



Report on the Chimpanzee Escape Incident on the 23rd of April 2006

On the 23rd of April 2006 at approximately 8:30 am a group of 31 chimps of various ages escaped from the Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary. This report follows a thorough investigation carried out by Tacugama and the Sierra Leone Police Authorities.

The official opening hours for the sanctuary are between 10 am and 5 pm. It is not known why on that day at 8 am a taxi with two Sierra Leoneans and three foreign nationals was at the gates of the nearby Congo dam, located about 500 m away from the sanctuary's main entrance.

According to the statement given to the police by one of the Sierra Leoneans, Melvin Mammah, they were going to Tacugama but took a wrong turn and ended up at the Congo-Dam gates, where they were confronted by one adult chimp. The chimp managed to brake one of the windows and got hold of Melvin's arm and bit him. The driver tried to go forward trying to hit the chimp with the car but the chimp jumped out of the way and the car crashed into the gates. Everyone jumped out of the car to get away from the scene but the chimp got hold of Melvin again and bit him on the leg. While he was struggling, the rest of the occupants ran away towards the main road. None of the foreigners were injured by the chimp. Melvin managed to hit the chimp with a stone and got himself freed but lost three fingers during the attack. He made his way towards the main road where he, was met by the others and was taken to the hospital. No-one knows why and how the taxi driver, Issa Bangura, went alone to the sanctuary entrance where he had been attacked by a group of chimps as he was found dead at the sanctuary gates by the police. We do not know what had prompted the attack and have to rely on Melvin's statement.

According to the Police (CID-Criminal Investigation Division), On the following morning, they visited the construction site of the new American Embassy complex where the foreigners were working and they were told that the three people involved in this incident had already left Sierra Leone! CID could not obtain any statement and we do not have their version of this incident.

Bala Amarasekaran, Director of Tacugama, was away in London. The incident was reported to him at 8:45 am by Laia, a Spanish volunteer working at the sanctuary. From this moment, Bala was establishing contact with various quarters and giving instructions to bring the situation under control. By noon, the police and the most senior Tacugama staff, Willie Tucker, reached Tacugama making loud sounds. They also fired three gunshots in the air to scare the chimps away. As predicted, all the chimps vanished into the forest. The Police made their way to the quarantine area and rescued Laia and another staff who had taken refuge in the clinic. On Bala's request, Willie and staff together with the armed personnel agreed to stay at camp to monitor the movement of the escaped chimps and to establish the reason for their escape. Also, to look into the possibility to tranquillise any of the escapees. They were also able to go around the electric fenced enclosures to establish the cause of the escape.

Fortunately, all the enclosures and the power system were intact except for one service slide that opens into the enclosure from one of the dens. The padlock on this slide was missing and the backup locking device made out of timber, fitted tightly into the groove of the slide had been dug out! There were two long sticks forced into the slide and also found couple of big stones and short sticks by the slide. Our locking device has worked effectively since its commissioning in year 2000. It is now certain that one or some of the chimps have been studying it and had managed to use stones and sticks to force open the slide, working from their enclosure. Unfortunately, this happened when one of the staff was busy carrying out his routine den cleaning and had opened the main door to take the garbage out of the den. As he turned back, he saw couple of adult chimps coming towards him. He panicked and basically took to his heels! He ran towards the main office area calling for help. The head keeper, Moses and another care staff, Dauda tried to go towards the den area to retrieve some equipment, but saw some of the adult chimps charging down on the path leading to the quarantine area. They were too afraid to confront the chimps and decided to go down to the main road to warn the public. Another junior staff, Sineh was greeted by some adult chimps in another den area, where he was engaged. They were quite friendly towards him and he was able to give away some fruits to the chimps. They did not bother him as he decided to go towards the staff quarters. He saw a man lying down by the gate. He went to help but found the man already dead. He got scared and ran towards Regent village to get help. None of the staff was aware of a chimp-attack taking place some 500 metres away by the dam.

T acugama has never had an incident of this nature in our eleven year history! We are aware of the risks involved in working with these intelligent and strong chimpanzees and give constant attention towards safety issues. But an accident has taken place and an innocent man has lost his life. For all of us, this incident brings back haunting memories of the rebel invasion into Freetown and the demise of thousands of fellow beings killed and maimed by fellow humans for no reason. We had to bury over a dozen men in shallow graves on either side of the road leading to T acugama. It hurts to witness another death at our gates and some of our chimps were involved.

