

**CHIMPANZEE CONSERVATION CENTER**  
Republic of Guinea

**Release project**  
**First month report**  
**July 2008**

I'm happy to report to all the Chimpanzee Conservation Center's supporters that on June 27<sup>th</sup> 2008, the CCC released its first group of adult chimpanzees back into the wild.

As you all know the preparation and the follow up of such a pioneer project has been and is a lot of work...

As I'm writing this report for the first month after the release, I can say with 100% certainty that:

-They are self sufficient. We had planned supplemental feeding program for months but they only showed up for feeding the first morning!

-They haven't come back (yet?) to Somoria (the sanctuary) although the road is still quite clearly marked.

-They are avoiding humans and even the trackers that they know, including myself. We've only had a couple of visuals of just two of the females, but most of the time they go away when we find them. We're all a bit heartbroken after so many years looking after them but we know that it's the best for them.

-None of the released chimpanzees have been anywhere close to villages.

-They seem, especially the females, to follow our boats going up and down the river at a very safe distance, maybe for safety?

- The males are avoiding the groups of wild chimpanzees. We've had sightings of wild chimpanzees and if any released male chimpanzees are anywhere close they always move to another forest gallery without contact.

- The males have split into two groups, of two and three males. We're hoping that once they've settle a bit more, they'll team up again.

- Except for two females who are close by, the other females seem to be traveling much more than the males.

-We've found nest sites and areas that they frequent. They are mostly using forest galleries much like wild chimpanzees do.

-Of the visual sightings that we had, the chimpanzees are in very good health.

The next step for us is now to have visuals of all the chimpanzees to check their group composition and their health status. Some of the release chimpanzees don't have collars (the two youngsters, a female who has removed her collar, 5 minutes before we opened the door, and the castrated male, who removed his collar twice before the release); so it is important for us to check if these chimps are, as we think, staying with chimpanzees who have collars. The two youngsters have dummy collars (very loose) so in case they come close to humans we will be warned notified.

We are hoping that the Argos system will finally work, the collars are active but so far we've had no real exact location of the males. It's currently the rainy season in Guinea and the clouds could be the reason why the satellite isn't transmitting the collars. The released chimpanzees are also staying in very dense forest gallery where even the VHF system has a hard time to get the signal. In order to get better coverage of the collars we're planning on:

-Having the PNHN relay repaired, enabling us to at least locate the perimeter where the released chimpanzees are; using the VHF radio from our base camp and at the sanctuary base camp.

-Build platforms in keys location so we can hear the chimpanzees from a greater distance.

-Keep checking the Argos data and act accordingly to get the visuals sightings.

We're also planning on:

-Continuation of our education and sensitization campaign

-Increase our protection program

-Hire additional trackers to cover a bigger area of the Park

-Have messages on the local radio stations about the released chimpanzees

-Continue our survey work to show scientifically an increase in the protection of wild fauna, including wild chimpanzees by our presence and

our different projects, especially the release project.

Our scientific consultant advisor, Dr. Tatyana Humle, has just left the release site and is confident that, so far, the released chimpanzees are showing amazing skills at becoming wild chimpanzees again.

I will keep you updated with frequent reports and of course an annual report, including financial information.

I wish to thank you all for your support during the years of preparation and for your support for the monitoring, the protection, and the education as well as for the sanctuary. Our work has only just begun monitoring these 12 chimps and we still have 35 chimpanzees at the sanctuary site waiting to be free as well!

Thank you.

Estelle Raballand  
CCC Director

**CHIMPANZEE CONSERVATION CENTER**  
Republic of Guinea

**Release project**  
**Second month report**  
**August 2008**

We are now finishing month number two after the release and starting the third month. Many things happened which is why I haven't sent the first month report and you're getting both together!

The best news is that the male's collars are now working, more to the point, Telonics, the company that made the collars, hadn't explained that we needed software to decode data sent by Argos... The collars had been working the whole time but we didn't get the GPS points. Since mid-august we have been getting regular GPS points for the males, which allowed us to follow where they are and act on it if needed, as was the case for Robert which is sited below.

In order to simplify the report, I'll explain each case separately.

