The Okapi Conservation Project since its inception has been all about investment. We invest in the place where okapi live, invest in the communities that share the lands with okapi, invest in people that drive program success and invest in fostering a good working relationship with government officials that oversee conservation in DRC.

In 2018 amidst regional instability, our staff had to deal with unpredictable events that led to an ambush attack on an OCP vehicle where six innocent people died, the spread of the Ebola epidemic closer to the Reserve, more miners invading the Reserve and uncertainty leading up to the elections in December. Despite all the difficulties our staff and ICCN rangers faced, they were able to persevere and hold the line because your support is invested in them, the place and neighboring communities.

It is of utmost importance to me that the work we started and the progress we have made over the last 32 years continues well into the future. For that to happen, the appropriate talent and infrastructure needs to be in place so that the work can continue uninterrupted. We invest in well-built facilities and provide the logistical support so that the brave rangers can patrol the Reserve controlling illegal activities that threaten okapi habitat. To gain support, respect and cooperation of communities living inside and around the Reserve, we invest in projects that improve their quality of life. We continued to invest in bringing on board talented young people, especially women. We also invested in the education of the three children of our educator, Kalinda, who was killed in the attack on our vehicle.

It has been, and continues to be, our strategy to invest in all the stakeholders involved in or impacted by the conservation of okapi habitat. We have seen our holistic investment approach (which is made possible by your donations and grants) pay dividends in the form of over 8,000 square miles of intact okapi habitat protected that supports a viable population of okapi and allows the Mbuti Pygmies to continue to live their traditional lifestyle deep in the forest.

Thank you for all your support,

A Letter From John

Okapi are peaceful, quiet and gentle and so mysterious they were not discovered by Western science until 1901. They are known by every Congolese adult and child as a symbol for their vast rainforests teeming with life. In DRC, likenesses of okapi are used to market a vast array of products.
By the Numbers

Wildlife Protection

In 2018, we made significant investments that led to advancements in protecting wildlife and supporting communities around the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. We are immensely proud of our wonderful staff and ICCN rangers and are eternally grateful for our generous donors who helped accomplish these achievements.

**By the Numbers**

- **50** new ICCN rangers recruited and trained for the field.
- **24,038** kilometers were covered by ICCN rangers on patrol.
- **2** aerial surveys were done to identify new mines around the Reserve.
- **3,374** patients were treated at the Okapi Dispensary.
- **69,906** seedlings were distributed to over 2,100 farmers as part of our agroforestry program.
- **1,678** illegal miners were escorted from the Reserve by ICCN rangers.
- **16** okapi were observed by ICCN rangers while on patrol.
- **4,822** snares were dismantled and removed from the Reserve.
- **170** poachers were arrested by ICCN rangers inside the Reserve.
- **15,000** people participated in events and learned about conservation on World Okapi Day.
- **3,000** educational calendars were distributed to local communities throughout the region.
- **3,000** kilometers were covered by ICCN rangers on patrol.

**Attack on OCP Vehicle**

On February 27, 2018, a truck carrying ICCN and OCP staff and citizens from Epulu was ambushed by a group of armed individuals as it entered the town of Erengeti, 200 miles east of Epulu. The truck was destroyed, six people lost their lives, and four others were seriously wounded. OCP educator, Kalinda Mubengwa died from his injuries at the hospital. The Congolese army was able to repel the attackers while ICCN rangers secured the safety of the survivors. Eastern DRC is home to multiple armed groups competing for control of the region’s vast mineral resources. The attack was most likely carried out by members of the Allied Democratic Forces, a rebel group with origins in Uganda, that is accused of killing hundreds of people over the past three years.

We are deeply sorry to all the families of those who lost their lives, and for all our Reserve staff and colleagues who lived and worked closely with those that died in the attack.

We continue to support and invest in the families of the fallen rangers and OCP staff by covering the costs of their children’s school fees. And with generous support from Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Houston Zoo and Susan Tall, we were able to replace the truck to ensure our protection efforts and community programs are able to continue.

Thanks to Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Houston Zoo, Susan Tall and additional donors, we were able to quickly replace the damaged truck and pay the school fees for Kalinda’s children.
Two thousand eighteen marked a significant year of investing in the infrastructure of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. Early in the year, with the help of Fondation Segré and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, construction was completed on an immigration checkpoint and office at the Zunguluka Patrol Post, and an internet office building in Epulu to increase communication between OCP and ICCN staff members and among patrol posts around the Reserve.

Thanks to the support of a donor from the Wildlife Conservation Network, a tree nursery in the village of Wamba, just northwest of the Reserve was opened to expand the reach of our agroforestry program, filling a critical need for farmers in the area, and it is led by our first female agronome, Therese Bangbeto. We continue to invest in building capacity and providing employment in the Reserve, especially for women.

In late 2018, the Mambasa office complex was constructed, housing our educators, Mambasa women’s group, Agroforestry office, and ICCN field office. The new building has increased the motivation and efficiency of the women, providing suitable storage for their materials and a space to work out of the tropical heat and rain. The office complex was so successful, word has spread to the four other Women’s Groups around the Reserve, resulting in a push to secure funding to construct buildings in those areas.

In December, construction on the ICCN Confiscation depot began, which was completed in early 2019. This building houses confiscated items from ICCN patrols – weapons, animal products and illegal mining and poaching equipment.

