

# Forest Wisdom



Journal No. 5  
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... Hey, did  
you know  
that ...



# FOREST WISDOM

## A NEWSLETTER FOR ALL OF YOU:

- Villagers living near a national park, and for
- Everyone who cares about the conservation of forests and wildlife

Gahably village committee for the protection of Taï National Park in Côte d'Ivoire.



School children watching the theatre play near Gola Forest in Sierra Leone.



## FOREST WISDOM

- Tells the life story of special forest inhabitants: chimpanzees
- Shows the problems and threats to the forest
- Supplies information
- Answers your questions and invites you to contribute to this newsletter
- Invites you to protect the great forest, this national heritage which is also yours

## CONTENTS

In this edition:

- Editorial
- Knowledge of our ancestors
- Grégoire Nohon tells us about...
- WCF and its projects
- The life of our chimpanzees: Ella – a family history (2)
- The tamtam...

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Hello and good health to you all!

“Once upon a time... there was a pregnant woman gathering wood in the forest. Unfortunately, she lost her way and was caught by nightfall. The next day, she had not yet left the forest when she went into labour. Lost and alone, she was about to deliver her baby by herself when a softly grunting chimpanzee approached and helped her in her hour of need. Thanks to this unexpected help, mother and child were saved and returned to their village in good health. The young mother then proudly presented her son to the villagers, who had been worried about her whereabouts, and told them about the precious help she had received from the chimpanzee. Since that time, the chimpanzee is the totem of her family.”

This story was told to me by an old man from a village near Tãï, and shows how, in the African tradition, people have long been aware that the forest and the animals living there could be really important for the inhabitants of the region.

Does science come to the same conclusion? I will try to convince you that the answer is, Yes! Let's take the elephant for instance: in the past, many elephants were slaughtered for the ivory trade. Today this is forbidden. Ivory has become nearly worthless and in many regions elephants have disappeared. But even more surprising is the fact that since all the elephants were killed the seeds of the Macore tree no longer sprout. This tree is even disappearing. And why? Because these seeds grow very badly when they haven't passed through the gut of an elephant. Many other trees of the forest also need elephants for their dissemination and the sprouting of their seeds. If we don't do anything, it's not only elephants that will be exterminated. We won't even be able to make a good seed sauce...

And here's another example: recent and very exact studies carried out in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Liberia show that the disappearance of the forest caused a regular decline of the amount of rain falling in these countries. The “Cacao belt” in Côte d'Ivoire used to extend to the region of Abengourou but is now confined to the Daloa zone, following almost exactly the line of the rain decrease. This rainfall decline is more pronounced in the forest zones than in the savannas. If this trend continues, in 20 years it will no longer be possible to grow cacao and coffee plants in Côte d'Ivoire. We will all be punished.

Thus, our old people were right when they suggested that the forest gives us great riches. Therefore, let's do everything we can to save it and secure our children's future.

See you soon,  
*Christophe Boesch*





*Irvingia gabonensis* (Aubry Leconte ex O'Rorke) Baill. Irvingiaceae  
 Indigenous names in Côte d'Ivoire : Boborou or Poborou (in Abé), Bé (in Attié), Brètié (in Ebrié), Kalo, Kakourou (in Gouro), Kpé (in Yaouba), Sakosou (in Bété), Kplélé (in Oubi), Kplé-tou (in Guéré)

*Irvingia* is a typically shaped tree which can be found mainly in the humid and semi-deciduous tropical forests. It has a straight trunk with quite large buttresses at its base. The bark is yellow-beige. The leaves are leathery, glossy on both sides and end in short points. In the middle of the leaves is a protruding vein with 6 to 8 pairs of smaller veins branching off to both sides. The tree also has small yellow blossoms that grow into fruits from December to June.

*Irvingia* produces yellow-greenish fruits which resemble mango fruits and likewise contain a seed. In certain regions of Côte d'Ivoire people eat their flesh, and the village populations of the Guére or Wé even appreciate the fruits for their edible seeds also known under the name "Kplé".

