25 years of conservation efforts in Nyungwe National Park, Rwanda: progress, challenges, lessons learned and way forward

WCS Rwanda Program
World Tourism Day
Tourism & Water – Protecting our common future

Celebrating 25 years of partnership in tourism and conservation

Wildlife Conservation Society in Nyungwe

Since 1986, the Wildlife Conservation Society has focused on the Nyungwe Forest, situated in the southwestern part of the country, which together with its surrounding forested habitat forms the most intact rainforest in Central Africa. A special about the Nyungwe Forest in the region. It is home to a variety of rare and endangered species, including the mountain gorilla, the golden monkey, and the green monkey. The forest also serves as a habitat for a wide range of other wildlife, including over 100 species of birds, 300 species of plants, and more than 200 species of butterflies. Nyungwe Forest is a vital part of the country's biodiversity and plays a crucial role in conservation efforts.

What We Are Doing

The conservation efforts at Nyungwe Forest include the protection and management of the forest, as well as research and monitoring of the diverse wildlife species that call the forest home. The organization works closely with local communities to ensure that the benefits of conservation efforts are shared equitably.

In addition to conservation activities, the organization also engages in education and outreach programs to raise awareness about the importance of conservation and the role of local communities in protecting the forest.

USAID and RDB: Partnering for a Sustainable Future

USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) and RDB (Rwanda Development Board) have been working together to support conservation efforts in Nyungwe Forest. Their partnership is aimed at ensuring that the forest remains protected and that the benefits of this conservation work are shared with the local communities. USAID provides financial and technical support, while RDB ensures that the conservation work is effectively integrated into local development plans.
“Pre-history”...
Main threats

- Poaching
- Mining
- Fire
- Tree and bamboo cutting
1988
PCFN: Projet Conservation de la Foret de Nyungwe

WCS receives one of first USAID Biodiversity grants for Nyungwe

ORTPN begins full-time
1988
Official tourism begins in Nyungwe

1990-1993
Infrastructure development
1994

- Rising threats: poaching, mining, encroachment, security
- All efforts are focused on rebuilding the country, reconciliation, resettlement of returnees: conservation is not a priority
- Rwandan Park Service (ORTPN) understaffed, focus on Volcanoes mountain gorilla tourism in VP
WCS Leadership in Nyungwe
Post war priorities

• Resume security & patrols
• Halt encroachment
• Gain local leaders’ support
Moving onwards

• 1999 : first donor support other than WCS (including UNDP, USDs, Dutch technical assistance, MacArthur Foundation, PIC, USFWS) for construction of ranger posts and equipment for mobile patrols, rehabilitation of infrastructures, support to local cooperatives, biodiversity and socio-economic surveys.

• 2003 : increased engagement of ORTPN

• 2005 : Nyungwe gazetted National Park
2006 to present

- 2006 – 2011: GEF Protected Areas Biodiversity (PAB) project
- 2006-2009: USAID Destination Nyungwe (IRG/WCS)
- 2010-2015: Nyungwe Nziza (DAI) & Sustaining Biodiversity Conservation in NNP (WCS)
- USFWS chimpanzee conservation: tourism, awareness, transboundary
- US Forest service, MacArthur Foundation, Columbus Zoo, MMBF...

- 2008: RDB to manage Parks
Park management and institutional support

- Support, guidance, capacity building and transfer of core activities
- Technical advice and lobbying for policy development
Research

- Inventories and surveys
- Ecology of the park’s primate species
- Long-term biodiversity monitoring
- Forest restoration
- Monitoring of climate and ecosystem services
- Attitudes & awareness, socio-economic studies
Tourism

- Product development
- Guidelines and impact monitoring
- Transfer of responsibility
- Revenue sharing
Community development

- Support to activities directly linked to threat reduction
- Beekeeping
- Energy efficient stoves
- Livestock to ex-poachers associations
Nyungwe-Kibira transboundary collaboration

- Formal agreement between RDB and INECN for transboundary cooperation (2008)
- Ten-year transboundary strategic plan (2009-2018)
- Joint planning meetings and joint patrols
- Threat monitoring and wildlife surveys
- Chimpanzee conservation and tourism development
- Owl-faced monkey and bamboo forest conservation
- Sharing of lessons learned and best practices
**Ecosystem Services**

- Monitoring and modeling ecosystem services
- Identify users and the value of the ES
- Raising awareness and willingness to pay
- PES National task force
- Forest restoration
Outreach and education

- Education and outreach strategy
- Development of materials
- Training of teachers
- Conflict resolution and community liaison officers (ANICOs)
- Socio-marketing events and community radio program
Threat reduction

- Increase coverage
- Increased community involvement in threat detection and reduction
WCS Lessons Learned

- Nyungwe tourism is very different from Volcano model
- Value of long term science-based information
- Poverty reduction and community support are key to the long term conservation of NNP
- Achieve and secure conservation successes through local and national capacity building and awareness raising
- Stay the course – persistence pays
WCS Looking forward

- Promote tourism as a conservation tool
- Foster research in Nyungwe
- Scale up conservation focus outside the park
  - Outreach and education
  - Threat reduction via rural enterprise and agriculture
- Greater transboundary efforts
- Private market interests dominate in Rwanda
  - Management of national tourism assets (NPs)
- National PES strategy & policy
Thank you!