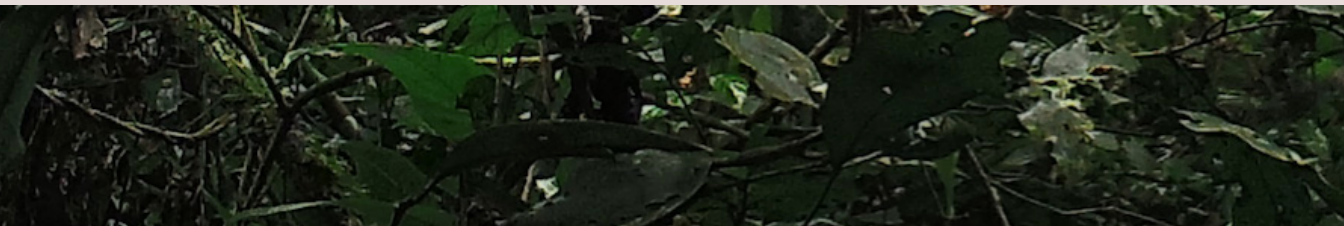




**OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT
2016 ANNUAL REPORT**



MISSION

**TO CONSERVE THE OKAPI IN THE WILD,
WHILE PRESERVING THE BIOLOGICAL
AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF THE ITURI
FOREST**



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

FRONT COVER: Male okapi recorded by an OCP camera trap near the top of Mount Mbia, just 1 km the Okapi Wildlife Reserve Headquarters in Epulu.

A LETTER FROM JOHN

During 2016, the security situation in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve gradually improved with no insurgent attacks occurring since January 2015. This was made possible by the support we provided to our partner, the Institute in Congo for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN), to conduct more targeted anti-poaching operations in conjunction with the Congolese army gradually shifting its focus to keeping gold mines closed by securing access roads and trails to the mines and following up on information on Maimai movements.

ICCN patrols were dispatched to areas previously too dangerous to transverse because of the presence of armed insurgents. In 2016, the ICCN rangers carried out 498 patrols which covered 14,190 km on foot and resulted in 2,156 snares dismantled, 70 poaching camps destroyed, 113 poachers arrested and 1200 miners evacuated from the Reserve. As a direct result of improved security in the region, ICCN patrols were able to monitor 55.5% of the Reserve – an increase of 15% over 2015.

After the attack on the Zunguluka guard post by Maimai militia in January 2015, which heavily damaged the newly built guard housing blocks, the Guard post was completely rebuilt using funds through a grant from the USFWS African Elephant Fund. In an effort to provide and promote sustainability, solar power and rainwater cisterns were installed in each of the guard houses.

As the security situation inside the Okapi Wildlife Reserve gradually improved, we were able to install camera traps to better monitor the okapi populations' response to the reduction of the number of insurgents, miners and poachers traveling through and living in the Reserve. The images of wild okapi, as best as we can determine, are the first recorded for the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.

Progress made by the ICCN and the Congolese army to clear out poachers and miners has made it possible for OCP staff to travel freely around the Reserve

to carry out OCP's far-reaching education and community assistance programs. During 2016, OCP educators produced 2,000 calendars and 1,000 copies of the first Okapi Wildlife Reserve Newsletter which were shared with many communities living inside and along the Reserve boundaries.

Our educators installed large signs at the two entrances to the Reserve that show the protected endangered animals living in the Reserve to remind all travelers that they are protected by law and you cannot hunt them.

We added a new Women's Group in Mungbere, where OCP provided resources in line with what all the women's groups receive such as administrative support, sewing machines and materials, beans and vegetable seeds for community gardens to each group in an effort to support small business enterprises that empower women.

M'Monga Kiete, OCP Assistant Director of Education, was the point person for the UN funded STAREC peace and reconciliation program that reached over 30,000 people living in and around the Reserve through meetings and workshops to address current issues in the Reserve and solidify each communities and government agencies commitment to Reserve security.

