

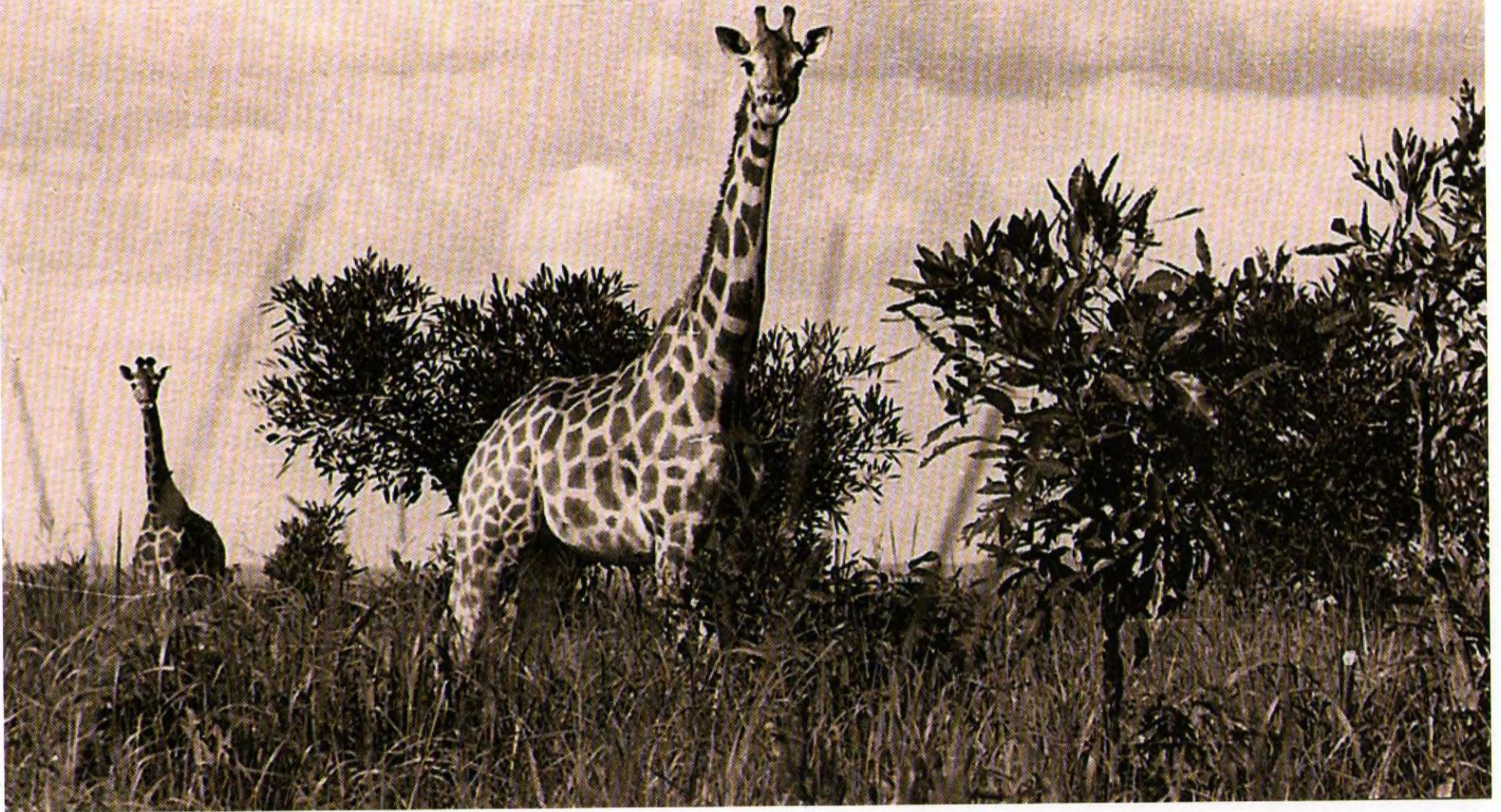
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Early History

By Jean-Pierre d'Huart & Jacques Verschuren



The history of nature conservation and protected areas in the Belgian Congo is a fascinating story, that took place against a background of extreme environments and involved passionately committed men and women, working in the forefront of a uniquely international context. The story breaks down into two distinct parts: the creation of the Belgian Congo Institute for National Parks (Institut des Parcs Nationaux du Congo Belge - IPNCB), and the subsequent achievements of this Institute. This section covers the national historical context in which Garamba National Park was created up to the 1960s.



Early History of Conservation in Congo

Creation of protected areas

At the beginning of the second half of the 19th century a growing concern was beginning to emerge regarding the excessive level of hunting of wild animals around the world. The survival of several wildlife populations was threatened, and certain species had already disappeared. Later, concern began to focus on the fate of natural habitats, ecosystems and landscapes with the onslaught of man's industrialisation. There was a growing realisation in the international community that urgent protection measures had to be taken, but what exactly needed to be done?

In 1872 the United States of America had introduced the concept of protected areas with the creation of Yellowstone National Park. At the same time the scientific community and several public bodies were becoming increasingly concerned about the on-going slaughter of large mammal populations in equatorial Africa. Indeed, as a result of the excessive trade in ivory, elephant reserves had already been created in the Independent State of Congo (in particular in Kasai), and voices were soon to be heard calling for the creation of reserves where all the wildlife could be protected. This principle was accepted at the London Convention of 1900 (Convention on the Preservation of Wild Animals, Birds and Fish in Africa). As a result of this conference and subsequent commitments made at the International Congress for the Protection of Nature in Paris in 1923, and the Convention for the Conservation of Wild Fauna and Flora in London in 1933, the Belgian Congo created its first hunting reserves. These hunting reserves were the foundations for what were later to become Congo's first three national parks (CCTA 1953; Harroy 1993; Van Schuylenbergh 2006).

