CyberTracker Data Shows Impact of Ebola on Lowland Gorillas

Data collected by trackers working for the ECOFAC programme using the CyberTracker have showed up the extent of the lowland gorilla mortality due to Ebola in the Lossi Sanctuary, Republic of Congo.

At the time of the Ebola outbreak in 2001 no conventional statistical data was available, since the outbreak was not anticipated by scientists working in the area.

The only data available was CyberTracker patrol data that showed the presence of lowland gorilla before the outbreak of Ebola, and absence of gorilla over a large area after the outbreak. In addition, Index of Abundance data also suggested a drop in chimpanzee, duiker and bushbuck numbers.

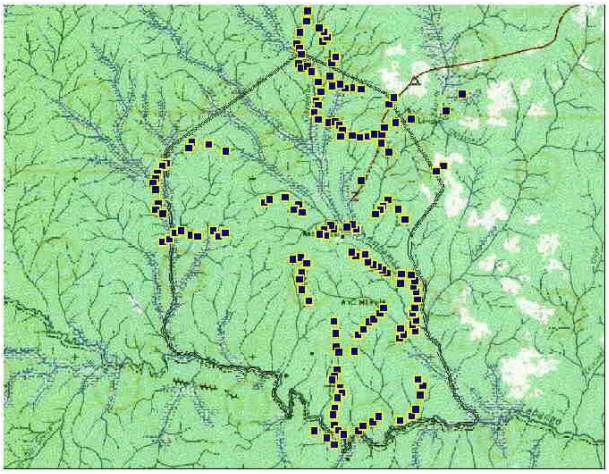
This has been confirmed by the primatologist, Dr Magdalena Bermejo, who has studied the gorillas in Lossi for ten years, and by the veterinarians of the International Medical Research Center of Franceville (CIRMF).

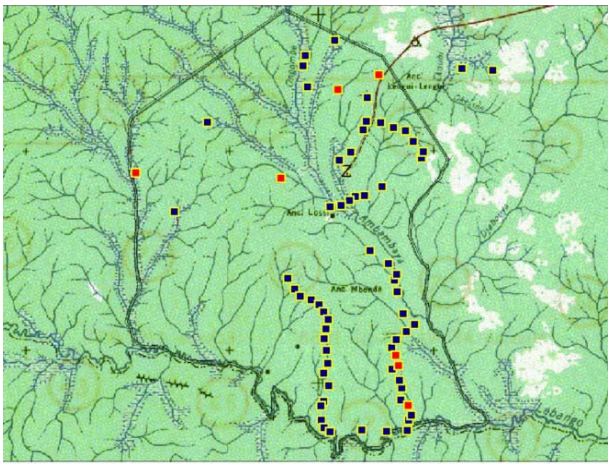
All the eight families (139 individuals) followed by Dr Bermejo since 1994 have now disappeared from the study area (40 km^2). Two of these families were habituated to human presence. This habituation was not only a first with lowland gorillas but also was a first sight tourism experience in association with villages.

The CIRMF veterinarians have been able to collect a lot of samples and to confirm the presence of the virus in chimpanzees and gorillas. And, carcasses from other species have been found in the same area. The Index of Abundance data collected on other species by the trackers, such as duiker and bush pig, calls for further research.

Gorilla in Odzala National Park (Photo © Station biologique de Paimpont/ECOFAC)

Ebola, like other emerging diseases, remains a critical area of study to understand the ecology of large primates and its implication for conservation.





The yellow dots indicate the presence of lowland gorilla before (left) and after (right) the outbreak of Ebola