

# Lola Ya Bonobo Newsletter

July 2007

## Special moments at Lola

It's nearing 6 o'clock, daybreak. Once again it is the dry season, Africa's winter. At this time of year the bonobos rise later than usual. Today the air is crisp, almost cold. Every now and then an alarm call is heard. I recognize the vocalization: It's Manono, one of the eldest in enclosure 1. He is certainly returning from the forest, coming down the tunnel which leads into the night enclosure. He is trying to encourage the others who are lagging behind more than he would like.

I love Lola at daybreak, when the ponds are covered with mist and the pitter patter of the morning dew drips onto the roof of my house and the leaves of the trees. The moon is still visible high in the sky, as the night-time sounds slowly die-down... It's also the season for colds! As I walk around the night shelters of enclosure 1, I can hear a few coughs here and there...

I go to meet Manono, greet him; he reaches his arm out, for me to hold and gently squeeze, my own way of saying hello to him. Opala comes out of the night enclosure



The alliance of females

and into the tunnel to join him with her little Pole. Under her arm, a little bale of straw stolen from a nest in passing. She places it on the floor and puts her baby on it. Manono comes to see them, takes Pole in his arms to keep him warm while Opala munches on a few leaves. Here comes Kalina with tiny Malaika, the youngest at Lola. They join the group. All huddled together on the small patch

of straw, they look like penguins on the ice (in the middle of equatorial Africa)! Semendwa arrives with a large bale of straw. Her daughter Elikia follows close behind. She is already wide-awake this morning. Behind her are Salonga and

Bandundu, still half asleep and yawning, and shivering like the others. Manono distances himself a little; the presence of all these females must be too much for him! Kisantu emerges, accompanied by little Kindu, her young protégé. As she passes by, Salonga, maternal as ever, takes Pole into her arms to warm him up, while the magnanimous Semendwa drops her straw onto the ground and offers the space to "the alliance". All the females settle down, huddled against one-another. Kalina tenderly rocks her baby as would a human mother. They wait... for the sun which probably won't show itself before a good few hours! Seeing their goose bumps, I softly say: "Why on earth don't you stay in the warmth of your nests??"

Inside the night enclosure, at the tunnel entrance, the younger ones and the juvenile males are waiting to come out, but "the alliance" is there, blocking the only way out! Ilebo, timorous, patiently waits for some back-up. Here comes Kasongo: as if begging, he reaches out his hand to the females, his mouth open, displaying a timid grin. Kisantu reaches out to Kasongo: he's almost through! But here comes the hefty Tatango, bumping into everyone on his way. They attempt to make a sortie... Bolobo, the smallest one, goes ahead as a scout, Kasongo clings on to him, holding his shoulder, Tatango walks around trying to assert his authority... Inside, the young males, Kikwit, Matadi and Beni, play in the hammocks as they wait: Caution will keep them inside. They will wait for "these ladies" to clear the exit first!



Mimia is the only one still snoring in her hammock, she hates these cold, grey early mornings. She must still remember the happy lie-ins she had under her blanket, on her mezzanine in Lilianne's house...

### Visitors in July

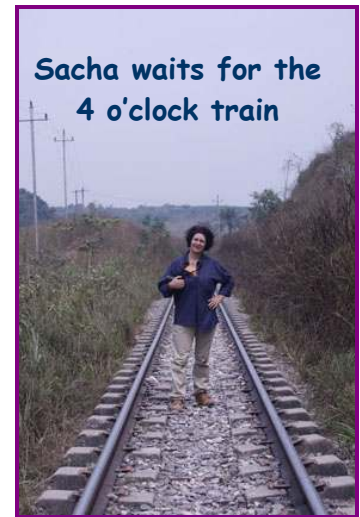
Since I won't be going on holiday this year, I may as well not be alone. I am pleased to welcome Jennifer Gladden, a young American woman whose visit we had been expecting for a long time, Véronique Charnal and her daughter Pauline, as well as the founders of the association "OKA" (meaning "Forward" in Gabonese). Both the chairwoman Anne Vosgien, a prosecutor in Paris, and Christine d'Hauthuille, a journalist who wrote articles about Lola which appeared in several magazines last

year including "Paris Match", are technical advisors of our new association "Friends of Bonobos in Europe." They are accompanied by Sacha, Lyda, Luc-Jérôme, and Serge Belais, a vet from Paris.