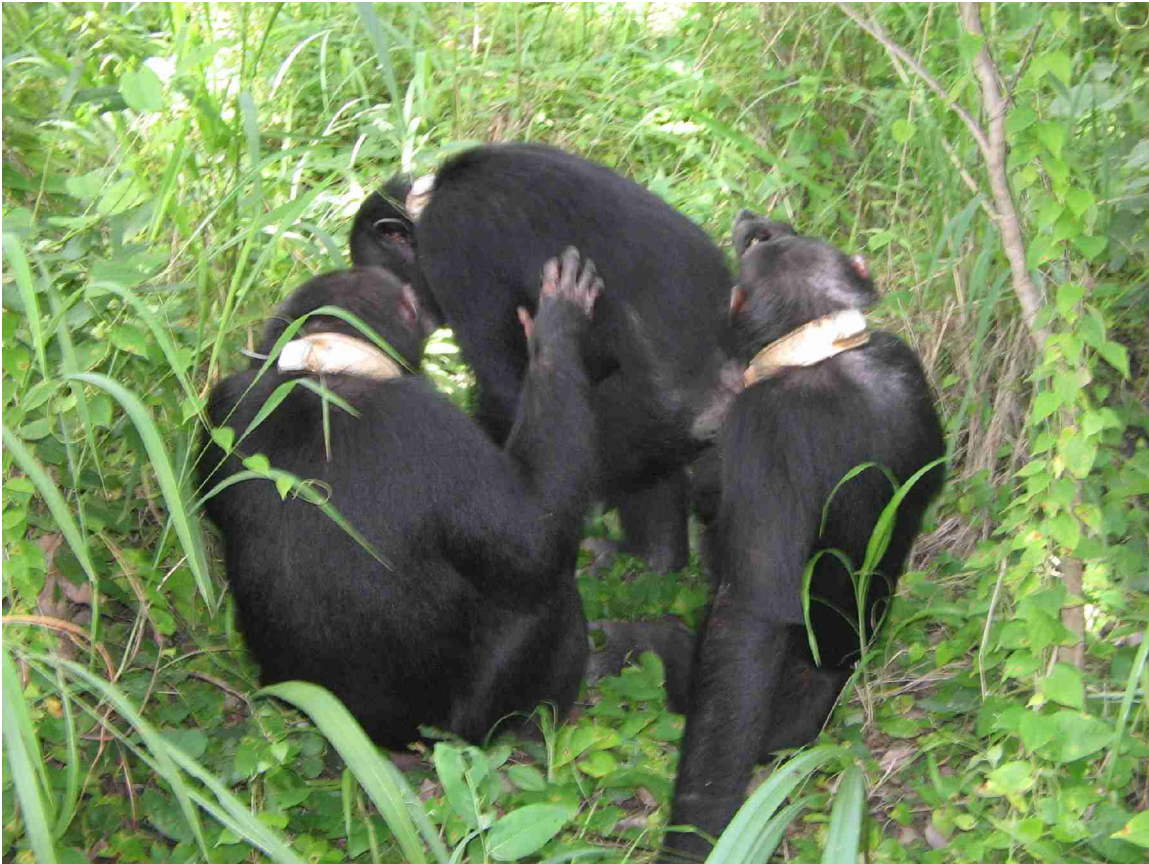
**Nanou and Mama:**

Nanou and Mama have been living 2 kilometers apart for a month but not getting in contact. Mama was a bit stressed by the situation so I decided to bring Nanou and Mama together. It was really easy to bring Mama to Nanou as she followed us towards Nanou without any problems. They were both really happy to find each other and there was a lot of grooming, playing and kissing! They were also happy to have some humans to hang out with. Luckily they weren't far from the river as they followed us back to the boat but, the next day they had moved together to a forest farther away from the river. They haven't separated since then. They were both in really good health. When we got to Nanou's patch of forest she took Mama and the two humans, me included, on a tour. We saw her nests and her favorite fruit trees. She was acting as a proud first time apartment owner giving a tour!

**Zira:**

Zira had also been staying really close to Mama and Nanou, in the vicinity of the release spot for over a month and then she moved west-south west. We tried to follow her via VHF but lost her track. Two weeks later we

located her about 15 kilometers from the release site. A week later she had moved another 5 kilometers west and was getting closer to Somoria (she was still over 5 kilometers away). We decided to bring her to Nanou and Mama so that the three females could be together. Safety in numbers! So at the beginning of August we walked with her, over two days, the 23 kilometers that separated her from Mama and Nanou. Despite her fatigue (and the volunteer's and mine!) the reunion was really touching and I know it was the best decision for all of them. Ever since their first contact they have explored a bigger area and are now living in a very lush forest, about two kilometers south of the river and the release site. We have gone to see them twice since their reunion, once about 10 days later and at the end of August.



Nanou, Mama and Zira reunited!