A decisive moment in the development of the parks concept came in 1909, just before the death of Leopold II, when his nephew Prince Albert made an official visit to the new Belgian Congo. On his return to Belgium he added his voice to the increasing clamour for the creation of totally protected hunting reserves in the colony.



Northern White Rhino and hunter, 1913





Exploration and research in The Belgian Congo

At that time the colonial administration was being seriously criticised internationally, for giving out an excessive number of permits for the collection of mountain gorillas, a species discovered for the western world in 1903, which was attracting the interest of hunters, scientists and adventurers alike. During the First World War, the American Museum of Natural History, represented by the famous taxidermist Carl Akeley, requested collection permits. Akeley had two interests. Firstly, he wanted to collect the necessary material to build an exhibition on the mountain gorilla, and secondly he wanted to help create a sanctuary for the protection of gorillas in the wild (to “make the world a safer place for gorillas” as the modern saying goes).

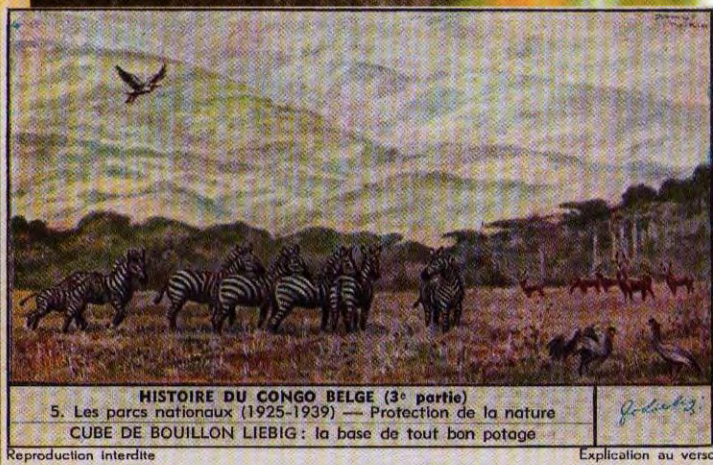
Accompanied by the British zoologist Alexander Burns, Akeley’s time in Kivu was spent collecting and observing animals and in 1923 he published his book, *In Brightest Africa*, which shed new light on the biology and behaviour of gorillas. The interest generated by this bestseller, together with King Albert I’s visit to Yellowstone National Park, led to the decision to reproduce the American model of a national park in the Belgian Congo. A group of naturalists led by Professor Victor Van Straelen, Director of the Royal Natural History Museum of Belgium (*Musée Royal d’Histoire Naturelle de Belgique*) urged the Minister of Colonies to prepare a Royal Decree for the creation of the Albert National Park. This was signed by the King on the 21st April 1925, creating the first National Park in Africa.

At the same time an American committee was set up and a new expedition led by Akeley was funded and organised in 1926. The story of the initial creation of the Albert National Park and the successive extensions that followed, are well described by Van Schuylenbergh

(2006). He describes how the communities native to Kivu, who had long shown respect for sacred sites and whose leaders, the *Mwamis*, were interested in finding a balance between their social and ecological needs, became instrumental in protecting this region. The low human population density in the area to the north, abandoned because of the presence of sleeping sickness, also militated in favour of the creation of the Albert National Park.

The development of a National Conservation Institute

On the international scene the decade 1920 to 1930 saw the growth of a vast movement towards nature protection in response to the slaughter of wildlife populations by irresponsible hunters and commercial poachers. During this period efforts in Europe led to the creation, in Brussels in 1928, of an *Office International de Documentation et de Corrélation pour la Protection de la Nature* (OIPN), whose first President was the Dutchman P.G. van Tienhoven, and whose General Secretary was the Belgian J.M. Derscheid (Harroy 1993). Twenty years later the pioneering activities of OIPN led



HISTOIRE DU CONGO BELGE (3^e partie)
 5. Les parcs nationaux (1925-1939) — Protection de la nature
 CUBE DE BOUILLON LIEBIG : la base de tout bon potage
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to the creation of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), whose secretariat, run by the Belgian professor Jean-Paul Harroy, remained in Brussels until 1955.