The aim of their visit: to promote the work carried out at Lola. Each one of them has a specific role within the group: Christine (known as "Titi Ô") and Luc-Jérôme take photos and films; Dr Serge Belais works with Crispin and the team in the infirmary. Be careful not to become overly attached to the bonobos, Dr Serge! Anne Vosgien, our magistrate, goes

through our contracts, while Sacha photographs the flowers and the "little animals" found at Lola. You can find her anywhere, sometimes on all fours, looking for the perfect shot of a colorful butterfly... but also waiting in vain with endless patience by the train tracks for the passing of the 4 o'clock ghost train...



We also welcome Renaud Fulconis and Eva Gross, from the association "AWELY".



We are used to having both of them here at Lola, in support to our education programs. It is thanks to AWELY that we will soon be able to give out the booklet "Who saved Béni the little bonobo?" to the school children who visit Lola. Illustrated by Florence Guiraud, this booklet aims to increase their understanding of our orphan bonobos' stories, the dramatic events that brought each and every

one of them to the Sanctuary.

Renaud and Eva will accompany Pierrot and Blaise on a mission to raise awareness on the plight of bonobos in the town of Basankusu, an area in the heart of the bonobo habitat, where we are planning to release 25 of our bonobos in the coming years.

Blaise, a teacher and leader of one of our Kindness Clubs, will be joining our team at Lola next year to help Pierrot in this new aspect of our education program. We are making the most of the school holidays to get him started. Blaise will be representing us at the COCOSI<sup>1</sup> meeting in Basankusu, a rewarding meeting which will bring to light the splendid awareness-raising efforts already underway by the AWF team<sup>2</sup>.



The following week, Eva, Pierrot and Renaud will go on to meet with civil servants, teachers and local NGOs. This success will further encourage AWELY to invest itself in programs in the region.

### Claudine in Basankusu

It is my turn to join them in Basankusu to assess potential release sites in the area. I am accompanied by Alain Tixier, director of an upcoming documentary film on "the bonobo people." We take a 24-hour journey by pirogue on the Maringa River (over 500 meters wide!), with near to no stops. Congolese otters come up to play around our small craft. We then push on under the full moon's light on the Lomako River, into the depths of the new Lomako Natural Reserve; we are being observed by the little monkeys, inquisitive as to the sound of our engine...



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<sup>1</sup> COCOSI : Site Co-ordination Committee (for the UNESCO World Heritage sites), a new approach to conservation, which advocates active involvement of local communities, NGOs and the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN).

<sup>2</sup> African Wildlife Foundation, of which Jef Dupain is the local representative, as well as being the actively involved co-coordinator of the Landscape of Maringa-Lopori-Wamba.

Marvelous rides on these rivers, whose banks, covered in lush vegetation, are reflected in their black waters. As we pass by, the inhabitants of the rare fishing settlements gladly greet us and come to sell us their fresh fish, pleased to have an opportunity to earn a little money!

After an energetic walk through the swampy forest for 2 hours, we arrive at Ndele, a village close to the camp of Frances Whites of Oregon University (USA) and her students. They too are glad to see us and to share a nice bottle of French wine around a table in the makeshift "Dining room".



A very brief encounter with the wild bonobos leaves us unrewarded... we can see them so much better in the forest at Lola! (With my apologies to the purists!...)



Time to look around the village, meet the very friendly inhabitants... and we return home, with joyful images in our minds... And the certainty that we have found our second paradise - for the bonobos' release - in this area!

### Birth announcements at Lola

Little Marco, Pierrot's son, is pleased to announce the long-awaited birth of his little sister Céline-Patience Mbonzo, on the 13th of July. Both mother and baby are very well. The big brother and the father are both very proud!



Pierrot is a happy father!