**Laurence:**

On July 30th, we had a surprise visit! At the mid-day feeding, Laurence was sitting on top of the cage. She was released with her mother but came back alone. Since she wasn't fitted with a working collar we had no way to follow her. We assumed that she was with her mom! Laurence is now 8 years old and arrived in full swelling. She was really happy to see some

males...and jumped in the fence with the new big guys group! We were disappointed to see her back but she was in good health and spirit, not even hungry. It was a small consolation. We haven't decided if we're going to re-release her back into a group and take the risk that she comes back again... with everyone this time, or if she'll wait for the next release. She is doing well with the group she's in now and could easily escape from the fence if she wanted as she used to do!

**Robert:**

The story of Robert is amazing and shows that sensitization and protection campaigns works! The third week of July we had an Argos point for him at the extreme east side of the park, close to the Mafou River, this river marks the border between the park and its buffer zone. We went to this remote point, about 40 kilometers away from the release site and over 70 kilometers from the sanctuary, but didn't locate him with the VHF. The closest town to the point was Serekoroba, a village in the buffer zone (see map). We had gone there before for sensitization and went again to let them know that some released chimps might be in the vicinity.

Then on August 15<sup>th</sup> we decoded the collars and found out that Robert's collar was in mortality, in what seemed to be across the Mafou River, in the buffer zone. A mission was organized with three people from the CCC, (a volunteer, a keeper, and myself) the park conservator and two policemen from Faranah. We arrived to the closest town we could reach by vehicle and started asking questions regarding a chimp with a collar. We were pointed in the direction of a village 30 kilometers away, on the border of the Mafou, called Baria.

We walked to that village and had a meeting with the chief and all the men. One of the fishermen told us he had seen a chimp on the park side while fishing on the Mafou. They also told us that they had had a meeting a couple of weeks ago, after our visit to Serekoroba, with chiefs from the villages' dependent of Serekoroba. The meeting was about the possibility that some released chimpanzees might be in the area and that they had to protect them...so when they saw one, they did protect it and kept a close eye on him.

In the mean time the CCC's volunteer and the CCC's keeper went to locate the collar, which was in the park side of the Mafou about 8 kilometers south of Baria! It was a great relief... the volunteer swam across but couldn't locate it exactly as it was already night and he couldn't cross with the VHF receiver and antenna.

The next day, we all left via pirogue with the fisherman, calling Robert along

the way, through out the area where the fisherman had seen him. Since we didn't spot the chimpanzee, not knowing if it was even him, we decided to go back inland on the buffer zone and walk across where the collar was transmitting. After we landed, a chimp started screaming and sending distress calls, really loudly. We went right back across the river and there he was sitting along the bank. I swam to him and when I reached him on the bank, it was a very intense reunion for both of us. I was expecting to find a dead chimp and I found a very healthy and very alive 22 year old male chimp!

Of course we then had to decide what to do with him: leave him or return him towards the release site. We decided to bring him back since he was really close to Baria and alone. He also helped us to make the choice for us very quickly; in fact as soon as I swam back towards the pirogue, he tried to jump in the pirogue, afraid that I was leaving him even if the volunteer was with him!

The trip back to the release area to bring him in contact with the females took five days: walking an average of 10 kilometers a day (tiring), swimming across rivers and marigots (wet shoes all the time), camping in the bush with Robert (amazing), passing close to wild chimps with a scared chimp (uncomfortable), meeting with buffalos (scary), crocodiles (a bit scary) and a close call with hippos (very scary)! When we arrived close to where the females are staying, the team (two volunteers, the chimp and myself) were very tired! Robert was a champion the whole trip and selfishly I did enjoy the days we spent together.

The reunion with the females went very smoothly. All of the three females, especially Nanou who was in full swelling, and Robert were very happy to be together. He had been really close to us during the trip but as soon as he was with the females, we didn't exist for him anymore! He had been eating along the way wild fruits and leaves and was very aware of his surroundings. I don't know why he got separated from Rappa and Orlando, maybe this happened where he lost his collar but no matter what happened, he has shown all the skills that he needs to survive since its release. Now that he's with the females I have no fear for him. They are all in the forest south of the release site. We're not planning to go check on them for a long time! As for his collar, a mission was made to retrieve it but it's laying under 1m50/1m80 of water in the middle of a marigot. How did it get there, is anybody's guess! Our guess is he probably lost it before the water level rose. We'll go get it and refit it on him once the dry season has started and there is less water. At least we know that it works under water...