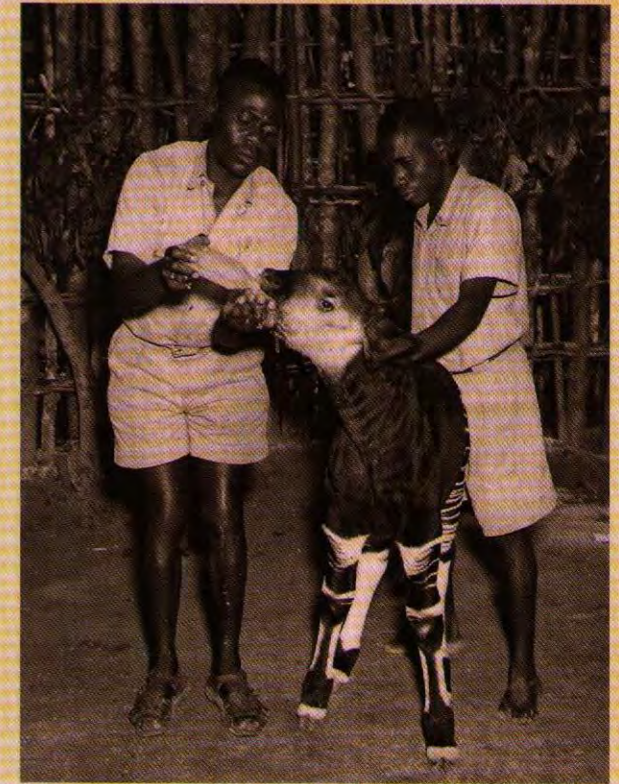
In 1929, an autonomous State Institution entitled Albert National Park State Institute was created by Royal Decree. It had its own legal entity and its headquarters was in Brussels. This institution, the precursor of ICCN (*Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature*), the current wildlife conservation agency of the Democratic Republic of Congo, was funded by the Belgian Ministry of Colonies but administered by a Commission composed of 26 people of both Belgian and other nationalities, chosen mainly from the scientific community and nominated by the King. A Management Committee was responsible for everyday financial and administrative management (IPNCB 1942, Van Schuylenbergh 2006). The parastatal nature of this new institution was a particularly bold political and constitutional move as its jurisdiction covered “totally protected reserves and their surrounding areas”. Vast areas of land now no longer came under the exclusive authority of the Governor General, the Governors and the Territorial Administrators. They now reported to a Management Committee which held extensive powers, a third of whose members were non-Belgian! This arrangement underlined the international and scientific dimension that Belgium intended to give this new institution.

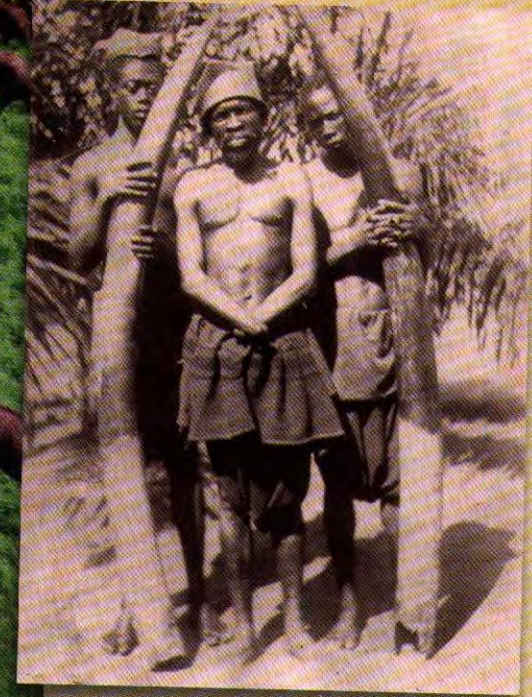
From 1932 onwards the Institute steadily consolidated its professional approach to management. The Duke of Brabant (future King Leopold III) presided in person over all the meetings of the Management Committee and the Administrative Commission. He also visited the Belgian Congo with Princess Astrid and delivered a memorable speech in 1933 at the Conference of London (IPNCB 1937). Soon after his accession to the throne, following the accidental death of his father King Albert I, he was at the centre of a new turn of events which saw the creation of the Belgian Congo National Parks Institute (*Institut des Parcs Nationaux du Congo Belge – IPNCB*), created by Royal Decree in 1934. Its first president was Victor Van Straelen. The IPNCB replaced the Albert National Park State Institute and opened the way for the creation of other National Parks in Belgium’s African colonies.

According to his contemporaries the development of IPNCB was largely the work of Van Straelen, his most remarkable achievements being:

- the extension of the southern sector of the Albert National Park (1933 to 1948);
- the creation, in 1934, of Kagera National Park (in Rwanda), and its development (1936 to 1938);
- the creation, in 1938, of Garamba National Park, and its exploration (1949 to 1952);
- the creation, in 1939, of Upemba National Park and its exploration (1946 to 1949).

In the 1960s the national parks in Congo and Rwanda-Urundi were amongst the best known tropical regions in terms of their flora and fauna (Anon 1964). As Director of the *Musée Royal d’Histoire Naturelle de Belgique* and President of IPNCB’s Management Committee from 1934 to 1960, Dr Van Straelen was a dominating personality. Over the years the clear vision for strict nature protection and the role of parks that he brought to the scientific community had a major influence on the philosophy and policies of IPNCB. This vision changed very little in the years leading up to independence and has been widely documented (Harroy 1941, 1946; IPNCB 1937, 1942; Van Straelen 1937, 1943).





The principles on which Congo's national parks' reputation was built and which, in many ways, still constitute the core values of today's ICCN, encompassed the following concepts:

- fully protected nature reserves, called national parks, are areas of wild nature where natural phenomena are allowed to evolve without human interference; the fundamental principle is to "maintain life in its original state";
- national parks are therefore open-air museums and laboratories (increasingly rare worldwide, but of global interest) where the principal role of IPNCB is to explore, observe and study undisturbed nature;
- national parks must therefore be totally protected, which means that considerable efforts must be devoted to surveillance and anti-poaching. Management is based on the principle of non-intervention (with certain exceptions);
- IPNCB stimulates international cooperation and promotes contacts between individuals and institutions;
- the promotion of tourism in parks, considered as a potential threat and often described as a necessary evil, is part of IPNCB's aims "on condition that it remains compatible with nature protection".

