



Protecting Africa's Elephant
Strongholds During COVID-19



POSTCARDS

FROM THE

FIELD

GALA 2020

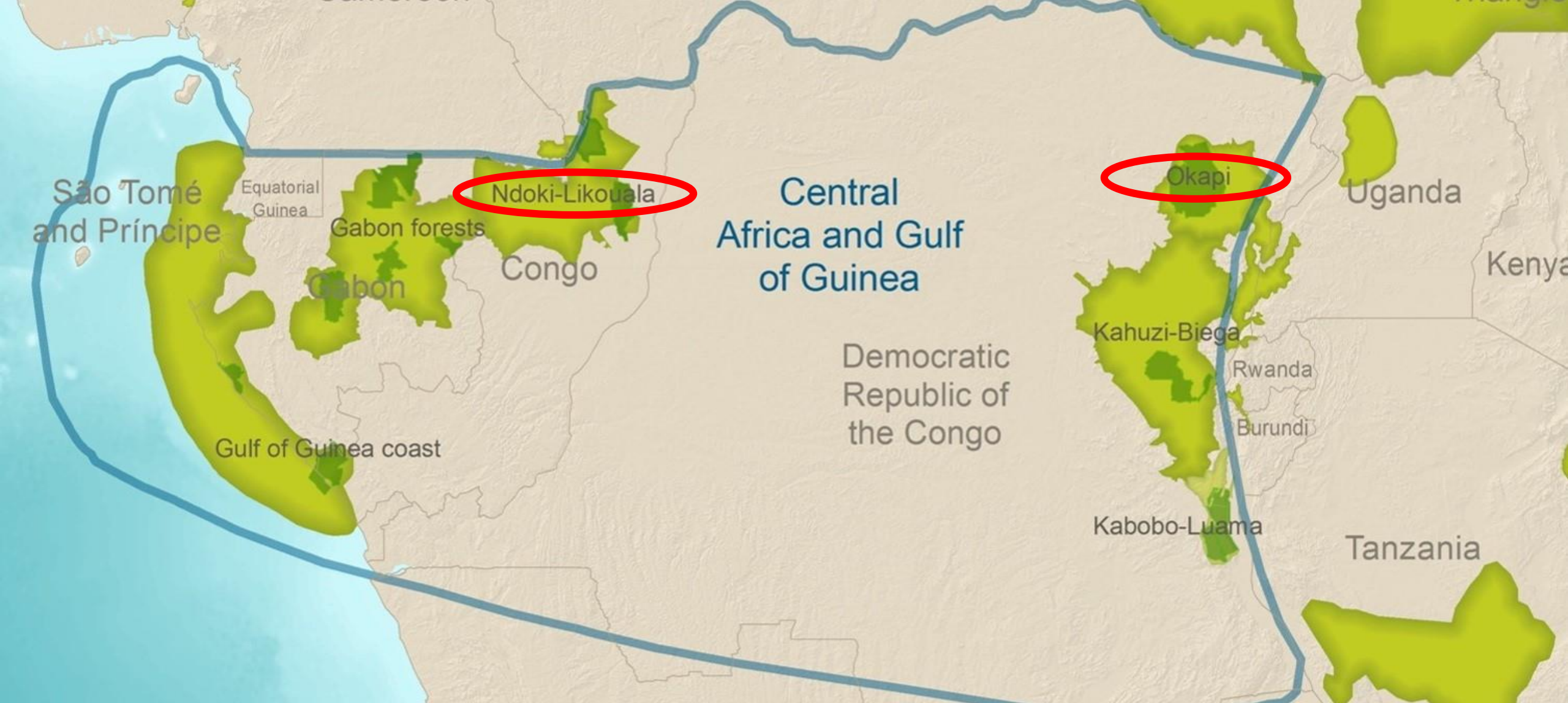


EMMA STOKES

WCS Central Africa and
Gulf of Guinea

Hello! My name is Emma Stokes, and I'm the WCS Central Africa Regional Director, based in Kigali, Rwanda.





One of the areas my team protects is the Central African Region—the most biodiverse area in Africa, featuring lush lowland forests and critical populations of wildlife. Today’s “virtual safari” takes you to see our work in the two protected areas you can see circled on the map above.





PHOTO: JEFFRY OONK & MARLEEN AZINK

First, let's travel to Nouabale-Ndoki National Park in the Republic of Congo, where I lived for eight years. WCS has been working in this area since the 1990s. It is an incredibly important ecosystem for forest elephants and lowland gorillas. As you can see, it's also stunningly verdant and beautiful.





PHOTO: IAN NICHOLS/WCS

Sixty percent of the world's gorillas are found in and around the forests of Ndoki. Not surprisingly, Ndoki's biggest tourism attraction is the gorillas of Mondika, where three groups of gorillas have been safely habituated to the presence of humans. This is Kingo, the silverback of the biggest group.