During this whole ordeal we realized that the villagers around the park and

the officials are very well informed and sensitized regarding the release chimps and chimpanzees in general and eager to help. The radio spots and announcements that we have done coupled with our visits and protection efforts are finally paying off.



Robert in the bush on our walk back to the release site

**Rappa:**

Thanks to the GPS points, we know that Rappa is in south of the park, in the full protected area. We have had emissaries and guards going to the closest village from him (Foya) regularly since we found out his location. He's moving very little. He must have found a good spot. We'll organize a mission to go check if Orlando is with him, This is of great importance since



Orlando doesn't have a collar. Depending on our findings, regarding if he's with other chimpanzees, we'll either leave them where they are, monitor them and increase protection in the area, or if he's alone or coming too close to villages or Somoria, we'll bring him with Robert and the females.

**Albert and John:**

They have traveled a lot over the last month. They have been together since the release. At the end of July they were 15 kilometers east-south east of the release site. They are now over 35 kilometers south east of the release site (see map). We went to check the area where they are, without visual contact (on purpose). The habitat they found is very dense and lush with an abundance of food.

We're monitoring their moves and will bring them north if they go farther south or west towards villages. The closest village, Komandi-Koura is 15 kilometers away. We've been to the village many times and we're planning to have a permanent guard there to block illegal logging. Unfortunately, Albert and John aren't in the full protected area of the park so we can't stop people entering. We're hoping they'll move north once the fruit is finished where they are. The area is very difficult to access, especially during the rainy season. The dry season won't start until October, which gives us two more months before having to make a decision.

**Lottie and Andrew:**

At the end of August we had a report that a chimp with a collar was spotted. We thought it was Rappa since it wasn't too far from his last GPS location. We organized a mission and found Lottie and Andrew. It took over an hour to locate them as they kept going away but since Andrew doesn't have a working collar, we wanted to make sure he was still with his mom, Lottie. Andrew is 7 years old and we have been worrying about him, not knowing if he'll be able to cope. Well, our fears were unfounded!. They are both very well, healthy and very independent. After spending 15 minutes with Lottie, Andrew, who had kept his distance the whole time, got up and left. Lottie followed him and that was that. Since Lottie only has a VHF collar, we're monitoring them a couple of times a week at a distance. The closest villages were informed and made responsible if something were to happen to them or if the chimps got closer to the villages. They are almost 10 kilometers from the closest village. Unfortunately like Albert and John, they aren't in the full protected area but in the buffer zone of the park. The area is free of villages and the habitat is very good for them. With the increase of protection, they could stay there if they wish.

**Nana:**

Nana took off her collar five minutes before the release. We've had no reports of her and she hasn't come back to the CCC. She's 18 years old and very independent. There is a very high probability that she's doing just fine, based on the way the others have coped since the release and being a female she might be able to move into a wild group of chimpanzees. It's a shame that we won't know but we might get lucky and spot her.

**Plans for the third month:**

The second month after the release has been busy but also happy. We're really relieved that the males' collars are now transmitting GPS locations on a regular basis, up to 7 points a day! It makes our life much easier!

Next month, we're planning to:

- keep a close eye on Albert and John and act if necessary;
- check with the VHF and/or visuals if Rappa is with Orlando and act accordingly;
- train and dispatch park guards in strategic villages and areas;
- continue with our sensitization program and campaign and broadcast more announcements on local radio, including one to thank the Baria villagers for protecting Robert and to give an update on him;
- increase responsibilities of village chiefs regarding foreign hunters coming into their hunting grounds;
- Prepare a legal block on all logging in the vicinity of the park and set road blocks with the authorities to confiscate all wood coming out;
- Build pit toilets in Baria to thank them for their chimpanzees' protection efforts.

**Conclusion:**

All the chimpanzees that we've had visual or physical contact with are very healthy and coping very well with their new freedom. They have avoided confrontation with wild chimpanzees and are very aware of their surroundings and its threats. Their nest building has improved a lot, especially for the males who used to be a bit lazy compare to the females. Their leaf diet has increase to up to 50% of their daily intake with a wide diversity of plant species.