Not surprisingly the mandate and wide ranging authority given to the institution generated conflicts of interest and competence between IPNCB and the local colonial administrations. In the absence of an administrative branch of the IPNCB in Leopoldville, disagreements were managed in parallel by the park wardens on the ground and the Committees in Brussels. Under these conditions it is hardly surprising that many of the disagreements became increasingly difficult to resolve.

Early history of Garamba National Park

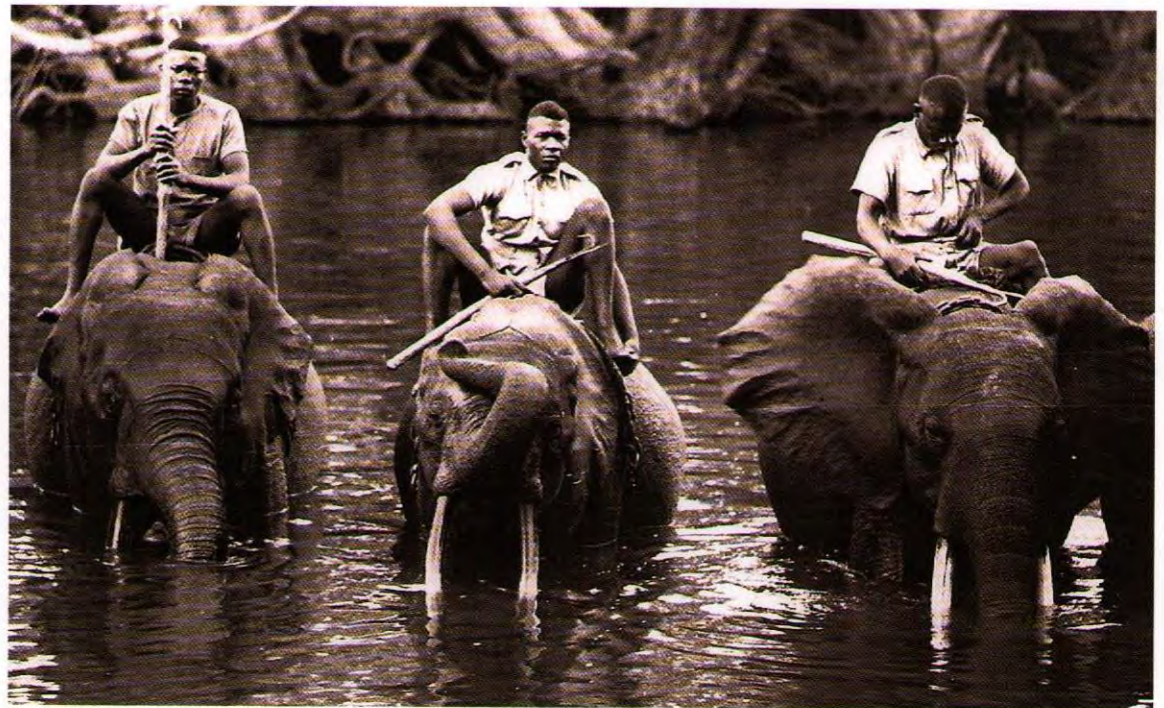
It is in this institutional context that the Garamba National Park was created. As early as 1929, soon after the creation of the Albert National Park, the IPNCB was planning to create a second reserve in Uélé, on the Congo-Nile divide, which was the border with Anglo Egyptian Sudan. The area chosen, which was particularly rich in wildlife, had already been part of the Aka-Dungu hunting reserve since 1920. Most of the human population had left the area "because of tribal and agricultural reasons" (De Saeger 1954). The principal reasons for the creation of this reserve were to prevent the extinction of the white rhino and the giraffe, two species found nowhere else in Congo, and to protect the very large populations of elephants. In 1932, the Institute asked Colonel Henri Hackars, park warden of the Albert National Park, to lead a mission to initiate negotiations for the creation of the future Garamba and Upemba National Parks. However these initial steps were unsuccessful because of the mining exploration permits held by the company "*Société des Mines d'or de Kilo-Moto*" which covered the entire country. In 1936 the official process of land attribution and boundary marking was initiated with the Faradje and Dungu Territorial Administrations, and in March 1938 the Garamba National Park was officially established by Decree. The dossier prepared by IPNCB carried the name "Leopold National Park" but shortly before the signature of the Decree the palace let it be known that the King had decided that only one park in Congo should carry the name of a member of the royal household (Harroy & Verschuren 1990).

