

THE WORLD WILDLIFE RACKET

THE CONAKRY CONNECTION

FIRST IN A TWO-PART SERIES BY DAN STILES

DAN STILES



first came to Kenya in 1971 to assist on the Koobi Fora paleoanthropology project at Lake Turkana. He taught at the University of Nairobi from 1977-1981 then worked for UNEP and other UN

agencies for several years. He has researched extensively in Africa and Asia on forest and drylands natural resource utilisation. Since 1999, he has been carrying out ivory trade studies and he just completed an assignment with UNEP to help prepare the Stolen Apes report, along with another one on the elephant crisis, both launched at CITES 16 in Bangkok.



CITES, c'est la plus sale des conventions en ce qui concerne la falsification et la fraude. (CITES is the dirtiest of conventions when it comes to falsification and fraud).

Ansoumane Doumbouya
FORMER HEAD OF THE GUINEA CITES
MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

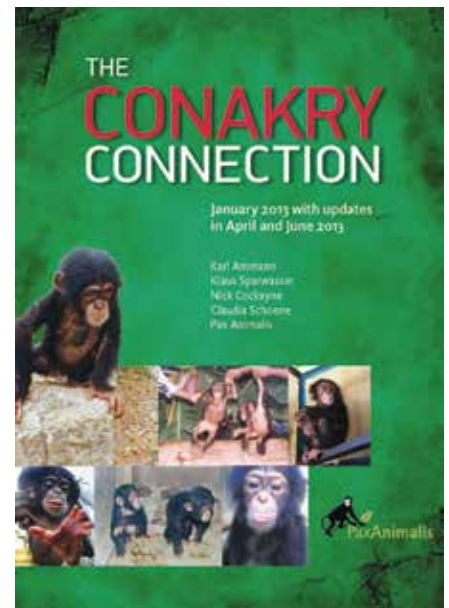
Mr Doumbouya knew what he was talking about, since he and colleagues in Conakry, the dilapidated capital of Guinea in West Africa, were involved over the course of several years in the issuance of falsified CITES export or transit certificates that allowed the illegal trafficking of hundreds of great apes and other supposedly protected wildlife species. Many apes did not even originate in Guinea, but were smuggled in from neighbouring countries and even as far afield as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), over 3,000 km away

Karl Ammann (profiled in this issue's Conservation Characters, (pg 68 -72) and associates have been working for several years to uncover a scandalous web of wildlife traffickers and government officials in Africa and Asia who have been conspiring to get around CITES regulations designed to protect threatened species from trade overexploitation. CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, lists over 30,000 species in one of three appendices that afford varying degrees of protection from international trade. All the great ape species are listed in Appendix I, which means, theoretically, that they receive complete protection from commercial trade. It is illegal, both in national and international law, for CITES Parties to sell great apes across borders.

In spite of CITES protection, one can visit countries such as Egypt, the UAE, Pakistan, Thailand and China – which do not have wild great ape populations of their own – and find hundreds of chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans in zoos, safari parks and circuses, many of them privately owned. In the five countries mentioned, it is often difficult to distinguish zoos from amusement parks. The apes are being exploited to make money, with owners charging the public to watch apes perform or to be photographed with them. Some never make it to zoos, but disappear from public view as trophy 'pets' for the rich.

Where did all of these great apes come from and how did they get there?

Ammann and associates describe in great detail, with abundant supporting evidence, the tragic details of great ape



Report cover

trafficking in a series of documentary films and reports, culminating in the release in August, 2013, of *The Conakry Connection* (<http://www.pax-animalis.org/downloads>). The officials that are tasked with enforcing CITES regulations and related legislation in ape supply countries such as Guinea, DRC, Cameroon and Nigeria and in demand countries, such as those mentioned above, have been carrying out an elaborate game to make money off wild-caught great apes.

Various ruses were used to export great apes from Guinea. The scheme that got them into trouble, ironically, was the purportedly legal one. Between 2007 and 2011 about 130 chimpanzees and at least 10 gorillas, which Ammann believes were Eastern Lowland (*Gorilla beringei graueri*) from the DRC, were sold to China using the CITES 'C' Source Code. This code signifies that the animals were

bred in captivity in accordance with CITES regulations, which confers legality on non-commercial trade in Appendix I species. The China CITES Management Authority (MA) issued the corresponding import permits to allow issuance of the export permits, following CITES rules. The China CITES MA even wrote to Guinea requesting confirmation that the permits were genuine. They received letters of confirmation.