We have had many ups and downs over the last 29 years, but we remain steadfastly committed to our mission to **protect and conserve okapi in the wild**. All of what we do would not be possible without the generous support we receive from WCN, zoos of the world, foundations, government institutions and individual donors. A special thank you to all our friends and donors from the OCP staff and ICCN rangers in DRC, your support provides life-enhancing opportunities for them and their families.



CONSERVATION BUILT ON TRUST FOILS AMBUSH, SAVES LIVES

Community Conservation is a necessary component of effective conservation projects across Africa. Although we often hear that ‘too many people are the problem’ causing the devastating impacts their activities have on wildlife and natural habitats, what we also know is that a real solution involves working with people to address threats to wildlife. Measuring the effectiveness of supporting communities and addressing quality of life needs, relative to the ultimate goal of habitat protection for wildlife, is very difficult to quantify and subject to much debate.

OCP has wide-reaching community assistance programs that include support of schools, health clinics, women’s groups, farmers, soccer teams and local development projects such as building clean water sources. We do this to create dialogue with community members about how they can cooperate with Reserve regulations and at the same time, improve

the sustainability of their food sources, improve the delivery of health care and education, while reducing impact on forest resources that okapi need to survive.

We have anecdotal evidence that the communities in which we invest are more cooperative, are better stewards of their land and more respectful of Reserve regulations. Although this impact is hard to measure, as many variables are involved, it is easy to imagine what would happen to the forest if we were not working with the communities; we just need to look east to North Kivu province where large areas have been deforested and converted to large scale agriculture.

In July of 2016, there was an incident at Nzaro on the eastern border of the Reserve that showed why it is important to support communities and keep lines of communication open between community leaders, conservation project



staff and ICCN rangers. An ICCN-UNESCO delegation of OCP Staff, WCS Staff, ICCN rangers led by the Mambasa District Administrator, was meeting with community leaders in Nduye to enhance collaboration between all parties in implementing peace and security initiatives funded by the UN.

OCP has been working directly with the Walese Karo community since 1994 through the establishment of the Bukulani and Nduye ICCN patrol posts, initiating soya-bean cultivation to help children in dispensaries, improving 4 water sources, assisting the women's group in Nduye with gardening and tailoring and providing school supplies to primary and secondary schools.

While the delegation was preparing to travel back to Mambasa on the lone dirt track through the forest, farther down the road, a band of eight poachers armed with AK-47s set up an ambush. They had positioned themselves on both sides of the road along the forest edge ready to open fire on the partner delegation as they passed on their motorcycles at a very low rate of speed due to the poor road conditions. As the poachers were waiting in ambush, local people on foot and motorbikes were allowed to pass by without harm. Several passersby notified their chief about what they had seen, and he sent word to the delegation, who were ready to depart, about the location of a possible ambush. The chief risked serious reprisals from the poachers and put his village in danger because he

valued the people in the delegation and appreciated what they had done to make life better for his community members.

Once informed about the ambush, ICCN rangers hiked through the forest and came up behind where the poachers had positioned themselves, surprising them. Not unforeseen, a shoot-out ensued, and one poacher was killed and the rest fled into the forest. No rangers were injured. The delegation then passed, picked up the rangers and made it safely to Mambasa.

Lives were saved because the community valued its conservation partners. These were not ordinary lives. They were dynamic people working diligently to conserve okapi – all are highly skilled and competent advocates for conservation and communities that are critical to the functioning of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. They would be hard to replace in present day DRC. These dedicated conservationists are alive today because we invested in the communities and that investment really paid off by protecting the human assets that drive our programs to conserve okapi and the bountiful diversity of the Ituri Forest for all human kind.

Community assistance is often shown as a dotted line supporting conservation objectives, but in this case, it was a solid line from community members to conservation agents that saved the lives of dedicated Congolese conservationists along a lonely forest trail in the middle of the Congo.



CENTRAL CORE ZONE CONSERVATION AREA

When the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR) was created almost 25 years ago, it was envisioned that someday a portion of the Reserve would receive protected status similar to that of a National Park. As a Wildlife Reserve, certain human activities are allowed – limited agriculture, collecting firewood, collecting medicinal plants, developing sources for drinking water and sustainable hunting by the indigenous Mbuti and Efe pygmies.