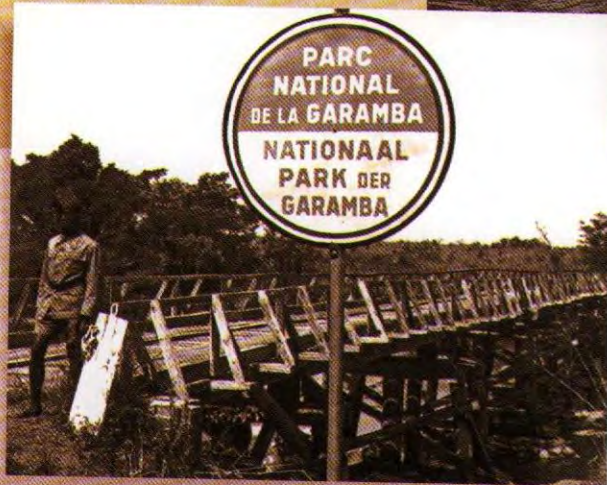
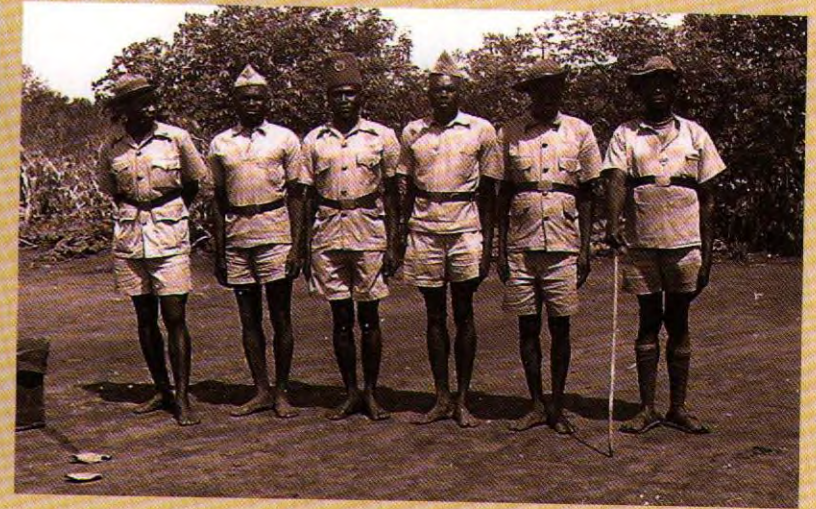
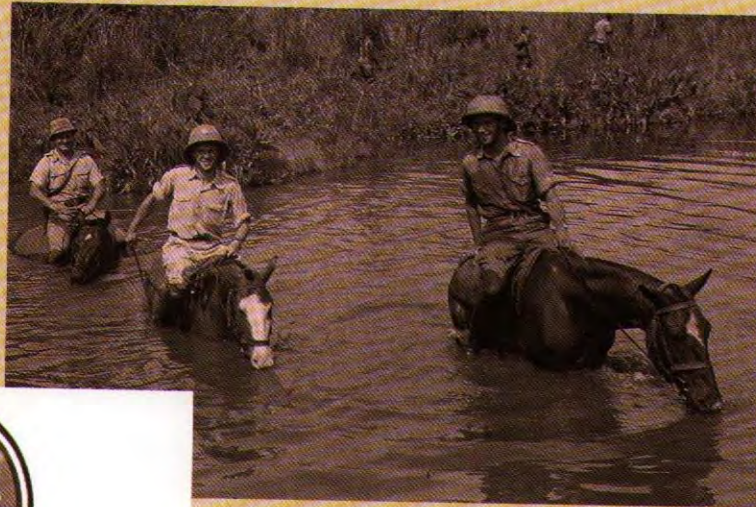
Management of Garamba National Park was initially given to Major Pierre Offermann, at that time director of the elephant domestication station. He was the park's first warden, but his temporary status as acting park warden lasted until 1946! (Harroy & Verschuren 1990).

The "*Mission de Chasse du Haut Uélé*", a service of the colonial government, had been in existence at Gangala-na-Bodio since 1927. Its task was to capture elephants in the region with a view to creating an elephant domestication station. The station was founded in 1928 at Api, site of the original experiments in elephant capture and domestication in 1904, but closed in 1932 (Offermann 1952). Until that time the station had always undertaken elephant captures south of the Dungu River, but even before the creation of Garamba observations had shown that elephants moved northwards in large numbers into what was later to become the fully protected reserve, in order to avoid being hunted (Harroy 1941). As the negotiations with the various authorities for the creation of the park had been particularly arduous, IPNCB agreed on a certain number of concessions in order to accommodate the interests of the various stakeholders.



Chiefs and other famous or infamous Azande at the creation of Garamba National Park in 1938





Article 2 of the Decree creating Garamba made provision for three rights of access (IPNCB 1942):

- the fishing rights for the indigenous population in several sections of the Aka, Garamba and Dungu rivers were maintained;
- the elephant domestication station was allowed to continue browsing its elephants to the north of the Dungu River “in a radius of 5 km, with Gangala at its centre”, and to capture elephants in the sector situated between the Garamba and the Dungu rivers. It also maintained the right to burn the grass for elephant captures ”;
- mining rights given to the *Société des Mines d'or de Kilo-Moto* under the Decree of the 8th February 1926 were maintained, but with strict controls over access and movement of agents undertaking prospection work.

IPNCB bemoaned the fact that its principle of total isolation and protection from human interference was far from being achieved for this reserve (IPNCB 1942; De Saeger 1954). Not only did the artificially high density of elephants and the periodic elephant hunting activities contribute to the maintenance of the savannah in the area between Dungu and Garamba but also, despite the existence of fire breaks all around the park, huge bush fires originating in Sudan swept through the park every year in December and January. Some of the uncontrolled bush fires were also a result of the elephant capture operations. The almost annual occurrence of locust swarms also added to the pressures on the park's vegetation.

Reports from the time indicate that poaching was less of an issue with the indigenous populations, who “quickly came to terms with the Institute's rules and regulations”, but rather with poachers operating out of Sudanese territory. Large bands of poachers regularly made forays across the border into the north of the park to hunt the large mammals (De Saeger 1954). It is easy to imagine the difficulties that the park managers confronted at this time. In 1940, Garamba had only 20 guards. There was not a single motorable track inside the reserve, several hundred kilometres of boundary needed marking, and the park had no aircraft. Jean-Paul Harroy, who was the first official park warden in Garamba from 1947 to 1948 (before being appointed General Secretary of the *Institut pour la Recherche Scientifique en Afrique Centrale*, IRSAC) noted that over the years the quality of guards improved as a result of a strict recruitment process. An extensive training period at Gangala-na-Bodio was required before entering the service and a policy of annual retraining for all the staff was adhered to.