### *The legend of Irvingia*

In the Toulepleu region of Western Côte d'Ivoire, the Guére or Wé legend tells that one day a big crocodile caught a young man and put him into a hole. The unlucky man was saved by a fruit from a *Irvingia* tree near the river. The fruit fell heavily on the ground and, as by Providence, made a hole just where the young man was held captive. He escaped and returned safe and sound to his village. Out of gratitude, the villagers no longer eat the fruits or seeds of *Irvingia gabonensis*. Anyone who is not obedient to this self-imposed prohibition will be hit by a severe disease which can only be cured by the healing powers of this tree.

### *Medical use*

A decoction of the bark is used as a laxative to cure stomach or kidney pain. A paste from the pounded bark mixed with kaolin is used as body pack to cure scabies.

### *Use of the seeds*

The seeds are dried, roasted and pounded with chili pepper to create an oily paste or a powder. The paste is then either eaten directly with cooked rice or used for a sauce called "kplé". To prepare this sauce, one puts the paste into hot water along with chili pepper powder. This mixture is then beaten with a special small whisk. The "kplé" sauce is eaten with manioc or banana foutou, plakali or prepared rice.

The seeds are also used for the fabrication of a beauty cream which is thought to make the skin soft and radiant.

### *Consumption by the chimpanzees*

The chimpanzee very much like to eat *Irvingia* fruits that have fallen to the ground. They chew them for a long time to get the juice out of the fruit, but avoid eating the fibers of the flesh. When they are done chewing, they leave the fruits on the ground until the flesh has decomposed. Then, the chimpanzees come back and open the dried seeds with their teeth. It takes a great deal of strength to get to the almond rich in protein.

## GRÉGOIRE NOHON TELL US ABOUT...

His discussions with the villagers about chimpanzee hunting.

Hedwige Boesch

*Grégoire, the assistant of the Tai Chimpanzee Project in Côte d'Ivoire tells the people in the village what is happening in the forest when he follows the chimpanzees every day, all day. This week, he saw them catch a red colobus monkey...*



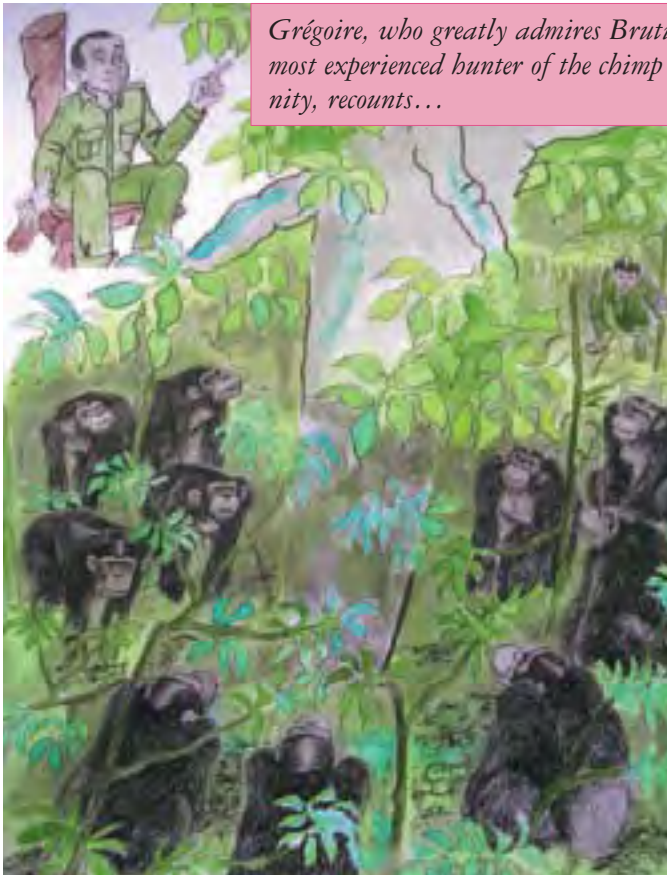
It's Friday, market day. Grégoire is tired and happy to spend a weekend with his family. As he arrives in the village, he sees a passing poacher with his gun and a backpack containing a dead animal.