The various civic and cultural stakeholders involved in the conservation of nature in Ituri Province, DR Congo met on July 21, 2016 in Mambasa to sign the Protocol Agreement dedicating the Central Core Zone Conservation

Area within the OWR. This agreement will prioritize the preservation of the biodiversity in this protected area by making the conservation of wildlife the primary objective within the core area of the Reserve.

Since the OWR has been inhabited by people since its inception (no people were moved out to create the Reserve), a zoning process was undertaken over the last 16 years which has resulted in the demarcation of 32 agricultural areas and the recognition of 31 hunting areas (which represent more than half of the 13,700 sq. km. of the Reserve) for indigenous hunter-gatherer pygmy tribes living inside the Reserve.





With an area of 3,296 square kilometers, the Central Core Zone is now a totally protected area comprising 25% of the land area of the Reserve. Only ICCN resource protection activities, biological research and authorized passages such as travel to agricultural zones and hunting zones in the surrounding areas are permitted.

The formal recognition of the Central Core Zone was the result of long, fruitful and constructive negotiations between the surrounding communities and the Institute in the Congo for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN), and is the final product of the zoning process for the Reserve and was financially supported by USAID-Carpe and

UNESCO, and implemented by Wildlife Conservation Society and OCP as partners of ICCN working in the Reserve.

The signing of this document is an opportunity to reiterate the importance of this protected area set aside to conserve okapi, the national animal of DR Congo and for the conservation of natural resources that benefit both local communities and many other species of wildlife. As a global hotspot for wildlife, formalizing the protection of the Central Core Zone will enable the preservation of biodiversity and ecological services in this protected area for the benefit of surrounding communities and for the world at large.



REHABILITATED AFRICAN GREY PARROTS FLY FREE

In 2015, 100 grey parrots were confiscated by ICCN at the vehicle check point in Epulu. The person transporting the parrots had a legal permit for 50 birds, so 50 birds were returned to him by ICCN. OCP staff maintained the 50 remaining parrots in a large aviary at the station for rehabilitation before they were able to be released, as their feathers were damaged when they were caught using glue traps on the ground around clay licks. The OCP holding facility was enlarged to provide food stations in many locations so all the birds could get enough to eat.

It was encouraging to see wild parrots roosting in trees high above the enclosure every day calling to the recuperating birds as if giving them encouragement. During the non-nesting season, African Grey Parrots are very social and travel in large flocks. As the birds' feathers grew out, they gained strength

and began flying around their enclosure. A door near the top of the enclosure door was left open for a few hours each day, and the birds that were strong enough to fly eventually departed on their own. They stayed around the area for a few days but the lure of the wild parrots flying overhead eventually drew them away. Gradually, over several months, most of the birds left on their own to join the wild flocks, with only a few parrots needing additional time to heal remaining in the enclosure.

It is very satisfying to now see this group of confiscated birds living in the forest canopy above, and flying about in the company of other wild parrots. Occasionally they roost above their temporary home giving comfort to the birds remaining in treatment as only parrots can do –loudly!

REBUILDING THE ZUNGULUKA GUARD POST

In January 2015, the Zunguluka guard post was attacked and burned by Maimai militia. In a show of solidarity following the attack, and after security had been reestablished in the area, OCP workers and carpenters rebuilt the 6 guard housing blocks that were damaged. After removing large, cumbersome sections of burned roofs, damaged doors and shattered windows, the workers installed new roofs and replaced everything that was damaged.

With all new facades the housing complex offered a glimpse of renewal after a devastating attack on the community. To demonstrate and promote sustainability and clean energy inside the Reserve, solar power and water cisterns were installed in each

unit. The guards have already begun moving in with their families and the complex was fully occupied by the end of 2016.

Providing comfortable living conditions respects the efforts the rangers and their families' make to protect the animals and people living within the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. All renovations were made possible through a grant provided by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service African Elephant Fund which has been very supportive of our efforts to improve the living conditions for the rangers and their families that dedicate their lives to protecting the largest populations of forest elephants and okapi in DR Congo.