PHOTO: MARK GATELY/WCS

From 2010, we began facing an elephant poaching crisis in Ndoki, as did much of Africa as the demand for ivory in Asia was growing. This loss of life caused WCS to step in more actively and make recommendations to the government of the Republic of Congo. We signed a public-private partnership (PPP) with Congo in 2014, and we now manage the park.





PHOTO: MARK GATELY/WCS

Our management of Ndoki includes investments in infrastructure, sustainable tourism, and a deeply professionalized ranger staff. With new tools, such as planes, cutting edge technology, along with highly trained rangers, we can move around and surveil the landscape for poachers and other criminals much more efficiently.



Number of prison sentences for poaching/trafficking

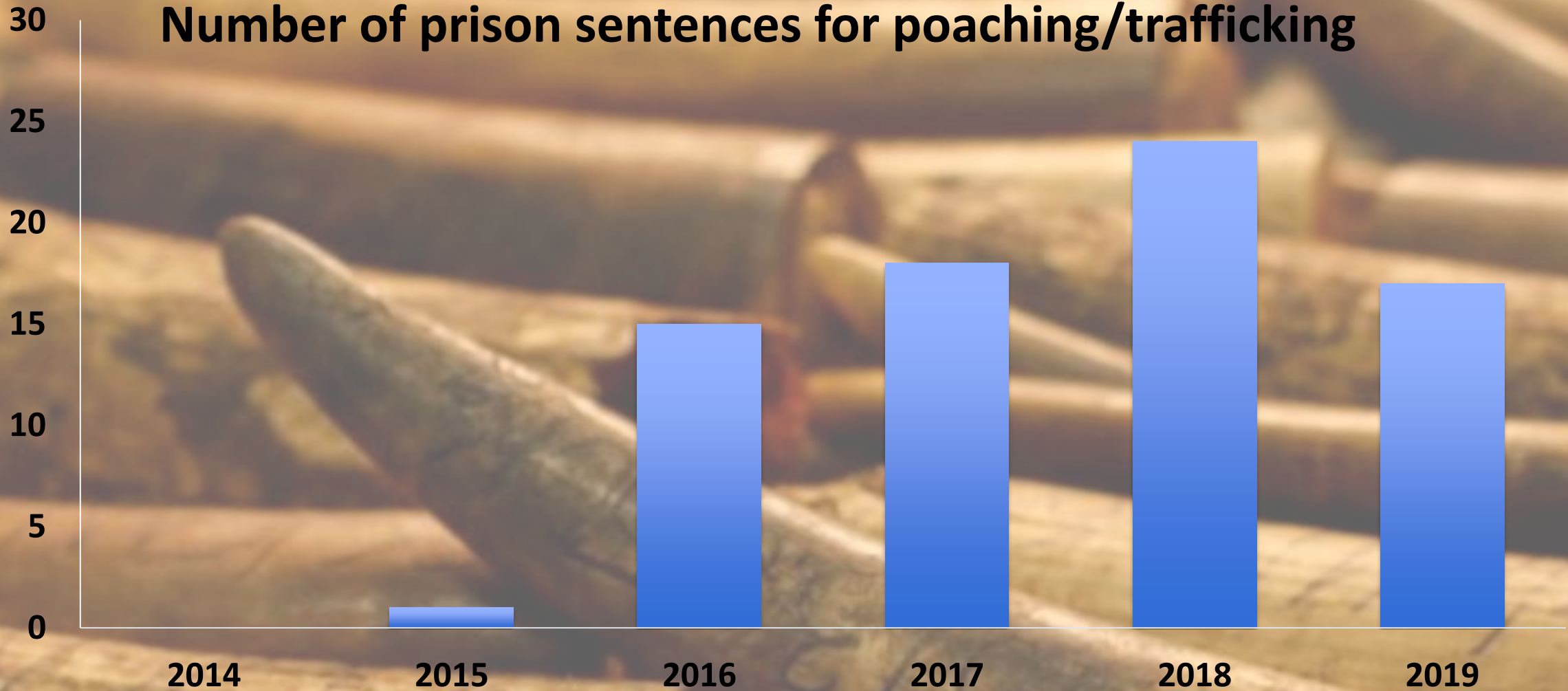


PHOTO: ZANNE LABUSCHAGNE/WCS

Our efforts are paying off. As you can see here, since we assumed management via the PPP in 2014, we have seen a significantly higher number of arrests and sentencing for poachers and traffickers. We work closely with local law enforcement to ensure offenders are fairly brought to justice.



