

## Kikongo Otter Sanctuary

DRC – Rita & Glen Chapman

Began in 2010

**Kikongo is one of the African Otter Networks “Otters for Africa” partners. We want to help them accomplish their conservation goals – 1<sup>st</sup> up is their need for 25 shovels for the conservation club: Friends of the Congolese Earth! Our goal is \$1000 to include extra, there is always something that will make restoration work easier!**



As a newborn babe presented to Mama Rita on February 11, 2010.

Mazu, the Congo Clawless Otter from Kikongo, now serving as an Ambassador for African Otters, Wildlife, Wild places, Congo's unequalled natural heritage, and Nature. Known around the world.



The Kikongo Otter Sanctuary is located in the forest at a mission station; it was founded in response to a need – a local hunter killed a female otter to feed his family. In the process he had seen her drop something, something he went back for – Mazu who is estimated to have been one or two days old. Being a kind hearted man he took the cub to the Chapman's who had raised other orphaned wildlife. Thus began the sanctuary, the rewilding of three Congo clawless cubs and the birth of community awareness of their wild neighbors in a way they had not considered. This was not only due to the otter cubs and the Chapman's but also to the birth of a deep commitment to conservation by their fellow villagers, Delphin Kumbi and Sico Lunko.

The most recent message from Kikongo:

*Sico and Delphin continue to take pictures on the digital camera's IOSF sent them, and are still using the camera traps. With Delphin's background and experience as a longtime hunter, he is particularly good at that. In addition to the picture of the adult and juvenile CCO coming up the stream bed, he has a clip of a vague shape with eyes around the margins of a swampy area that we believe to be another CCO, but we can't confirm it. The guys have taken pictures where otters have relieved themselves. We have not seen anything with bones or scales in it yet. The material is always runny and black, leading us to believe that the CCO in the Kikongo area are primarily worm and water snail eaters. Other photo's they have taken show foot prints, but there is frequently so much leaf litter, that the prints don't show up well.*

*This summer, we've had no wild otters killed that we've heard about. Hurray.*

*Sico, Delphin and I have started a conservation club for 25, 11 year old boys at Kikongo called "Amis de la Terre Congolaise." (Friends of the Congolese Earth.) They wear bright snazzy red shorts and jerseys, have a song they sing, receive a short conservation lesson each time they meet, and then spend the majority of the time doing a field project with us. We've met about 6 times. Since August is a critical time for forests as people slash and burn for their field planting in Sept., we have concentrated on the re-forestation of areas on the edge of Kikongo that were badly burned in last year's devastating fire season. The kids have collected local forest tree seeds now falling, planted them, planted cuttings that will root and be resistant to fire, and have planted acacia seedlings in tree bags for a future artificial forest we plan to plant. They have also been working on terraces for forest paths to springs that have been badly eroded. Great fun.*

*The experiences we are giving the boys will be ones they never forget. There is nothing being done in communities at any level that addresses care for the earth. The guys and I plan to touch on many different areas with the kids. Wetlands, spring and animal conservation will be one of them. One of the things we could immediately use funds for would be enough shovels for each boy to use, instead of rotating our personal 5 among them!*

