

Project Update: August 2017

The field work started on June 22nd 2017. The first week was about visiting the edges of the park with the help from RDB trackers to understand the area and where I can put our transects. The second week was about setting up transects in and outside the park and visiting the transects for chimpanzee presence. The forest edges in Gisovu are complex. They are a mixture of patches of natural forest, buffer zone (eucalyptus and pine plantations) and people's farms (See the first photo below). For example, only at 600 m away from the park edges, we could find 1 km transect parallel to the forest edge. Below that we would start outside the forest and find ourselves inside the park. Most of our transects outside the forest passed through pine and eucalyptus buffer zones, people's houses, farmlands and roads.

The edges of the forest are surrounded by three types of buffer zones: pine, eucalyptus and tea plantations. We found a lot of native trees around and in the buffer zone. My field assistant, Martin, told me that some of the trees are planted by local people who use them for certain purposes such as food or medicinal plants. It was very interesting to see the amount of native trees distributed in the buffer zone and even outside the forest, and we could see how people have entered the park to put their farms. There is a tea plantation right after the pine and eucalyptus buffer. And so many livestock around the park. Some of our transects fell right next to people's houses in Nyarusiza village Center. These transects also passed right through the main road. During our visit, we were able to find chimp faeces in the road and other chimp signs, which confirmed what local people have been telling us that chimps have been hanging in that area. During our sampling, we found a lot of beehives in the buffer zone (pine and eucalyptus plantations). I tried to record all the beehives but there were so many. Some of the beehives were destroyed by chimps and this happened very recently. (Below are some photos). We found some ficus seeds, myrianthus, eucalyptus (which I don't know how they got into chimps stomach.

Chimpanzee presence inside the park

During our visit of the transects inside the forest, we found a lot of chimpanzee signs, including chimpanzee's trails and nests. I also recorded fruit phenology at the edges and inside the forest. So far, we have found a lot of fruits in the forest interior.

Some challenges

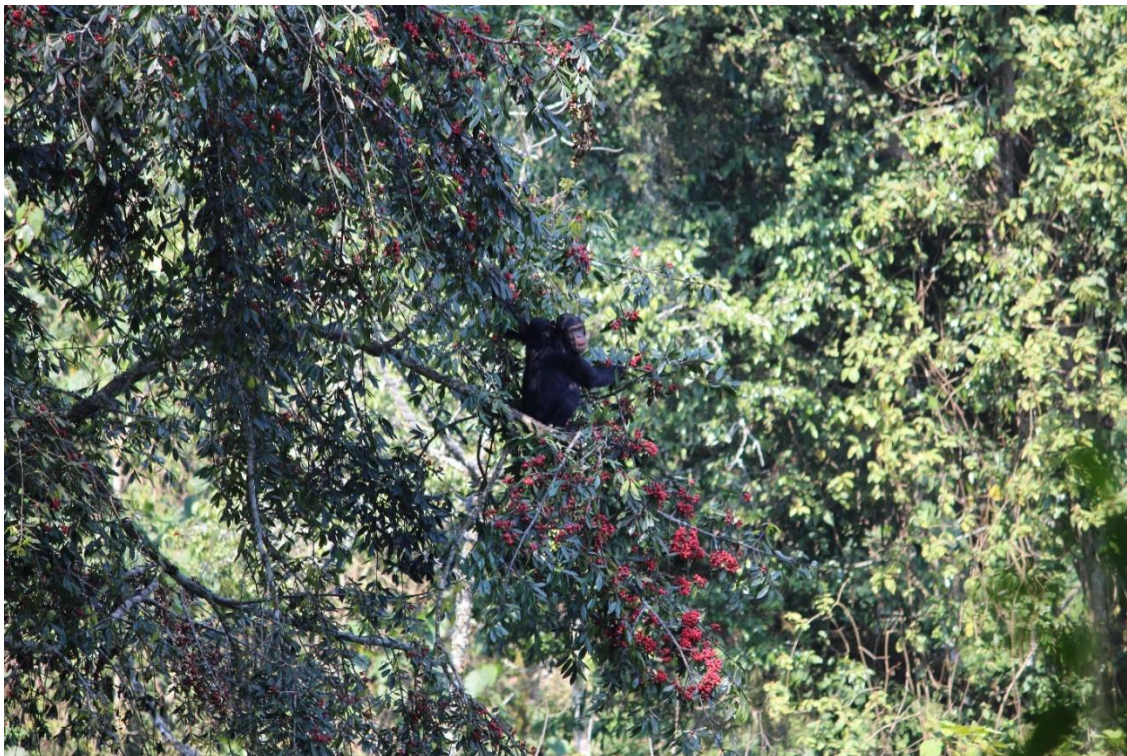
The main challenge in Gisovu is the terrain. It was challenging to set up transects inside and especially outside the forest because of the complex landscape. Inside the forest, we crossed rivers and some rocks, we had to be very careful to keep our transects straight. For example, it took us about 10 hours to set up only 1 km transect, but with the time we got used to the field and it all went well. The transects outside the park were also difficult because of the terrain but also passing through people's farms and forests. We had to explain them about the research.

In general, the field work in Gisovu is going well. I get some time to talk to local people about my work and conservation in general. I have noticed that people in Gisovu are tolerant toward chimpanzees and baboons despite the damage they cause. I tried to ask them the reason of that tolerance and they tell me that RDB compensate them when

there chimps and other wildlife destroy their crops. I found this very positive. We have successfully finished to sample/visit transects outside the forest. This week, we are doing the vegetation sampling inside the forest to understand chimpanzee habitat and some ecological factors influencing chimp's distribution.



Gisovu, forest edges and buffer zone



My first sight of Gisovu chimps



Making transects inside the forest



Making transects outside the forest (Passing through charcoal burning fur and other human activities)



Left: Beehives destroyed by chimps. Right: Sampling inside the forest



Sampling inside the forest



Chrysophyllum trees and fruits outside the park, along the road