HELPING THE UNINTENDED VICTIMS OF SNARES

Rescuing chimpanzees from bushmeat hunters’ snares in Uganda

In Uganda, although it is illegal, hunters set forest snares to trap wildlife for so-called ‘bushmeat’. The poachers are usually hoping to catch animals such as antelopes and wild pigs, but sadly chimpanzees also become victims of the illegal traps. The snares are usually made from strong wire and as chimpanzees walk on the forest floor, their hands and feet become trapped. When the trapped animal struggles to escape, the snare tightens further and causes greater injury and suffering.

The victims are often juvenile females. Mugu Moja (‘One Leg’ in Swahili) was just such a case. The Jane Goodall Institute Uganda was called by local villagers who had seen her caught by the leg in a metal trap. Her leg had been crushed by the trap which weighed 14kg – two thirds of her own body weight - and she could not get free. Although it would be a risky procedure, Mugu Moja’s life was already in danger and so it was decided to remove the trap and send her to the Wildlife Education Centre at Entebbe where her leg had was safely amputated. Once she had recovered, she was immediately returned to the forest where she was able to join her small social group. Though restricted by her injury, she could climb and disappeared straight into the trees. As a young female, ready to reproduce, she would have been a sorry loss for her community without JGI’s intervention.

In Uganda it is estimated that 25% of chimpanzees are suffering from injuries inflicted by hunters’ snares. Injured chimpanzees lose dexterity and control when processing important foods such as figs. And while chimps with injuries fortunately often show remarkable adaptation, their social behavior is affected and their inability to fully compete for food may affect their long-term survival. In severe cases, the injuries chimpanzees sustain from traps and snares are so severe they lead directly to death.
As well as rescuing trapped chimpanzees - so far over 40 chimpanzees have been saved from snares and snare-related injuries - JGI removes snares from the forest, for example working with the snare removal team in Kibale National Park. The team, who are all re-trained previous hunters, spend days in the forest, following hunters. They find and remove the snares that are set, deterring and arresting poachers. It is a dangerous undertaking, but also a vital one to protect Uganda’s wild chimpanzees. Over two decades JGI has supported the removal of more than 10,000 snares in 4 forests.

Removing snares addresses the immediate threat to chimpanzees, but for the long term we must change attitudes and practices to stop illegal hunting. Therefore the snare removal team also helps to teach local communities about chimpanzees, bushmeat, human-wildlife conflict, the local ecosystem, and the importance of conservation.

Watch videos:

Mugu Moja’s story – https://yhoo.it/2FdNNWt

The snare removal team - https://yhoo.it/2DcdNPa

- Great apes are protected by law, because their numbers are rapidly declining and their survival is under threat. Uganda is now estimated to have only around 5000 Eastern Chimpanzees and 400 Mountain Gorillas.

- Chimpanzees are our closest cousins. Indiscriminate wildlife trapping causes immense suffering to these intelligent beings, who desperately attempt ways to escape their entrapment.

- The Jane Goodall Institute’s strategy in Uganda is to ensure long term conservation and protection of chimpanzees through empowering and enhancing the national and local institutions (government agencies, local government and local communities) into being effective custodians of this endangered ape. This is achieved through implementing an array of activities that focus on three major areas: conservation education, habitat protection and chimpanzee welfare. The first two areas not only conserve chimpanzees but many other species as well.