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Source: Journal of East African Natural History, 89(1) : 113-115

Published By: Nature Kenya/East African Natural History Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.2982/0012-8317\(2000\)89\[113:ASOCPT\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.2982/0012-8317(2000)89[113:ASOCPT]2.0.CO;2)

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A SURVEY OF CHIMPANZEES, *PAN TROGLODYTES SCHWEINFURTHII*, IN TORO GAME RESERVE, UGANDA

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INTRODUCTION

In his preliminary surveys of the chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii* habitats of Uganda, Reynolds (1965) recorded the presence of chimpanzees *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii* in Toro Game Reserve, but was unable to estimate population size. In 1993, Frontier-Uganda took a team of 19 researchers to Toro Game Reserve to carry out a 10 week ecological survey.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Toro Game Reserve (548 km²) is located in Bundibugyo District in western Uganda (0°55'N, 30°25'E). The Reserve is comprised primarily of grassland, wooded grassland and bushed grassland. In addition, there is a network of seasonal and permanent watercourses, many of which support riverine forest.

METHODS

Surveys were undertaken daily on foot by teams of 3–5 observers. All habitats were sampled (Stubblefield, 1994). All evidence of chimpanzees (sightings, vocalisations, nests) was plotted on a map.

RESULTS

Observations were few because chimpanzees actively avoided contact with observers. Chimpanzees were sighted on three occasions, and vocalization (but no visual contact) recorded on nine occasions. Indirect signs of chimpanzees (*e.g.* nests) were found on 10 occasions.

The findings of this preliminary survey indicate the presence of two groups of chimpanzees in Toro Game Reserve. A group of 12–15 individuals used the Mugiri Forest, and a group of at least 16 animals used the Wasa Forest 10 km away. A possible third group along the Kakara River was suggested by the discovery of nine chimpanzee nests. This site is about 7 km across wooded savanna from the localities of the two above mentioned groups.

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The distribution of the observations indicated that the chimpanzees ranged throughout the Mugiri and Wasa riverine forests systems (figure 1).

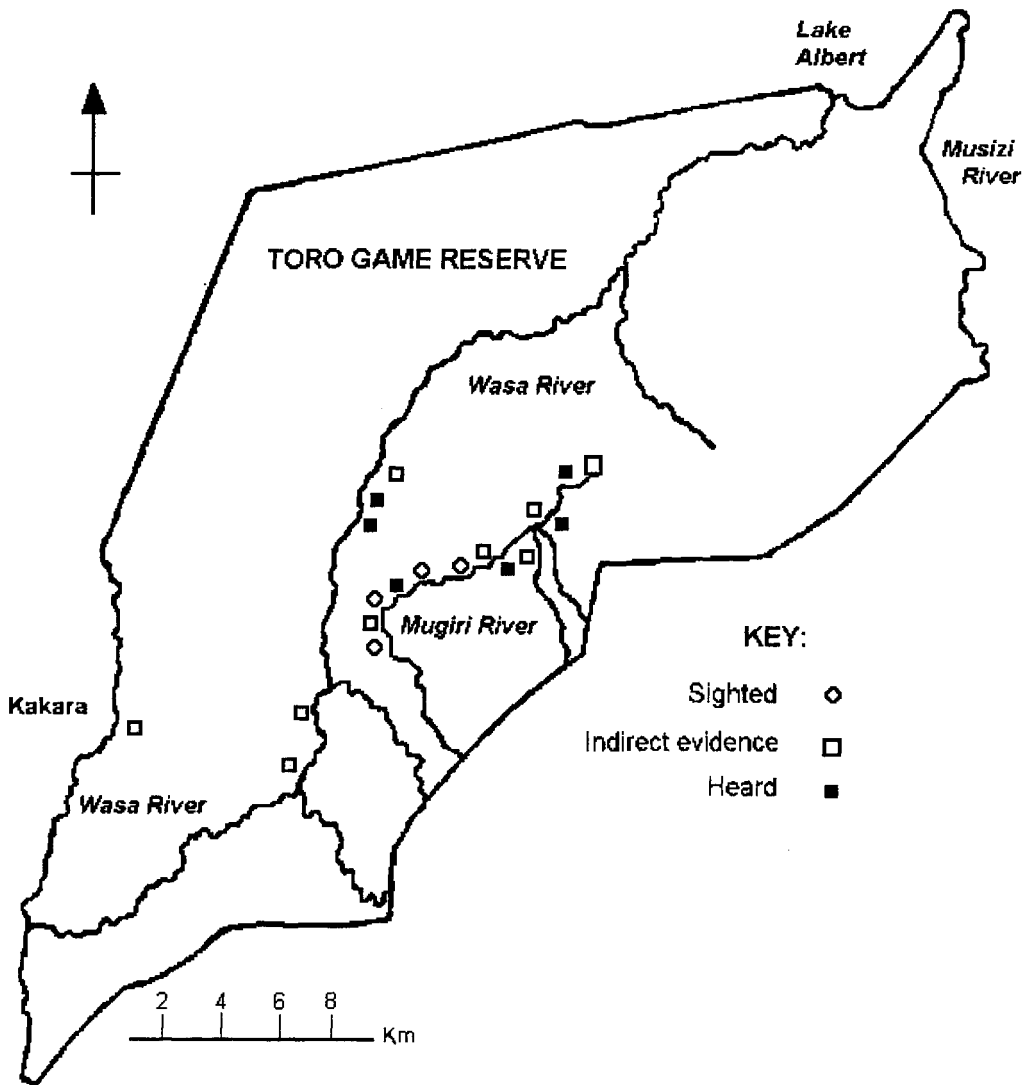


Figure 1. Locations of Chimpanzee Observations in Toro Game Reserve, Uganda.

DISCUSSION

This population of chimpanzees adds to the value of Toro Game Reserve, both as a protected area for endangered species (IUCN, 1996) and as a tourism resource. The protection of the area is, however, minimal. Ten game guards are assigned to the reserve and it appears that patrols to the more remote areas are infrequent (Stubblefield, 1994). This situation is in sharp

contrast to Kibale and Budongo forests where the chimpanzees are well protected (Struhsaker, 1987) and ecotourism programmes are underway.

The presence of chimpanzees in this type of habitat (forest fragments in an open savanna environment) warrants further scientific study; other studies from the region being on populations inhabiting large areas of forest (Butynski, 1985; Ghiglieri, 1984; Reynolds, 1965; Struhsaker, 1987). A more intensive study of the chimpanzees of Toro Game Reserve is needed to ascertain numbers, demography and range of the three groups, to examine their current status with respect to threats, and to determine the possible impact of development measures such as the cutting of trails and habituation. This is particularly pertinent since the concession to manage Toro Game Reserve and develop it for tourism was given to a Canadian company in August 1994 (Moses Okua, pers. comm.).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the Frontier-Uganda UG09 research team, especially Leigh Stubblefield, for all their support. Acknowledgments are due to Moses Okua, Justus Tindigarukayo-Kashigire, and all the Game Department staff associated with the Frontier Project. The Society for Environmental Exploration provided administrative and financial support. I also thank Neil Burgess for his comments on this record.

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