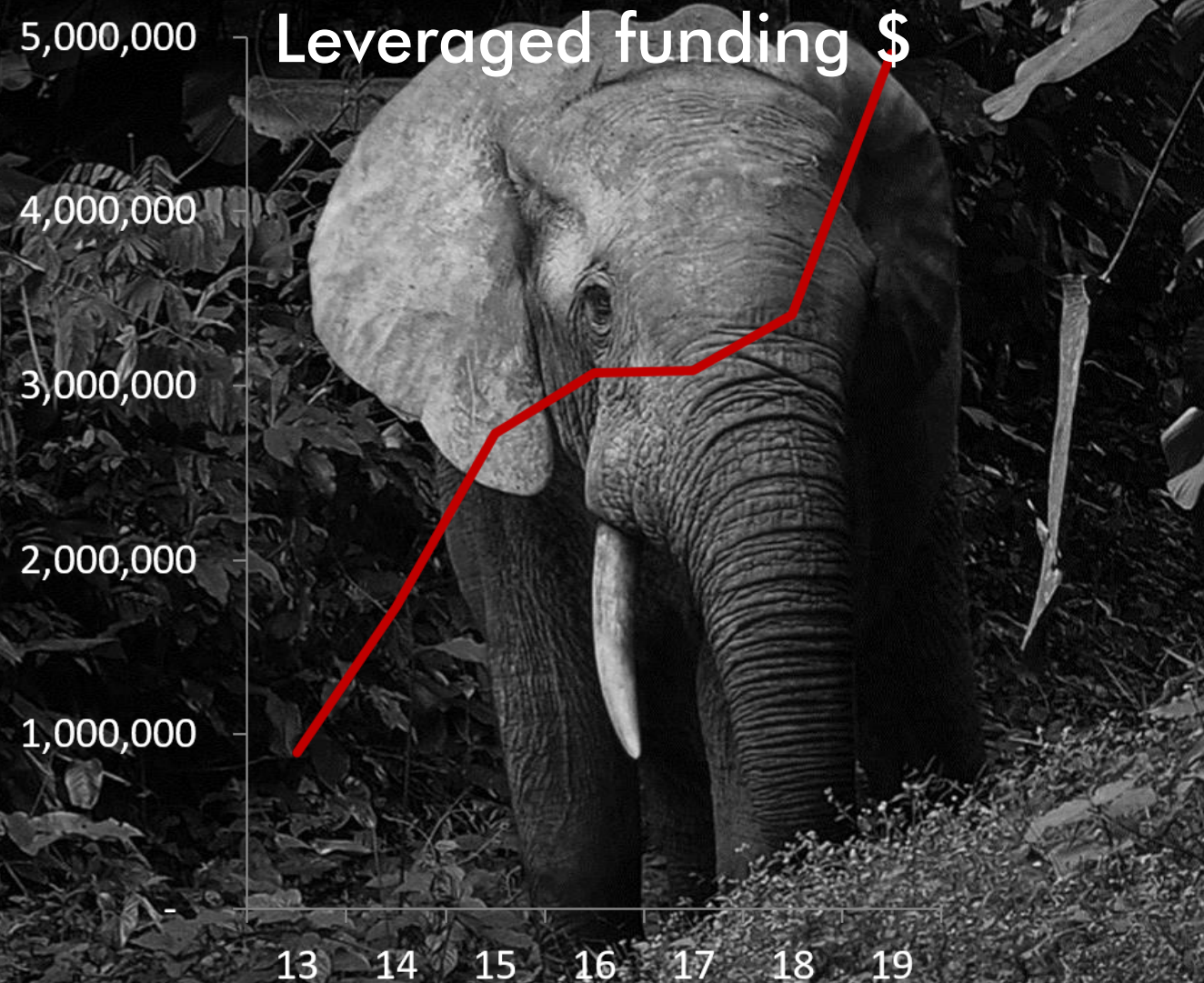
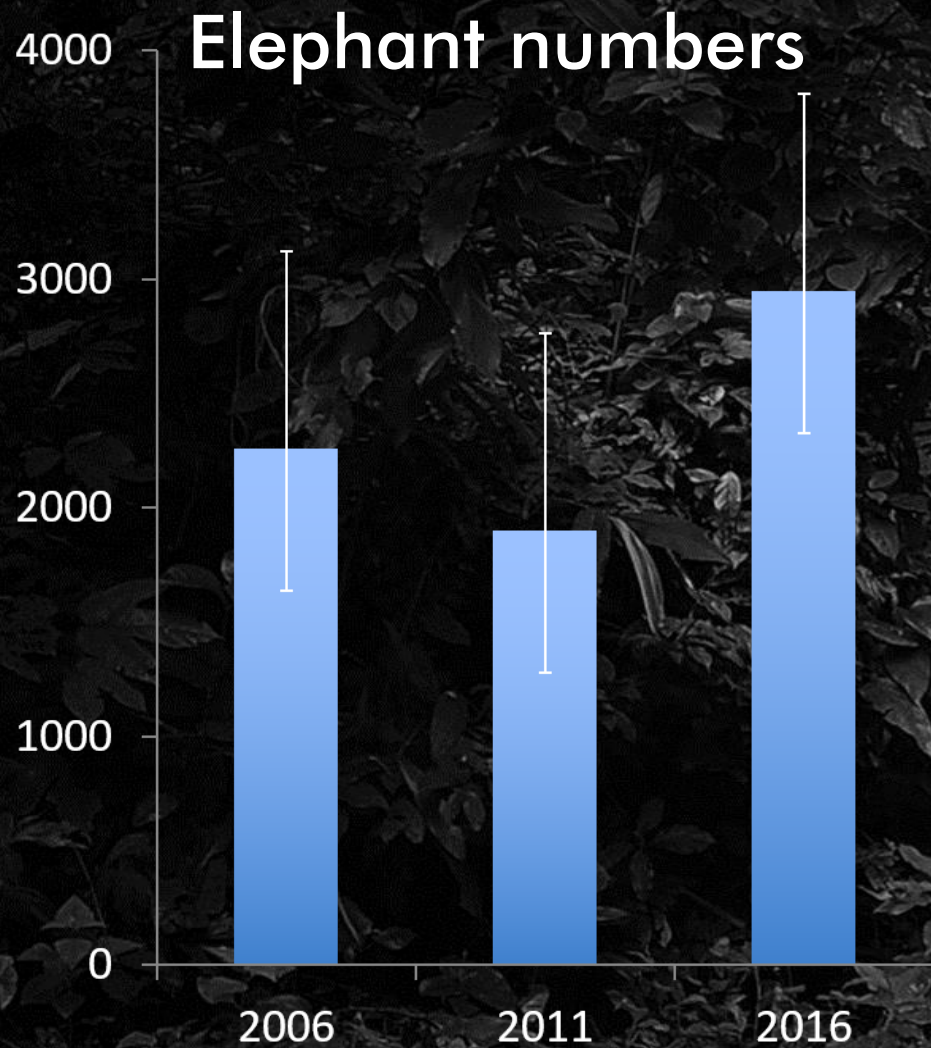