CAMERA TRAP STUDY PROVES SUCCESSFUL

During early 2016 as the security situation inside the Okapi Wildlife Reserve gradually improved, we put in motion a plan to better monitor the okapi populations' response to the reduction in the number of miners traveling through and living in the Reserve. Through a grant from WCN's Cross Partner Exchange Program, Jim Sanderson of the Small Cat Conservation Alliance advised OCP on which camera traps to purchase, how to set and place them, and provided feedback on image quality and camera settings to the staff in the field.

In July, we brought in five camera traps, metal 'bear proof' housings (to keep poachers at bay), spare batteries, cables, locks and memory cards. The array of equipment raised eyebrows while passing through Congolese customs and posed some difficulties, but nonetheless, after agents were given copies of our annual report, all five cameras made it to our research station.

The objective of this first phase of the project was to train a team of OCP staff, WCS staff and ICCN rangers to set up, monitor, collect and sort images and be able to move the camera traps around the forest. "TEAM OKAPI" was formed

and is made up of Jean Paul M'onga (OCP/ICCN), Berce Nsafuansa (WCS), ICCN rangers Marceline Kpetule, Alain Masumbuko, Muyisa Muzaliwa and Talaguma Ilebe, Zaituni Lubenga (OCP) and Mbuti guides Mustafa Tapi and Michael Jackson.

All members of the team participated in a training class on putting together and dismantling the camera traps, changing the batteries, making adjustments to the camera settings and installing a camera trap securely to a tree. Everyone had a fun time acting like unsuspecting okapi setting off the camera so we could review the images to better understand the complexities of the location of the sun, density of the background, height off the ground, camera settings and the distance from a clearing needed to capture good images of okapi.

We were unsure of how people would respond to seeing the cameras deep in the forest, so we chose our first location in an area people usually avoid because of the difficult terrain. Led by our two Mbuti guides, we hiked up Mt. Mbia (one km from Epulu), started to work our way down the back side of the mountain and immediately came across a small circular opening trampled down





to form a soft substrate – an okapi bed – a perfect place for our first camera trap to be deployed. ICCN ranger Marceline, one of the four female rangers trained last year, was in charge of taking GPS coordinates of camera trap sites so we could collect data on the number of okapi living in the area.

Results have been impressive so far with several images of different okapi, and various species including duikers, chimpanzees and monkeys recorded. We continue to adjust our approach, and TEAM OKAPI has several experienced biologists working on

camera trapping animals in rainforests around the world who are available to respond via Skype to any questions they may have.

As we move the cameras around and collect good images from the camera traps, they are shared with local people to show them all the wildlife that live in the nearby forests. We describe what we are doing and enlist their help in monitoring the security of the area around the camera traps so we can safely access the cameras to collect the images.

World Okapi Day

Tuesday, October 18, 2016, marked the inaugural World Okapi Day to bring awareness to one of the most elusive large mammals found anywhere in the world. Initially confusing scientists with the stripes of a zebra, the body of a horse, and a head of a giraffe, the okapi was the last major mammal discovered in Africa by scientists in 1901. Even over 100 years later, many people are still unaware that this unique but endangered forest giraffe even exists.

To protect this unfamiliar animal, we needed to make people aware of the okapi's role in saving large tracts of forest. With encouragement from okapi keepers and enthusiasts worldwide, the Okapi Conservation Project (OCP) worked with zoos and other conservation partners to create a day that focused on teaching everyone about the okapi, through a social media campaign

and encouraging them to host their own 'mini' events. We wanted to tap into the many millions of guests that visit zoos throughout the world and especially the people that take care of okapi. These are the people that are invested in saving animals, and whose support we needed to protect okapi in the wild.

The campaign went viral. Hundreds of people and organizations gathered together to teach their friends and families about the enigmatic okapi with their impact reaching hundreds of thousands of people. Zoos, schools, and conservation organizations across the globe – U.S., U.K., Japan, Belgium, Germany, France, Czech Republic, United Arab Emirates, and even at home in the Democratic Republic of Congo – joined in to celebrate the day. Zookeepers participated by making educational scavenger hunts, providing photo booths, and opportunities to





encounter the okapi in person. Though the impact is difficult to measure, the awareness of the plight of the okapi is the first phase of protecting this gentle creature.