The ape imports to China were duly recorded in the United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) Trade Database. It took a surprisingly long time, but eventually the CITES Secretariat took action on the import records in 2010, realizing that Guinea had no wildlife breeding centres of any kind. Also troubling, Guinea had not reported the exports. After considerable delay, Guinea eventually authorised a visit by the CITES Secretariat to look into the matter in September 2011. They found a real mess. The CITES confidential mission report stated in part:

'However, what was most troubling was the increasingly regular discovery of permits, allegedly issued by Guinea, which appeared to be forgeries or altered genuine permits. This was noted both by prospective importing countries and by the Secretariat. As a result, the Secretariat issued Alert No. 36 of July 2010 to warn Parties of such fraud.

This was not the first occasion when fraudulent documents, allegedly issued by Guinea, had been detected on a regular basis. The Secretariat had issued Alert No. 22 in April 2006 to warn Parties of this.

It was suspected, at various times, that staff of the previously-designated Management Authority might still have stocks of permits and that either they were issuing them illicitly or unscrupulous traders had gained access to them.'

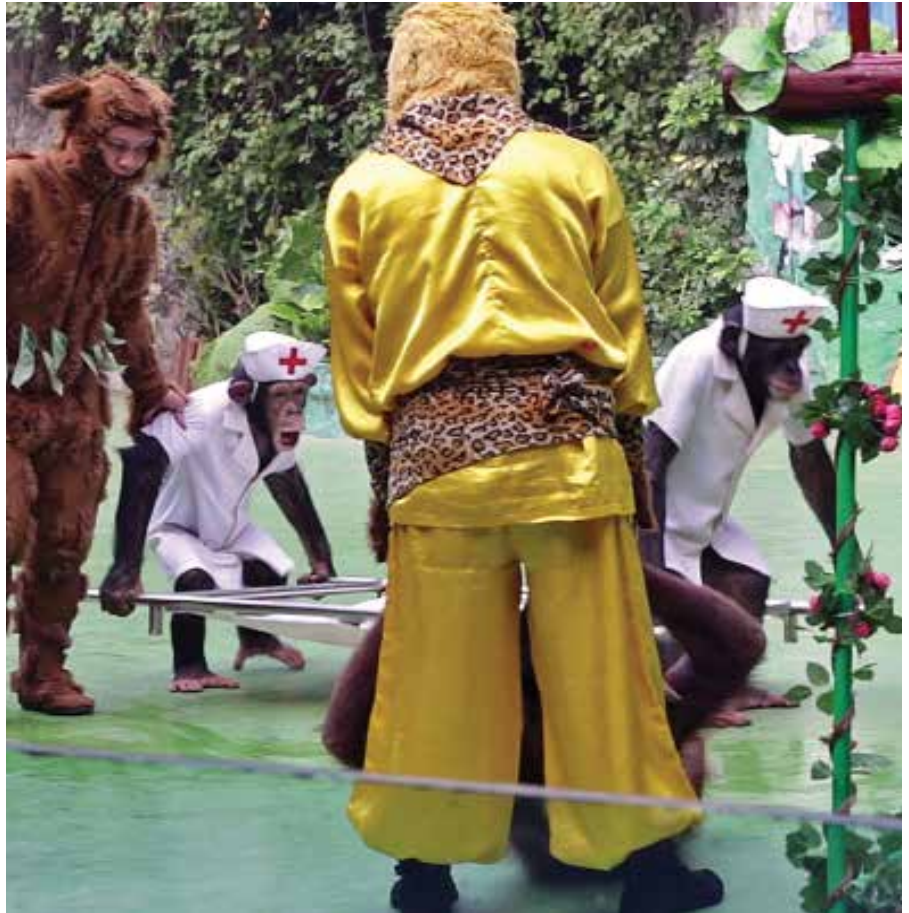


PHOTO BY: KARL AMMANN

These performing chimpanzees in a Guangzhou wild animal park were imported illegally from Guinea, supposedly to be viewed in a zoo. Note the hard squeeze to the shoulder of the chimp on the left.

It would appear that someone in China, not yet known, had made an arrangement prior the first great ape imports in 2007 with the then Guinea CITES MA head Namory Keita. Mr Keita later moved to another department, apparently taking a number of blank signed and stamped CITES export permit forms with him. Mr Doumbouya took office in 2008. The China MA continued to write to Mr Keita after he had left the CITES MA office to request permit confirmation, which they received, but Keita no longer had the authority to issue such confirmation. The China CITES MA should have known this and Mr Doumbouya claims that he emailed them informing them of the change. Doumbouya even met China CITES MA officials in March, 2010, at the CITES conference in Doha, Qatar, but China continued corresponding with Keita until 2011. In 2010 alone China imported at least 69 chimpanzees and

10 gorillas, most of them probably after this meeting took place.