Then, in his yard, surrounded by the curious people who always like him to tell what he has seen in the forest, Grégoire explains what a real hunt is – without guns or traps – and how the chimpanzees organize themselves to catch their prey.

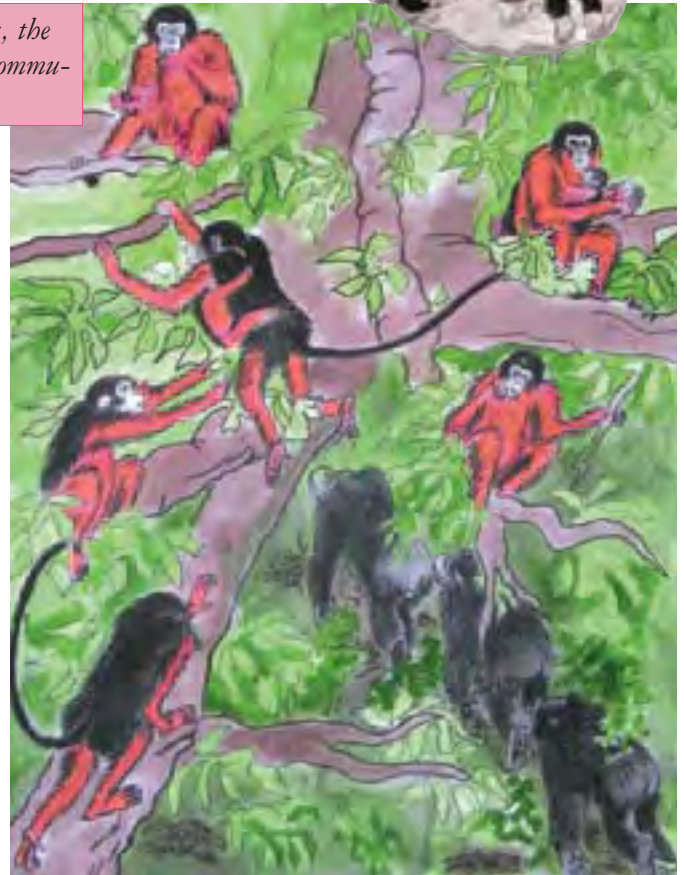
## GRÉGOIRE NOHON TELL US ABOUT...



*Grégoire, who greatly admires Brutus, the most experienced hunter of the chimp community, recounts...*



"It's 6 o'clock on a misty morning and I find the 10 male chimpanzees in a swampy area. It is very humid and cold. The chimpanzees sit in complete silence listening intently to the slightest sound in the forest..."



All of a sudden, the characteristic metallic bark of a red colobus can be heard. Brutus gets up immediately and leaves. All the others follow him silently. We arrive under the tree where the colobus monkeys are eating leaves and grooming.



The chimpanzees look at each other and young Snoopy starts to climb silently into the tree. Ulysse moves without a sound 50 m away to another big tree, into which he climbs. Frightened by Snoopy, the colobus monkeys flee towards the tree Ulysse has climbed. When they see him emerging, they screech and change direction. Brutus, the expert, observed them attentively, and then runs as fast as he can and swings with all his might into exactly the tree the monkeys had chosen to escape. And here, they bump into Brutus. That's amazing!



The terrified colobus monkeys are caught in the trap between Snoopy, Ulysse and Brutus. Some throw themselves intrepidly into the void. On the ground, other chimpanzees excitedly follow the action.



While Ulysse defends himself against three of the monkeys, which bite him everywhere, Brutus grabs another big one and kills him with a bite to the neck.



There is an explosion of cries. Victoriously, Brutus descends with his prey from the tree and walks around for a while, dragging the monkey behind him.

"See how well organized the chimpanzees are! They cooperate and then share the prey fairly. Everyone who participated in the hunt receives meat, even the young ones."



"Um, that's too much! These chimps are really intelligent."



Then they divide up the kill. Brutus tears the prey into pieces. He cuts himself a piece of the spine, cuts a leg for Ondine, his preferred female, and finally he gives the rest to Ulysse, who shares with Snoopy, the third hunter, and so on... Everyone eats the meat with soft leaves! The feast lasts about 3 hours."

