

WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE BORDER BETWEEN HUMANS AND CHIMPANZEES? : WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN WEST AFRICAN RURAL LANDSCAPES

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Abstract

Phylogenetically, chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) are the closest relatives of humans and therefore occupy an exceptional position in terms of various aspects of their relationship with humans. I examined a new dimension in the complicated relationship between humans and their evolutionary neighbors, the chimpanzees, in the small village of Bossou, Republic of Guinea, West Africa, where wild chimpanzees and people live side-by-side. In this village, chimpanzees are traditionally conserved by local people, who believe that chimpanzees are reincarnations of their ancestors. The main habitat of the chimpanzees in this area consists of dense forest patches, which are preserved as sacred sites, and various stages of regenerating fallow bush that contains abundant oil palm trees. Chimpanzees and humans at Bossou share the oil palm resources in the fallow bush, which consequently serves as a buffer zone. The origin and function of the sacred groves at Bossou are likely related to past tribal warfare, and therefore are firmly embedded in the political and environmental history of the village.