In an interview on videotape with Ammann in 2012, Doumbouya repeated what he had earlier told the CITES Secretariat, that variously someone higher up forced him to sign blank CITES export forms for various people, that unauthorized people took signed forms from his desk, that traffickers took forms directly from the printer's shop, and that legitimate forms that he had issued for other species were later changed to great apes by traffickers using digital photography manipulation. For Doumbouya, this explained how all of those great apes ended up in the UNEP-WCMC Trade Database. He claimed he had knowingly signed no forms himself for great ape exports.

To investigate further how dealers operated, in June 2012 a conservation activist in South East Asia agreed to set up an internet-based trading company

in Indonesia that then became the vehicle to negotiate with dealers who had been identified in Guinea. He also negotiated with the representatives of Asian Dragon, a company headed by an Australian, but with offices in South East Asia, which had been advertising chimpanzees and gorillas online. Asian Dragon was trafficking great apes from DRC and Guinea via Egypt and Syria to Middle East and Far East countries. The communications were passed on to Ammann for analysis. They included copies of actual CITES export permits from Guinea and DRC to China and elsewhere.

From the communications with traffickers, Ammann found out that another common ruse for exporting apes with CITES permits was to label them as monkeys in the forms. Traffickers also told Ammann that, depending on the species and numbers involved, bribes to government officials like Doumbouya and Keita to obtain CITES export permits ranged from USD 600 up to USD 5,000. The United Nations Environment Programme's