## THE WCF AND ITS PROJECTS

Ilka Herbinger

### Bio-monitoring in Côte d'Ivoire – at Banco NP, Marahoué NP and Taï NP

*Ilka Herbinger for WCF with Paul N'Goran, Célestin Kouakou and Hjalmar Kübl and in collaboration with OIPR, Abidjan University, CSRS, MPI-Leipzig, Conservation International, GTZ, WWF and EU*  
What is behind this phrase “bio-monitoring”? It is about going into the forest and using precise methods to find out what kind of animals are in there and what their survival chances are: For instance:

- Where are the chimpanzee populations?
- Are chimpanzees numerous or are they under threat of extinction?
- Can we be precise about their numbers?
- Which are the most severe threats for these animals (poaching, deforestation, diseases...)?

This information is collected by villagers, park wardens, and researchers who use scientific techniques in the field as well as for the analysis. The resulting information is intended as a base for the park managers' conservation efforts: they learn about the whereabouts of the main threats and can react quickly and efficiently.



*Ecologists and park wardens during their training in Taï National Park. (Photo: Ilka Herbinger)*

### Film Tour in the west of Taï National Park in Côte d'Ivoire

*Ilka Herbinger, tour organized by Zoro Bertin Goné Bi*



Photos: Zoro Bertin Goné Bi

*Bad road...*



*Very concentrated children.*

Torrential rains and blocked roads have not prevented Zoro Bertin Goné Bi from WCF to undertaking the tour and attracting a crowd of interested people in 16 villages. No less than 17,000 people have seen the films on the extraordinary behavior of the chimpanzees of Taï forest and on the WCF activities in favor of better protection of chimpanzees. We thank everybody for having so actively and passionately participated in the discussions. We hope that ALL of you will become active to protect the forest and the chimpanzees.

### The theatre is on tour in Sierra Leone

Ilka Herbinger

In December 2005, WCF with Zoro Bertin Goné Bi and Yasmin Moebius became active in Sierra Leone in collaboration with the “Conservation Society of Sierra Leone“, the “Forestry Division” and the company “Tabule Theatre”. The play “Nuvui Ke Ngolei Ndengasiamia” in the local language Mendé (“We and the chimpanzees, our brothers”) as well as films on chimpanzee behaviour were brought to the Gola forest. With its 75'800 ha, it is the biggest forest in the country. The audience appreciated the performances and the people have expressed their worries and their critiques. They came in a record number of 18,000 people! Despite a very difficult post-war situation, the majority has judged in favor of protecting chimpanzees and the forest – also for the well-being of the human population. THANKS very much for the support in Sierra Leone!



*The theatre and its public in Sierra Leone.*

Photos: Zoro Bertin Goné Bi





## ELLA – A FAMILY HISTORY (2)

Hedwige Boesch



*In the last edition we started our story in 1983, with Ella and her three sons Kendo, Fitz and Gerald. Now let's move ahead to 1989! Kendo is a 20 year old adult, Fitz a 13 year old adolescent and little Gerald is 6 years old. Ella's role is now very important because her eldest Kendo has ambitions to become the boss.*



Macho is the dominant male of the group but for the last year Kendo, the number two, has been regularly provoking him. Macho and the other big males Falstaff, Brutus and Ulysse slap Kendo whenever they can. When mother is nearby, Kendo manages to make Macho flee and scream, but facing him alone Kendo doesn't take any chances.



There's something in the air!  
Ella is back in the group with a newborn baby! She does not fear anything. She does not hesitate to behave provocatively and starts to scream without a reason when she is near Macho. When they hear the cries of their mother, Kendo and Fitz, followed by little Gerald, come running like lightning. That's a real fight! Macho is attacked from all sides.



Finally it's the day of the decisive battle! Kendo chases Macho relentlessly and tears off a finger and a toe... As for Ella, she screams her support as loud as she can...