The De Saeger Exploration mission

In 1948, IPNCB sent a scientific expedition to Congo led by the famous Swiss ethologist Heini Hediger, assisted by a young Jacques Verschuren, in order to study "how man and the strict protection measures applied in national parks affect the behaviour of animals" (Hediger 1951, Harroy & Verschuren 1990). Travelling via Stanleyville the expedition spent two months in Garamba (April-May) before continuing its 1600km journey in a Ford pickup to Albert and Kagera National Parks.

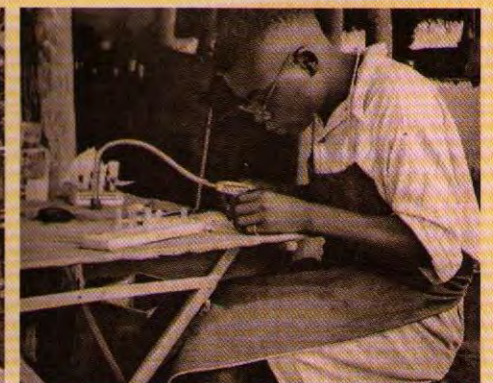
In 1949, after returning from a tour of inspection in the parks, Victor Van Straelen appointed Henri De Saeger to lead the first exploration mission to Garamba. At that time IPNCB made a particular point of covering the widest possible range of disciplines in its inventories and surveys. About 15 specific missions had already been undertaken to explore the Albert, Kagera, and Upemba National Parks, and several hundred scientific publications had already appeared in the annals of the Institute. Van Straelen wanted this exploration of Garamba to be an example of a multi-disciplinary study covering not only the traditional fields of research (collections, systematics, taxonomy), but also the more dynamic aspects (ecology, habitat dynamics, evolution). The expedition, involving ten Belgian scientists and technicians, including again, Jacques Verschuren, spent three years in the field (1949 to 1952), and was supported by the park warden M. Micha and his assistant J. Haezaert.

De Saeger's association with the Institute lasted for many years and covered a wide range of aspects (scientific, management and logistic). According to Verschuren (1995) it was De Saeger who was largely responsible for turning IPNCB into the effective organisation for which it became renowned. De Saeger was both demanding and conscientious. However he had difficulty finding experienced specialists in the various disciplines of bio-ecology that he wanted to establish in Garamba (De Saeger 1954) and was unable to ensure that studies covered a sufficiently long period. Despite an impressive array of results, which formed the basis for research in later years, there were nevertheless a number of important gaps. Verschuren (2001), who was one of the members of his team, gives a lively account of the activities and adventures of this expedition.

Among the many observations made by the De Saeger expedition, there is one which provides a good illustration of the questions scientists were beginning to ask themselves regarding the Institute's central philosophy of total protection. The mission rightly considered that the savannah biotope that dominated Garamba was not a climax community and therefore did not represent the final evolutionary stage of the vegetation for this area. The floral structure of the savannah was clearly being profoundly influenced by the huge annual bush fires; their "normal" evolution was therefore being held back and maintained in a state which did not correspond to what would be expected given the local soils and climate. De Saeger noticed that "the elimination of regular



People and activities of the De Saeger research expedition in Garamba 1949-52





1. En brousse : campement des travailleurs.



4. Le passage de la Garamba.
Saison des pluies.



5. La camionnette bloquée par une crue.

fires, which is the institute's policy in the reserves that it manages, appears to induce a rapid transformation of the plant communities, which in turn modifies the structure of the animal communities". Although the regular passage of fire, probably caused by poachers, fires escaping from burning of fields, guards and even lightning, produced a habitat that was favourable for the large mammal species for which the park had been created, one of the main tenets of the Institute - the elimination of all human influence - was not being respected. As had been done in the Albert National Park, De Saeger set up concrete markers throughout the park from where periodic photographs were to be taken in order to monitor the evolution of the habitats. One of the extraordinary discoveries made by the De Saeger expedition was that the extreme north of the park was the watershed connecting the hydrographic basins of the Congo and Nile rivers!

It is easy to imagine the enormous logistical difficulties that the IPNCB must have faced at the time, as it developed the parks and undertook this kind of expedition. Efficiency and pragmatism were essential. No less than 30 tons of materials, in 286 packages, were sent from Belgium to Garamba. In addition, all the usable equipment that Gaston de Witte had used for the Upemba National Park expedition (1946-1949) was transported from Katanga by lorry. At the end of the De Saeger expedition in 1952 the same material was packed up and sent off to Kivu for the exploration of the northern sector of Albert National Park. Despite the quality of the equipment the investigations were hampered by the isolation of the site and the lack of rapid communications, maps and tracks. These pioneers had to show great resourcefulness and determination to overcome the obstacles and find appropriate local solutions. Two major construction sites were launched in Garamba. A first track was opened up during 1950-51 into the interior of the park following the lines of watersheds for a distance of 130 km. This track enabled three base camps to be established for the expedition (Garamba-Nambira, Bagbele and Ndelele) comprising huts, mess camps, workshops, laboratories, tented camps, etc. The orders were that all construction materials - wood, binding, thatch - had to be collected outside the park and brought in on foot, sometimes from as far as 100 km away.