World Okapi Day will be celebrated each year on October 18, and we hope to grow the

event and reach a wider audience year after year to teach more and more people about the plight of the okapi and what they can do to help protect this very special creature and its habitat in DR Congo.





AGROFORESTRY GAINS POPULARITY

The continued success of the agroforestry program has contributed to a greater awareness of the damaging effects of slash-and-burn agriculture within the Reserve and an interest among farmers in improving food production. Thirty-two agricultural zones were created with involvement of community leaders to allow local farmers to grow and harvest crops within a designated area and limit their impact on the surrounding rainforest and okapi habitat. According to OCP educators, in 2016, no evidence has been observed of farmers expanding beyond the boundaries of the agriculture zones and encroaching into the forest.

OCP agronomes teach farmers sustainable practices to increase crop yields while extending the life of the soil through crop rotation and incorporating nitrogen-fixing plants into their plots of land. Because of the success of these practices, over 100 additional farmers join the program each year as slots open up when farmers become self-sufficient

and no longer need our assistance. OCP is looking into expanding into the towns of Mungbere and Wamba in the North, giving the agroforestry program more evenly distributed coverage throughout the Reserve.

OCP plant nurseries located around the Reserve jump start tree seedlings under shade structures until they are mature enough to be planted in reforestation sites. In 2016, nearly 40,000 tree seedlings were distributed around the Reserve for reforestation projects. One site was located near the Binase Primary School compound in Mambasa which provided opportunities to involve the students and educate them on the importance of trees in the landscape and their role in providing food and shelter for their many unique and endemic animals. The involvement of students in sustainable activities helps instill a conservation ethic in the future inhabitants of the towns and villages that will require more food to be produced to feed the expanding human population for years to come.





EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH ENTERPRISE

Continued investment in and empowerment of women's groups within the Reserve leads to women having more influence on community decisions on how resources are used. This creates a more receptive audience for our educators in reaching out with messages about conservation that can lead to actions by community members that will help protect okapi and other animals living within the Ituri Forest.

In the summer of 2016, OCP led focus groups that were held in six villages with 155 women participating which examined Reserve regulations, and the sustainable use of drinking water and firewood. Additionally, all were given the opportunity to bring forward pressing needs for their families. Their number one concern was access to clean, safe drinking water sources because of a marked increase in diseases where water sources had been contaminated and

not properly maintained. OCP committed to rebuilding twelve water sources and another NGO is planning to build seven new water sources in 2017 in villages inside the Reserve. Helping communities find solutions to their problems helps build trust that leads to improved relations with OCP educators and ICCN rangers that can facilitate protection of forests surrounding villages where we invest in improving their quality of life.

Due to the lack of economic opportunity in the area, OCP developed a women's association in Mungbere in the northern sector of the Reserve. Ten women were identified to start the program with a target of 30 women eventually joining as funds become available. These women are eager to improve their skills and earn income to support their families by learning how to develop their own enterprises involving tailoring, sewing and gardening.



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SPECIAL THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Houston Zoo for their commitment to providing support to our education team.



Dallas Zoo for their 3-year commitment to support OCP.



Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens for their staff commitment and office space.

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers!

