

Because of growing hunting pressure many areas in the Central African rain forest are uninhabited - green deserts!

Bonobos are not only hunted for their meat. The bones of a bonobo's lower arm are traditionally used for the treatment of human fractures. The people of the Mongo bathe their new-borns in water in which the nails of a dead bonobo have been cooked previously. This is supposed to strengthen the baby. Though bonobos are victims of such rituals even today, this is certainly not the main reason for their dramatic decline.



Demonstration of the use of Bonobo bones.



Dried bonobo meat in the market.

At first, the war repeatedly flaring up in the DR Congo led to a decrease of the bushmeat trade. People did not dare to go into the woods. Through fear of marauding soldiers, the trade was restricted. Since 1999, however, the situation has worsened dramatically. There is hardly any information on the situation in the interior. Presumably, poorly paid or unpaid soldiers go into the lucrative bushmeat trade. A main signal for the alarming situation is the increasing number of bonobo orphans which appear in the capital Kinshasa. Although this species is strongly protected by national laws, soldiers publicly offer bonobo infants with so-called "official permits" for sale.



Bonobo orphan in Kinshasa.

Originally the co-existence between humans and bonobos was a peaceful one in the Reserve of Luo. The apes were seen as relatives, and eating them was taboo. In 1987, bonobo researchers made a contract with the local government that prohibited any hunting around the research station in Wamba. But hunters from other areas used the temporary absence of the researchers and shot more and more bonobos to offer their meat for sale.

In 1987, government soldiers massacred bonobos when they were catching a youngster as a present for an official visitor.

Thanks to the protection league Amis des Animaux du Congo (AAC) which works closely with the Congolese ministry of environment, some of these orphans are confiscated. The AAC wants to open a shelter in Kinshasa, which should also serve as a centre for environmental education for the country's people.