By investing in the infrastructure of the region, it not only increases the efficiency and protection of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, but it also improves the morale of the personnel, providing additional motivation to fulfill the mission of the Reserve to protect the forest resources for the benefit of people and wildlife.
Rescued Primates Receive a Second Chance

In late summer 2018, a young chimpanzee and baboon were confiscated by ICCN rangers in Badengaido, and were brought to OCP for temporary care. We provided antibiotics and plenty of generous affection before arranging a transfer of the two animals to Lwiro Primate Sanctuary.

For several years prior to this rescue, OCP has had no primate confiscations, but with the explosive growth of the town Badengaido being used to access illegal mining camps there has been an increase in poaching activity.

Sadly, the confiscation of a single chimpanzee infant means the loss of their mother and likely the rest of the family, as chimpanzees will try and defend themselves. The young will then be sold on the black market as pets. Wildlife trade is a serious issue and if not controlled, can have disastrous effects on wildlife populations.

Thankfully for the chimpanzee and baboon, ICCN rangers discovered them in time, and we are happy to report the youngsters arrived safely at Lwiro and are now thriving after receiving proper veterinary care and meeting their new surrogate families.

In honor of Rosmarie Ruf, our In-Country Director, Lwiro Primate Sanctuary named the young female chimp, Rosie.
Agroforestry

Okapi Conservation Project (OCP) has continued to invest in local farmers by providing seeds, tools, supplies, and technical guidance. The addition of the new nursery in Wamba, now run by our first female agronomist, Therese Bangbeto, has allowed us to increase the output of nitrogen-fixing trees, nut-producing trees for farmers, and trees for reforestation projects. Because of the addition of this 5th nursery in Wamba, OCP now contributes to improving food security in the communities in the northern part of the Reserve. In 2018, we were able to produce and distribute nearly 70,000 trees, far surpassing our goal of 60,000!

In DRC, International Tree Day is celebrated at the end of each year, coinciding with the last rains of the year to provide ample watering for the young trees. Celebrations were organized around the OWR to involve students in reforestation projects at their schools. In total, 545 trees were planted with 450 individuals participating.

Schools are typically constructed by clearing an area of trees or building on abandoned gardens. Once constructed, the school sits in an open area subject to the hot sun. By reforesting the areas around schools, trees provide shade from the heat to students and faculty. The trees also provide a connection to nearby forests that act as wildlife corridors and food sources for native wildlife. More importantly, involving students in these projects teaches them the importance of conservation efforts and what they can do personally to help.

Women's Groups

For the past 13 years, OCP has been investing in women around the Reserve with the goal of expanding our reach to empower even more women. Working with women provides an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of conservation of natural resources to these influential members of the community.

OCP supports Women’s Groups by providing resources including administrative support, sewing machines and materials, and bean and vegetable seeds for community gardens in Epulu, Mambasa, Niania, Wamba, and Mungerere. OCP staff help initiate and manage the programs that improve food security, safeguard water resources from pollution and overuse, and provide economic opportunities to generate money to pay their children’s health care costs and school fees.

World Okapi Day delivers a platform for women to speak on issues important to them and about the need to use natural resources sustainably at sport events and ceremonies taking place throughout the day.

On March 8th the villages around the Reserve celebrated International Women’s Day through parades and activities that share the importance and involvement of women in each of the communities.
Early in 2018, OCP was hopeful to see an okapi calf on one of our camera traps after we observed a pregnant female browsing in December 2017. On February 13, 2018 our hopes were realized as the new mother and her newborn strolled across the field of view of the camera, the first-ever footage of an okapi calf in the wild.

Due to her very progressed pregnancy in the December 2017 footage, we believe she gave birth soon after passing in front of the camera. Naturally, the calf stayed hidden in the rainforest, most likely between large buttress roots, as the mother came and went to feed. After roughly two months, the calf began following the mother around, allowing us to capture this incredible footage.

You can see the characteristic mane on the back of the neck and down its back, which the calf will gradually lose as it grows older. Okapi are one of the fastest growing ungulate species, and it won’t be long until this little one is full grown.
World Okapi Day

In 2018, OCP increased the reach of World Okapi Day by including women’s groups in the activities. Celebrations were held in Epulu, Mambasa, Mungbere and Watsa, and our approach has always been to engage local communities, and World Okapi Day creates community wide excitement for forest protection.

This year, safety and travel conditions were a major concern, so races were shortened to sprints instead of 5-kilometer runs. The winners of the races had their school fees covered for a semester and all participants received backpacks and t-shirts.

Celebrations begin with community parades, followed by OCP educators speaking on the need to protect the forest to help conserve okapi. As the day progresses, audiences gather for the student races and soccer games. Thanks to the World Okapi Day events, an estimated 15,000 children and adults were exposed to our message of environmental stewardship.

These celebrations were only possible because of the support from Saint Louis Zoo, Tanganyika Wildlife Park, Zoo Antwerpen and ZooTampa at Lowry Park.
The Okapi Conservation Project works in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR) in the northeastern sector of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Covering nearly 14,000 square kilometers and encompassing one fifth of the Ituri Forest, the OWR was established in 1992, declared a World Heritage Site in 1996 and supports the largest populations of okapi, chimpanzees and forest elephants in DRC. In addition to the many species of plants and animals, the OWR is also home to the indigenous Mbuti Pygmies, a population of hunter-gatherers that share the forest with the endangered okapi.
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In September, the Okapi Conservation Project was awarded the Association of Zoos and Aquariums’ William G. Conway Award for International Conservation for our 30 years of work protecting the endangered okapi and its habitat in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Thank you AZA!

We’d like to thank WCN for providing longstanding support, guidance and fundraising opportunities.