities around Taï National Park, after the civil war broke out in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002. Gregoire also initiated numerous anti-poaching campaigns and succeeded in converting several poachers to field assistants or otherwise convincing them to give up poaching and rather involve themselves in developmental projects including livestock farming which also diminishes bush-meat consumption. He is also the president of the youth in his own village Ponan, where he is regularly organising cultural and sporting events that promote the conservation of the rainforest and its fauna.

His 20 years of field experience with chimpanzees and his talent to make people sympathise with the plight of chimpanzees and their habitat have qualified him above all others to lead the education campaigns carried out by the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation. Since 2002 Gregoire has been in charge of several education campaigns around the Taï, Marahoué and Banco National Parks including theatre and film performances in about 75 villages. The WCF developed a theatrical play with the theatre group, Ymako Teatri, that addresses human-chimpanzee conflicts and Gregoire's input in the set up of the piece 'Our cousins from the forest' and his ongoing input during the 'chimpanzee scenes' is of great value for the improvement and evolution of the play. So far over 45,000 members of the general public have already attended the play. Gregoire leads discussions and question and answer periods with the public after the theatre and film shows, which often go on for more than an hour. When explaining chimpanzee behaviours or the reason as to why one would want to protect chimpanzees, he has an enormous repertoire of 'anecdotes and real stories from the forest' to tell, which are highly convincing, especially since he is 'just another villager' like everyone else but one who obviously cares for chimpanzees and the forest.

Besides working with the professional theatre group, Gregoire also assisted in the formation and set-up of several school theatre projects. He proved indispensable in overseeing and supporting these student groups (with up to 20 children per group) on their theatre tours to regions around the national parks. He is not only capable of raising interest in, and motivating adults towards the conservation of chimpanzees and the forest, but is also able to fascinate children of all ages with his knowledge and story-telling abilities. In the last two years he has also supervised environmental education conducted by three teachers that are financially supported by the WCF. He develops, plans and helps to implement environmental education classes, nature classes in village forests, visits to the National Parks and education meetings in the villages of the teachers. Under his initiative the teachers formed an awareness committee where villagers themselves monitor illegal activities committed by people of their own village. They control illegal activities like poaching, the selling, buying and trading of bush-meat and the installation of illegal plantations within protected areas.

Since Gregoire's career has been such a good example to villagers and to furthermore honour his long term commitment, the 'life of Gregoire' is described via text and comic

illustration in the biannually-printed WCF newsletter. This allows many people to follow the development of a little boy who used to go hunting with his father and consume bushmeat (including chimpanzees) to one of the most passionate and committed people who fight for the protection of chimpanzees.

This year the WCF will be continuing all of its activities in Côte d'Ivoire and Gregoire will be leading further campaigns. Moreover, the WCF is currently starting a school exchange program between 100 pupils from a German school in Leipzig and 100 Ivorian pupils from several schools in the east of the Taï National Park. Gregoire will supervise and execute many of the activities involved in that exchange. Furthermore, this year the WCF will expand its multi-media education campaign to Guinea and Sierra Leone. Gregoire's input will be crucial to make the campaigns elsewhere as successful as they have been in Côte d'Ivoire.

Gregoire also continues to guide the assistants and students of the Taï Chimpanzee Project and collects data on mother-infant relations. Despite his enjoyment for educating other people about the value of chimpanzees and the forest, he still always loves to return to the forest and spend the day observing chimpanzees himself.

Please join me in congratulating Gregoire for his significant contribution to educating future generations to conserve primates and their habitats.