Macho, who can hardly walk, eventually admits defeat and leaves... Kendo, on the other hand, is magnificent! With his hair standing on end, he looks very strong. Kendo is the alpha male and he is showing it!

### *Who is the boss?*

*Brutus had been the absolute alpha male: he was:*

- *Dominant, able to face down any other members of his community,*
- *Leader of hunts and of the distribution of the meat,*
- *Warrior chief: Leader of the patrols against strangers.*
- *Strategist in times of war.*
- *Architect of shifts in community territory, guiding others with his voice and his drumming.*

*With loud and sharp screams he alerted everyone to dangers like the presence of a Gaboon viper. This role is critical, as the community has to be protected against strangers and predators.*

*Not all the alpha males manage to undertake all of these roles. Some of them, like Kendo, are dominant "leaders in power", but not absolute alphas.*



Kendo, accompanied by his family, arrives just as the meat of a freshly killed monkey is being shared out. Their arrival causes quite a stir! Ella gets the biggest piece of meat from the hands of Brutus himself.

Brutus, who was once one of the big bosses, has no ambition anymore. Nevertheless, he still shows a lively interest in hunting and... females. Thus, one sees him often with his favourite female Ondine and her children. He has even adopted two little orphans: Tosca's son Tarzan and Ali, who is now 10 years old (see number 2 on page 5).



Even though he has lost the status as a dominant male, Brutus is still the most talented hunter of the group and still an excellent "strategist" in fights against strangers. Sagely, he watches Macho and Kendo quarrelling and fighting each other without end, while he has a good time with his children...

*On page 5, Grégoire tells us about the hunting strategies of chimpanzees in the Tai forest.*

*To be continued... In the next edition: Will Kendo have what it takes to stay in power? Who among his friends might try to dethrone him?*

## THE TAMTAM ...

### School theatre groups – a succes in Côte d'Ivoire

Ilka Herbinger



Photos: Ilka Herbinger

*Claude Gnakouri, Director of Ymako Teatri, has trained a fourth school theatre company.*

The WCF supports the school theatre companies that have become increasingly successful in Côte d'Ivoire. In the south-west of Taï National Park, children of the EPP Grabo have decided to perform a play on nature protection. Likewise, children of the EPP Agban Attié have created a theatre company and prepared a tour close to the Banco National Park. Although in the heart of Abidjan, there is still a chimpanzee community in this forest. We want to do all we can so that the human population of this big city can appreciate and protect the natural habitat right at its front door.



*The children perform also a play on elephant protection, in collaboration with Conservation International.*

### Poachers on the right track and villagers concerned about the protection of their forest and animals in Côte d'Ivoire

Ilka Herbinger

In no. 4 we informed you about poachers who do not poach anymore. This good trend continues in the west of Taï National Park. Indeed, in some villages, there are committees organized to protect the forests near their villages and to convince others to join in these efforts. The WCF encourages everybody to work in this direction.



Photo: Zoro Bertin Gonté Bi

*Keibly village committee.*

### School exchange project between Côte d'Ivoire and Germany

Ilka Herbinger, Julia Riedel

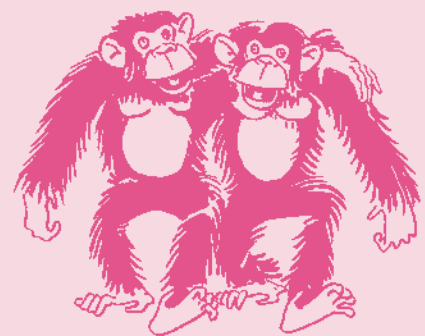
Hilaire Guilahoux, "Coordinateur de Cellule de Projets Environnementaux et d'Echange Scolaire"

with some of the objects made by the children in Germany and Côte d'Ivoire, which were exchanged with great pleasure between the children of the two countries (see also no. 4)

*Photos: Ilka Herbinger*



Ongoing ...



- Inauguration of the Banco Nature Museum
- Exposition of the School Exchange Program
- Theatre Tour in Guinée Forestière
- Sociological studies measuring the impact of environmental campaigns
- Results from the "bio-monitoring" in Côte d'Ivoire