Brandy Carvalho
 Judy Clark

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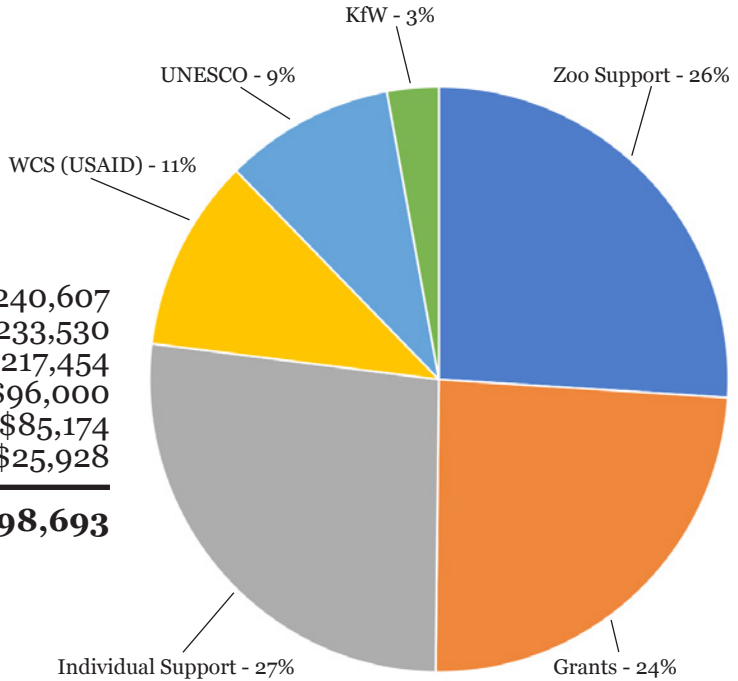
Vanessa Lukas
 WCN Staff

2016 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

REVENUE

Individual Support	\$240,607
Zoo Support	\$233,530
Grants	\$217,454
WCS (USAID)	\$96,000
UNESCO	\$85,174
KfW	\$25,928

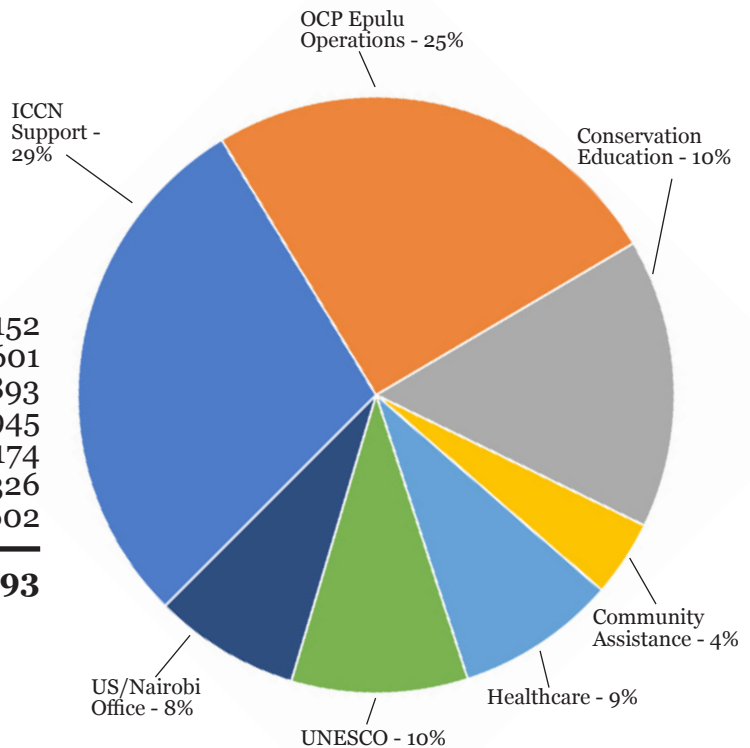
TOTAL REVENUE \$898,693



EXPENSES

ICCN Support	\$257,152
OCP Epulu Operations	\$224,601
Conservation Education	\$139,893
Community Assistance	\$36,945
UNESCO	\$85,174
Healthcare	\$77,326
US/Nairobi Office	\$70,602

TOTAL EXPENSES \$891,693



WHERE ARE WE LOCATED?

THE LUSH RAINFORESTS IN THE HEART OF AFRICA

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.





OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT

Protecting the endangered okapi, and its habitat, in the
Democratic Republic of Congo

Okapi Conservation Project is represented by Wildlife Conservation Global, Inc. (WCG), a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization. One hundred percent of gifts made to the Okapi Conservation Project directly support the management of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, help local communities find sustainable ways of living and provide an extensive refuge for the region's endangered creatures.