But we need to look deep into this "captive chimp" issue! It is illegal to hunt, trade or keep chimpanzees as pets in Sierra Leone. T acugama was created in 1995 to address this very issue and has given home to 84 chimpanzees, confiscated and rescued from various locations in Freetown and rest of the country. T acugama is located within the forest reserve, away from human population, taking great care to contain the rescued chimps in a secure area. Thus reducing the risk of such accidents spreading across our towns and villages. We run an effective sensitisation and education program for the public, reminding the danger and risks with keeping wild-animals. Especially, chimpanzees in captivity. Although this incident is unusual, it is not unprecedented. Captive chimps can become very dangerous when suddenly "free" from their confinement. They have to deal with a situation they have never dealt with. They panic, get stressed and easily become threatened and can become aggressive. Also, by having had the chance of interacting with humans, they already know that they are much stronger than us and have no fear of humans. Although, we continue to enforce the law and sensitise the public, we are still dealing with the symptom. We need to focus on the root of this problem! This is about time for Sierra Leone and the rest of the African nations to take this issue very seriously. We need to take stringent measures to enforce the law and to punish those animal dealers and those who patronise them for continuing with this illegal pet trade. Hopefully, the sad event of 23rd April will be a wakeup call for everyone!

As at present, we are monitoring the forest reserve around the clock. Regular patrols are being carried out, covering a 20 km area around the sanctuary. We have retrieved 25 chimps. The majority of them returned at their own will, except for four that had to be rescued from different locations. Six chimps are still at large, including the alpha male (Bruno), two adolescent males, and three juveniles. We are on the move most of the time, visiting the villagers around the Western Area Forest Reserve, educating them about the signs to look for, how to contact us and to deal with the situation in case anyone spots a chimp.

We are extremely grateful to the President-H.E Dr Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, the entire Government of Sierra Leone, Dr Sama Banya (Senior Presidential advisor and Hon. President of Conservation Society, The Police force (OSD-special operations) and the villagers around the sanctuary for their support. We are touched by the way the Sierra Leoneans have handled this issue. We continue to solicit their understanding and assistance towards solving the current crisis and to continue with our mission. Our sincere gratitude goes to all our friends and supporters of T acugama for your encouragement during this difficult period.

We extend our heartfelt sympathies to the family of the deceased, Mr. Issa Bangura, and Mr. Melvin Mamah. We deeply appreciate their patience and understanding as we continue to look at the possibilities of helping them further. We are appealing to everyone to extend some help to these two families. Such a support will complement T acugama's efforts towards public relations and on going conservation work in Sierra Leone.

With warm regards,
Bala Amarasekaran
Director TCS



TACUGAMA CHIMPS

AUGUSTA & HER BOYS



Augusta, or Oggi, as we fondly call her (left), is a very special female chimpanzee. She was rescued by Bala 12 years ago. She was then approximately 12 years old, owned by a local soldier who inherited her from a mining engineer who was leaving the country. As with any chimp in captivity, Oggi became uncontrollable and the soldier had to drug her with Valium to keep her sedated most of the time. She spent many years chained by the neck in a tiny cage where she couldn't even stand (top right). Probably due to her tragic past she finds it difficult to trust humans and chimps. We had difficulties socialising her with other chimpanzees except for Gorilla, a soft hearted adult male. Both of them have been together for the last five years. Two years ago, Aiman, a 10 year old male chimp joined the group but only after having his share of problems with our alpha female. Poor Aiman lost a toe during one of the introductions. Despite this, Aiman, was eager to return to the group and Oggi accepted him after establishing her status. Since then, they are inseparable. Then we had troubles with two of our teenagers, Boyze and Babu. Bullying was their past time when they joined a group of young chimps, and had to be removed from that group. Bruno's group was a big and established group, and the only option we had was to try to put Boyze and Babu with Oggi. Despite several weeks of introduction process, Oggi made sure to send a strong message to the newcomers by inflicting multiple bites on Boyze during one of the feedings. Babu, on the other hand, showed great respect to her, and was accepted much easily. All five of them are now a happy family living together in one of our forested enclosures.



LUCY'S GROUP INTRODUCTION



After the completion of building the new dens, 16 juvenile chimps from Lucy's group has joined the 16 chimps in Jaguar's group. They are now sharing a 8 acre forested enclosure.





PASA 2006 VETERINARY HEALTHCARE WORKSHOP AT TACUGAMA



It was an honour for Tacugama to host the 4th PASA Veterinary Workshop in March. Veterinarians and health workers from the African primate sanctuaries gathered together to discuss primate health issues.

The workshop included clinical presentations and case studies by the participants. Master classes in emergency medicine



and surgery was conducted by Carmen Vidal, field, parasitology by Rosa Garriga and health bio-security by Steve Unwin. PASA sanctuaries continue to benefit tremendously from these workshops. We are grateful to the organisers, donor agencies and the participants. We extend a special thanks to the PASA executive director, Mr. Doug Cress.

AFRICAN PRIMATE REINTRODUCTION WORKSHOP

In April 20-22, our resident veterinarian represented Tacugama at the African Primate Reintroduction Workshop held in The Netherlands. The Apeldoorn Primate Park hosted the workshop at its facility in Apeldoorn. The workshop was staged by the Pan

African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA) which represents sanctuaries in 12 African countries, in conjunction with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG). It is expected that more than half of PASA member sanctuaries which collectively care for over 680 chimpanzees, 85 gorillas, 40 bonobos and literally hundreds of other drills, baboons and monkeys will embark upon reintroduction programs over the next 10 years. As for Tacugama the priority lies with a national survey and census to establish the current status and distribution of chimpanzees in Sierra Leone before we can embark on a reintroduction programme. The workshop gave us the opportunity to present our case and to look into the possibility of teaming with other interested parties to help achieve our goal.