PHOTO: FORREST HOGG/WCS

Nouabale-Ndoki National Park is a pioneering model for PPPs. With creative partnerships and increased resources, elephant numbers are growing. The success of Ndoki, powered by our donors' support, allows us to leverage even more funding from government sources to continue this success.





PHOTO: EMMA STOKES/WCS

Now, let's head to Okapi Wildlife Reserve in the DR Congo, one of the newest protected areas managed by WCS. Here, you'll find more than 6,000 chimpanzees – one of the largest population of eastern chimpanzee anywhere in Africa. It is a stronghold for many species, including elephant and okapi.





PHOTO: RETO KUSTER

WCS recently signed a 10-year agreement with the DR Congo government to manage the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, which includes 14,000 square kilometers of intact forest. These lands are home to the single largest population of forest elephants remaining in DRC – just under 600.





PHOTO: WCS DRC

And it's the stronghold of the Okapi – also known as the forest giraffe. Discovered only 100 years ago, the Okapi is an incredibly elusive animal that is very rarely observed in the wild. It is estimated that more than 50% of the world's remaining Okapi live within the reserve.





The area is also known for its rich cultural heritage. The Mbuti and Efe peoples have lived here for almost 40,000 years. Almost 7,000 Mbuti and Efe live inside the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, where they often practice very traditional lifestyles. The people pictured here are Mbuti hunter-gatherers.



PHOTO: WCS

This important landscape, for animals and for people, is under threat. While the vast majority of the people within use its resources legally, its valuable gold reserves inspire illegal mining and other dangerous criminal activity. Here is a massive, illegal gold mine uncovered by WCS-supported patrols.





WCS is in it for the long haul. Since September 2019, when we assumed management of Okapi, we have been working to train 200 professional rangers to protect the preserve and its animals and peoples. Soon, we will be able to expand our reach and influence further into the vast Reserve.





PHOTO: EMMA STOKES/WCS

Yet in Ndoki and Okapi, there is a new threat emerging: COVID-19. In this region, we are well-versed in the science of dangerous viruses: the Ebola outbreaks of 2006 and 2019 have furthered our expertise in wildlife and human health. WCS helped supply this clinic dedicated to the staff and families of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.





PHOTO: TOM MULLER/WCS

In this time, we have not forgotten our duty of care and collaboration with local communities and our local staff. Often, we are the only organization providing healthcare or information regarding the threat of COVID-19. We provide care and essentials, such as medicine and food, where they are needed.





PHOTO: FORREST HOGG/WCS

Okapi Wildlife Reserve and Nouabale-Ndoki National Park are two critical strongholds for nature, nestled into the landscape of Central Africa. With your help, WCS will continue our mission to defend these wild places and the wildlife within. Thank you for standing with us.