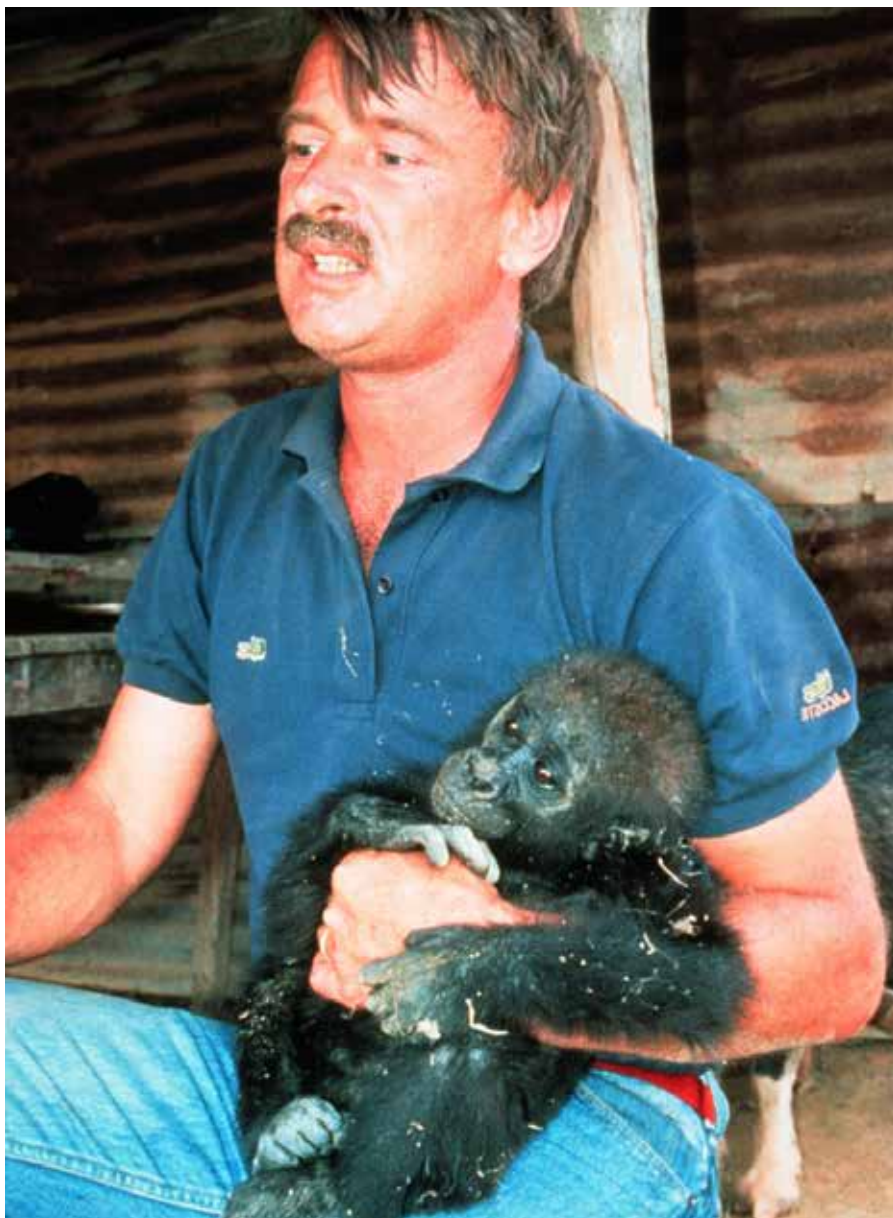


PHOTO BY: HELMUT SCHOLZ

Karl Ammann holding a baby ape.



PHOTO BY: KARL AMMANN

Poachers kill the mother and capture the orphan to sell to great ape traffickers.

THE UNEP-WCMC DATABASE SHOWS THAT THOUSANDS OF BIRDS, REPTILES, PRIMATES, PLANT SPECIES AND MORE – EVEN ELEPHANT AND HIPPO IVORY – WERE EXPORTED FROM GUINEA WITH CITES PERMITS 2007-2012.

World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) database shows that thousands of birds, reptiles, primates, plant species and more – even elephant and hippo ivory – were exported from Guinea with CITES permits 2007-2012. We will probably never know how many were bogus, nor how many were exported and never reported.

Ammann decided to try and obtain incriminating evidence on film directly with dealers in Guinea and sent, in collaboration with a German documentary film production company, an experienced undercover investigator equipped with a spy camera to Conakry in December 2012. He met first Haroun and established that Haroun's father

was a wildlife dealer based in Kinshasa, DRC, who dealt mainly with South African dealers. Haroun's grandfather was also a dealer. Haroun stated that he had collecting teams in forest villages that caught and kept great apes on order. Apes were also kept in Bamako, Mali, and could be brought to Conakry or shipped elsewhere at any time. Ethiopian Airlines was the carrier of choice, as they would carry any animal, as long as payment was there. His family had even shipped apes to Thailand and Indonesia, and he stated that many monkeys and apes went from the DRC to China. Some verbatim excerpts are illuminating:

PI: "Does he not check, the CITES official?"

H: "No he will not check... I will tell him I need CITES of monkey but I will send the chimp as monkey. If you tell him it is chimp, he will charge you more money. He tell you to pay more money and then he will go to the airport and check also, because he want money every time. "

PI: "Who's the CITES official here?"
H: "It's the name of Doumbouya..."

PI: "So have you managed to ship chimpanzees from Congo before?"
H: "Yeah... my dad already did it... already send chimpanzees from Congo to Arabic people... Dubai... and my brother-in-law from Ivory Coast... has already sent five chimps to another country... Bahrain, Kuwait, these Arabic

countries. Very big buyers. They like chimps, they like monkeys."

Haroun said that it was no longer possible to get a C Source Code CITES export permit for chimpanzees in Guinea because of the CITES Secretariat crackdown, but that it was easy to get one in the DRC. Ammann has been trying to find where in China the great apes from Guinea are being held and to have them repatriated to appropriate sites in Africa, either in the wild, or more feasibly, in managed sanctuaries. These attempts have built into an acrimonious row with the CITES Secretariat and the China CITES MA.

The China connection and CITES role in all of this will be described in Part 2 of this story. ●



PHOTO BY: KARL AMMANN

THE GREAT APE SAGA

The Great Ape Saga began in 2005 when six chimpanzees were seized at Nairobi airport, coming from Cairo, and sent to the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary near Nanyuki, Kenya. Ammann decided to begin an investigation into the trafficking of the chimpanzees, which led to him and associates travelling over the following eight years to Egypt, Nigeria, the DRC, Guinea, Thailand and China, to dig into

the morass of illegal great ape smuggling. What he and collaborators at Pax Animalis, a Swiss conservation NGO, and Perentie Productions (working on behalf of ZDF, one of Europe's largest television networks), found are chronicled in two documentary films, *The Cairo Connection* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7gsvvzlab8), and *Destination China*. Two reports entitled *The Cairo Connection*, parts 2 and 3, have also been published (karlammann.com/pdf/cairo-connection-2.pdf,

www.karlammann.com/pdf/cairo-connection-3.pdf).

Ammann et al. pose serious questions about the effectiveness of CITES, and particularly its Secretariat in Geneva, in cracking down on offenders of CITES regulations. ●

These chimpanzee orphans are being held for resale.