GET TO KNOW OUR STAFF

Mosses Kapia, joined the Wildlife Conservation Branch in 1982 and was seconded to Tacugama in 1998 as a wildlife guard. He is a dedicated worker, spends long time getting to know every chimp and has won their respect. He played a vital role in the survival of Tacugama during the civil unrest in Sierra Leone. He has risen to the rank of head care staff. Visitors adore his educational tours around the sanctuary.



EDUCATION & COMMUNITY

NEW LIBRARY AT REGENT SCHOOL



As part of our community support and education program, we have set up a library at the local school with assistance from Kevin McPhilips Foundation and Joe & Karen Sabharwal (Aviance). The opening ceremony took place on the 2nd of March coinciding with the visit of Joe and Karen and the school prize

giving. Tacugama has also built a new stage for the school to hold school events. We continue to assist the local schools with educational material and the villagers around the sanctuary with various donated items.



Thanks to Astraeus Airlines, Karl Travel Agency and Mr. Baibai Kamara for their kind assistance. To be able to cope with the storage and distribution of these items, we have now constructed a storage facility.



JGI – USAID: CHIMPANZEE CONSERVATION AND SENSITISATION PROGRAMME (CCSP)

With USAID funding, the Jane Goodall Institute for Wildlife Research, Education and Conservation in partnership with Pro Natura International, Humane Society International, Guinea Ecologie, Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary, the Chimpanzee Conservation Center and the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone is leading a twenty-three month Chimpanzee Conservation and Sensitization Program in both Guinea and Sierra Leone. The ultimate aim of the CCSP is to create an environment conducive for the conservation and protection of chimpanzees and their habitats. The first phase of the CCSP has made good progress. Hiring and deployment of personnel, the KAP survey (Knowledge, Attitude and Practice), PNI E co-development Training Workshop (right photo), Community integration and familiarization visits, training and orientation of staff and awareness strategy elaboration has been completed. Our veterinary program is also benefiting through this funding. We were able to extend the services of our resident veterinarian, Dr. Rosa Garriga. She is undertaking a twelve month intensive veterinary training for one of our senior staff, Mr. Willie Tucker.



News from Camp

Laia Dotras, a biologist working as environmental educator, arrived in January to volunteer at the sanctuary for three months. She had previously volunteered as a keeper at Mona Foundation, a chimp sanctuary in Catalonia. She is in charge of the



quarantine area, taking care of the new arrivals, assisting the vet and acquiring medical skills. She is also involved in setting up and running the library at the local school in

Regent. Her enthusiasm and commitment is remarkable. She is prolonging her stay for the whole year as both parties seem to benefit from this engagement.



During the last six months six new orphaned infants have been rescued:

Zoyas (right on the photo), Peke (left on the photo), Umno, Jerry, Chica and Cim. Except for Cim, the others have completed their quarantine and are now together, going through integration.



Our onsite laboratory is getting more functional thanks to Dr. Rosa Garriga, and those who have donated various laboratory equipment and supplies: Almedica, Assistent-Hecht, HSUS, PASA, Dr. A. Prince, Ramsey Medical Laboratory. We are still in need of an autoclave and an haematocrit centrifuge to



complete the facility.



We have great pleasure in introducing Santos, a local woodcarver who has been given the opportunity to express his talents at Tacugama, despite his disability. Santos was recruited on a part-time basis in January 2006 as part of Tacugama's community support drive. It is an inspiration for everyone to see this young man not losing hope and trying hard to secure a future for his family. Sierra Leone's civil conflict left a legacy of suffering and Santos is survivor of this brutal civil war. Rebel forces hacked off one of his hands when he was a teenager. He enjoys watching and drawing our chimps and transforming them into beautiful work of art. If anyone is interested in buying one of his work and helping this young man, please get in touch with us.



OBITUARY

COOMBA

(12 October 2005 – 19 February 2006)



T acugama has a non-breeding policy and we use birth-control implants for contraception. T his method is reversible as we wish to keep the option for our chimps to be reintroduced into the wild. Unfortunately, like in humans, this method is not 100% proof! Charlie girl became pregnant and by the time we realised, the pregnancy was at an advanced stage.



She gave birth to a healthy girl in October last year and we named the baby, Coomba. Charlie girl was a loner and way down in rank within her group. Coomba became the link between her and the rest of the group. We have never seen a happier Charlie girl before! Sadly, in mid February, Coomba was diagnosed with meningitis. Although she received appropriate care and treatment, she died on the 19st of February. Indeed a sad loss! T hankfully, Charlie girl has moved on. We usually see her playing and carrying other infants from her group.

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