There are very few publications covering the management history of Garamba during the 1950s. We know however, that the conflicts between elephant domestication and nature protection finally came to head in 1951, after which time elephant captures within the boundaries of Garamba ceased. Cut lines were opened up all along the park boundaries - an enormous task - and a chain of guard posts was established. In 1957, the north of the park was used to provide landscape shots for the film, *The Roots of Heaven*, inspired by the novel by Romain Gary. During the years 1957 to 1958 the park warden Claude Cornet d'Elzius gave new impetus to the elephant domestication station by developing a survey method based on systematic recording of observations by guards on patrol - a precursor of modern day patrol-based ecological monitoring. An expedition to Garamba led by the Swiss J. Baer to look at helminth parasites of large mammals was given an authorisation to kill several ungulates, including a giraffe, in 1958. In this same year King Leopold III, following a visit to Garamba, undertook a long over flight of the future Salonga National Park. That was officially created, along with Maïko, Kundelungu and Kahuzi-Biega National Parks, in 1970.

Between 1960 and 1964 an ex-RAF fighter pilot, Albert Ory, was park warden of Garamba, assisted by François Miesse. According to some of his reports, wildlife, including the rhinos, was common and distributed throughout the park, including the north. The rare cases of poaching were by spearing. Fortunately the troubles that shook the Congo at the time of independence did not lead to looting or an increase in poaching. The two park wardens remained at their posts, despite Ory being arrested and beaten up by out-of-control soldiers. The fortitude and integrity of this courageous park warden so impressed the Congolese authorities that they insisted that he remain as warden. However, he was soon experiencing funding shortages, made all

the worse by the difficulty of transferring funds from banks that had no money. De Saeger (1962) recounts how “loans provided by one of the local residents enabled them to hold out ... while waiting for the funds promised by the government in Leopoldville”.

The situation worsened abruptly in 1964 when rebels invaded the park and, in the absence of armed resistance, rapidly occupied it (Prigogine 1967). Seventy seven out of the 96 guards went over to the rebel side. The others fled into the bush taking with them the domesticated elephants from Gangala-na-Bodio station. This period of occupation by ill-disciplined rebels resulted in considerable damage to the park. Buildings were wrecked and archives at Nagero and Gangala-na-Bodio were burned. In 1965, the rebels were progressively hunted down and the legal authorities reoccupied the region. As if this was not enough they now faced the problem of undisciplined elements of the United Nations Organisation forces who were turning their guns on the wildlife!

A year later, on the invitation of the Congolese government, Dr Kai Curry-Lindahl, a Swedish scientist and longtime collaborator of IPNCB, undertook an evaluation mission to the Albert and Garamba National Parks. He overflowed Garamba and confirmed that the park appeared to have been emptied of its wildlife, and the massive scale of poaching perpetrated by the rebels, mercenaries and Sudanese poachers during the course of 1964. Hundreds of white rhino horns were recorded by European members of the Territorial Administration in Faradje; some 900 rhinos were estimated to have been killed in less than one year! According to the head of the station it seemed that the remainder of the wildlife was concentrated in the southern sector, particularly along the track between Nagero and the Garamba River (Prigogine 1967).

It was only after these difficult years that it was possible to get down to making an evaluation, in retrospect, of the policies followed in the Belgian Congo's national parks. Despite the pessimistic predictions expressed in Belgium about the possible impact of post independence events in terms of guard desertions, wholesale occupations of the parks and disappearance of wildlife, the situation in fact appeared to be far from catastrophic. On the contrary the guards had shown great loyalty and courage, several of them dying heroically in armed confrontations. Although the wildlife had suffered seriously at the hands of poachers, no species had actually disappeared. With hindsight it was regrettable that so few Congolese senior staff had been trained. No Congolese had got past the level of brigadier in chief! On the other hand the personal qualities of certain charismatic leaders, such as the brigadier Vukoyo, or the traditional chiefs (and future park wardens) Tatala-Tatika and Dimoloyele, had largely contributed to limiting the damage.

The new government authorities confirmed their commitment to park protection and created the *Institut National Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature* to continue the work done by IPNCB. In 1964 INCCN appointed Albert Ory to represent Congo at an international conference on conservation in the United States of America. While IPNCB had been heavily criticised for the rigid rules and inflexible directives imposed by its somewhat dictatorial president Van Straelen, this approach had nevertheless been accepted (not without recriminations) by both the European and African staff in the Institute because of the over-riding importance of his mission and