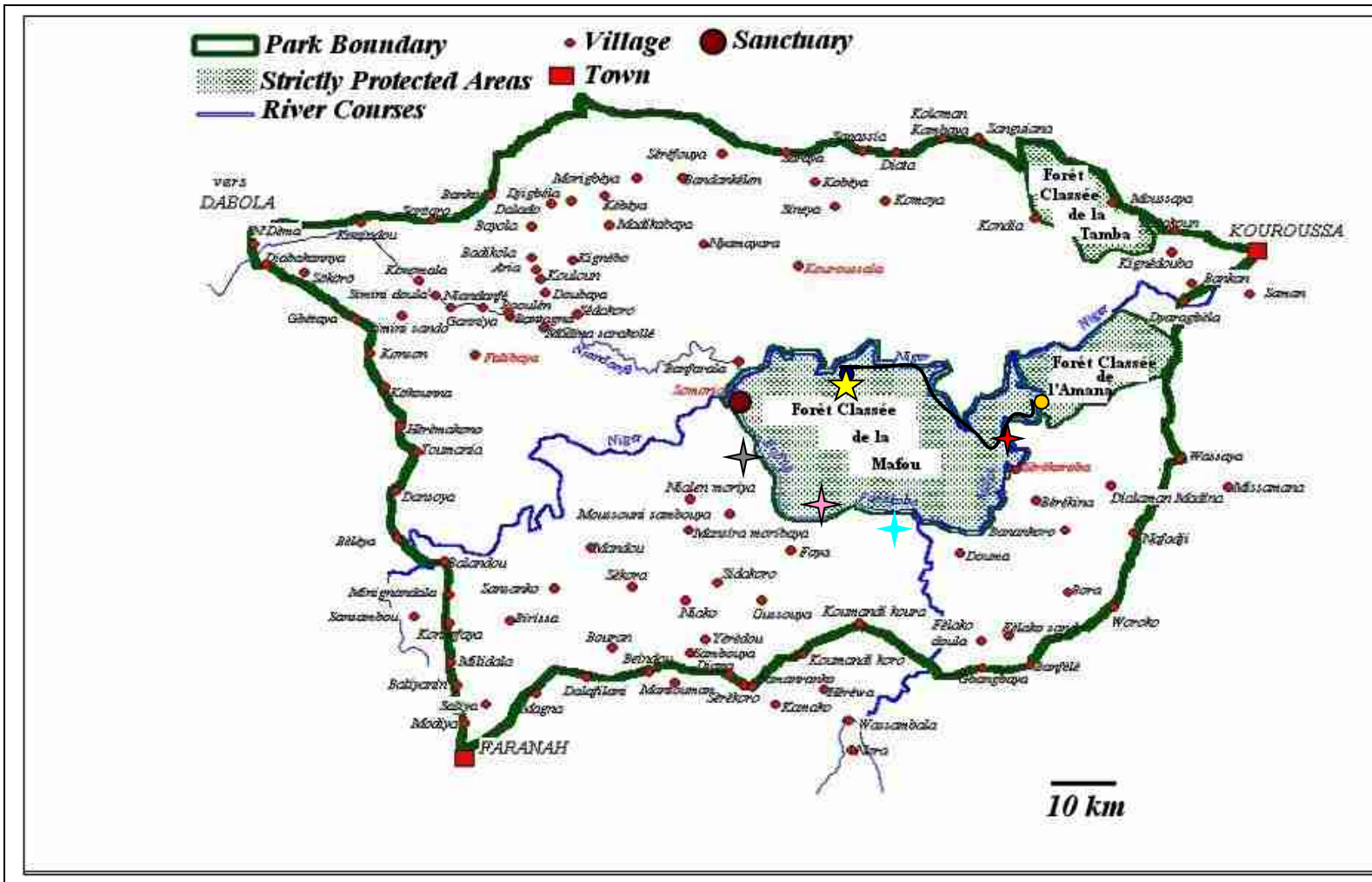
The park protection has increase dramatically and villages are way more aware of the special status of the chimpanzees and their need for protection. It seems that all chimpanzees of the park are now regarded as CCC's chimpanzees and treated with respect! Robert has been a great

ambassador for all the villagers on the east side of the park and has become a star... Baria villagers have asked for a list with the name and the sex of all the CCC's released chimpanzees, in case they see another chimpanzee in their area! Let's hope it won't happen as I'm not quite ready to make that journey again.

Thanks to all of you for your support of the project, either for the release, the protection, the education or the sanctuary work. We wouldn't have been able to do it without your help. I'll keep you informed regularly.

Sincerely,  
Estelle Raballand  
Director

# MAP Of The Park National du Haut Niger



- Release site ●
- Baria village ●
- Somoria ●
- Robert's Collar ✦
- Robert and Nanou, Zira and Mama ✦
- Albert and John ✦
- Rappa ✦
- Lottie and Andrew ✦
- Trip to return Robert —