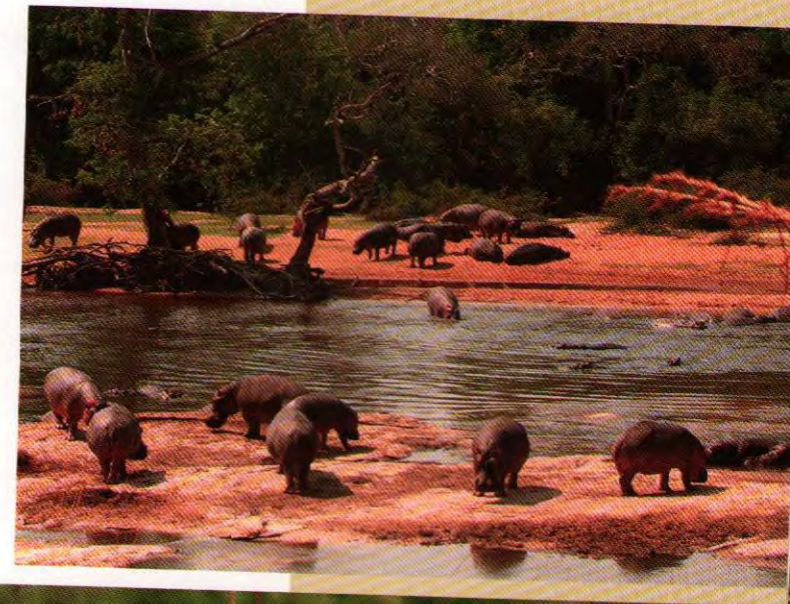
the respect that he had garnered from everyone. Staff training, which emphasised personal integrity and the capacity to improve oneself, transformed the guard force into a veritable elite imbued with a real sense of service and pride in its functions (De Saeger 1962).

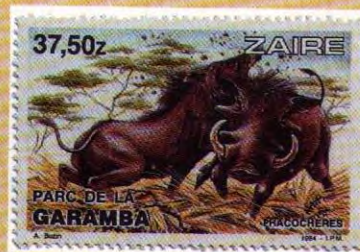
Although Belgium has been rightly admired for its contribution to conservation in its colony no official report has ever been published outlining and assessing the 35 years of IPNCB. The views of a number of authors were however summarised in a publication by the King Baudouin Foundation (Anon. 1991), based on an article by J. Verschuren. Key observations included:

- National parks in Congo were ecologically representative, viable and well-managed, and served as an example to many other African countries;
- The personnel were well-equipped and generally very motivated and disciplined; the effectiveness of the surveillance activities reduced the risks of poaching without major conflict;
- The infrastructures were designed to last, and the park boundaries were clearly marked in order to avoid disputes;
- The inevitable problems of land ownership resulting from the creation of the parks were resolved after negotiations and the payment of compensation or the maintenance of user rights. Populations who were displaced were given land of equal quality;
- The strict policy of total protection over a period of several decades enabled a series of a long-term observations and studies to be carried out;
- Park authorities were courageous enough to resist pressures both locally and from Belgium to allow various special dispensations;

- Park authorities were often disappointed by the lack of severity shown by the courts towards poachers and illegal encroachment;
- The national parks opened up enormous possibilities for scientists and naturalists and were a precursor of today's ecological movement;
- By protecting some particularly valuable habitats within the parks, the Congolese and Rwandan governments saved irreplaceable biotopes, created and extended a network of protected areas and prevented the extinction of rare species (some of which later became extremely valuable to the countries through tourism);
- The policy of total protection was pursued with admirable energy but sometimes with poor judgment. The need for rules and prohibitions was not well explained to the local populations and the public in general. Economic considerations (particularly in terms of tourism) should have been better explained;
- The Institute took too long to adapt its techniques for surveillance: aircraft were forbidden, there was no radio equipment and, for a long time, guards only had spears to work with.
- Sectoral research was not integrated into a national or regional ecological framework until 1960 and there was little collaboration with other scientific institutions.
- There was no systematic policy for training Africans for posts of responsibility, and efforts made by some of the expatriates to this end were not encouraged. In 1960, not a single Congolese or Rwandan had made the rank of park warden or head of station, and none were involved in management activities at headquarters;
- As in many other fields in 1960, the absence of a coherent strategy for redeployment of scientific and technical staff meant that the expertise acquired by Belgians who had worked in the national parks was not put to good use in the service of the newly independent Congo.

Overall however the results are largely positive: national parks remain one of the major success stories of Belgian colonisation and their presence has never been questioned by the governments which have followed.





During the years following independence the evolution of the situation in the national parks was followed with great interest by observers anxious to ensure the continued support of the international community. A number of detailed reports were produced (Curry-Lindahl 1964; De Saeger 1962, 1972; Harroy 1987; Prigogine 1967, 1985; Verschuren 1972, 1990). These reports painted a somewhat sombre picture of the parks. Garamba National Park slowly disintegrated between 1960 and 1970; the country's political problems only made the situation worse; salaries went unpaid; provisions stopped; and vehicles fell into disrepair. It seemed as though the park was slowly but surely going to disappear. And yet the troubles were nothing like as brutal as those in the Albert National Park.

From 1969 events took a turn for the better. Through a special cooperation agreement for national parks between Belgium and Zaire, Dr. J. Verschuren was appointed project leader and the new director general of INCCN (renamed IZCN *Institut Zairois pour la Conservation de la Nature*, in 1976). A speech by President Mobutu delivered on the 20th of May 1972 illustrated his political commitment to nature conservation. In 1970, he created four new national parks and placed INCCN directly under the Presidency. At this time a detailed foot survey of Garamba, the park which had been given highest priority by the *Direction Générale*, confirmed that most of north and west of the park had been almost emptied of its wildlife and that the main concentrations of animals were between the Dungu and the Garamba rivers. With the deployment of a newly motivated guard force, priority was given to this sector which contained the surviving population of rhinos and large herds of elephant. It was time to get back to work!

Between 1973 and 1976 a project supported and run by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN/FAO) worked with IZCN to re-develop the conservation of the park. Rhino and elephant numbers rose again and re-distributed throughout the park.

After 35 years of Belgian governance, the sequel to the long history of conservation and national parks in Zaire and DRC appeared to have a bright future.