

The Royal Museum for Central Africa and the DR Congo today

MAIN PARTNERS IN THE DRC

- Institut des Musées nationaux du Congo
- Musée national de Lubumbashi
- Université de Kinshasa
- Université de Lubumbashi
- Université de Kisangani
- Université officielle de Bukavu
- Institut supérieur pédagogique de Mbanza-Ngungu
- Institut supérieur pédagogique de Bukavu
- Centre de Recherches géologiques et minières
- Centre de Recherche en Hydrobiologie
- Centre de Recherche en Sciences naturelles, Lwiro
- Institut géographique du Congo
- Institut national pour l'Étude et la Recherche agronomique
- Institut national de Recherche biomédicale
- Institut de Recherches sociales appliquées de Kisangani
- École régionale postuniversitaire d'Aménagement et de Gestion intégrés des Forêts et Territoires tropicaux (ERAIFT)
- Centre d'Études politiques de Kinshasa
- Centre d'Études et de Recherches documentaires sur l'Afrique centrale
- Centre de Documentation de l'Enseignement supérieur, universitaire et Recherche à Kinshasa
- Goma Volcano Observatory
- Compagnie forestière et de Transformation

Layout: tomatolab.eu
Published in Tervuren, Belgium (RMCA)

© Royal Museum for Central Africa, 2019
Leuvensesteenweg 13
3080 Tervuren, Belgium

www.africamuseum.be

Publisher:
Guido Gryseels,
Director-General of the RMCA



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The Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) is a museum and research institute with world-renowned expertise. More than 80 researchers and 120 interns, doctoral students, and scientists-in-residence from Africa carry out research at the museum into past and present African societies and the continent's biodiversity and geology. Their work draws on the museum's exceptional collections, field work, and close ties with international institutions, particularly those in Africa.

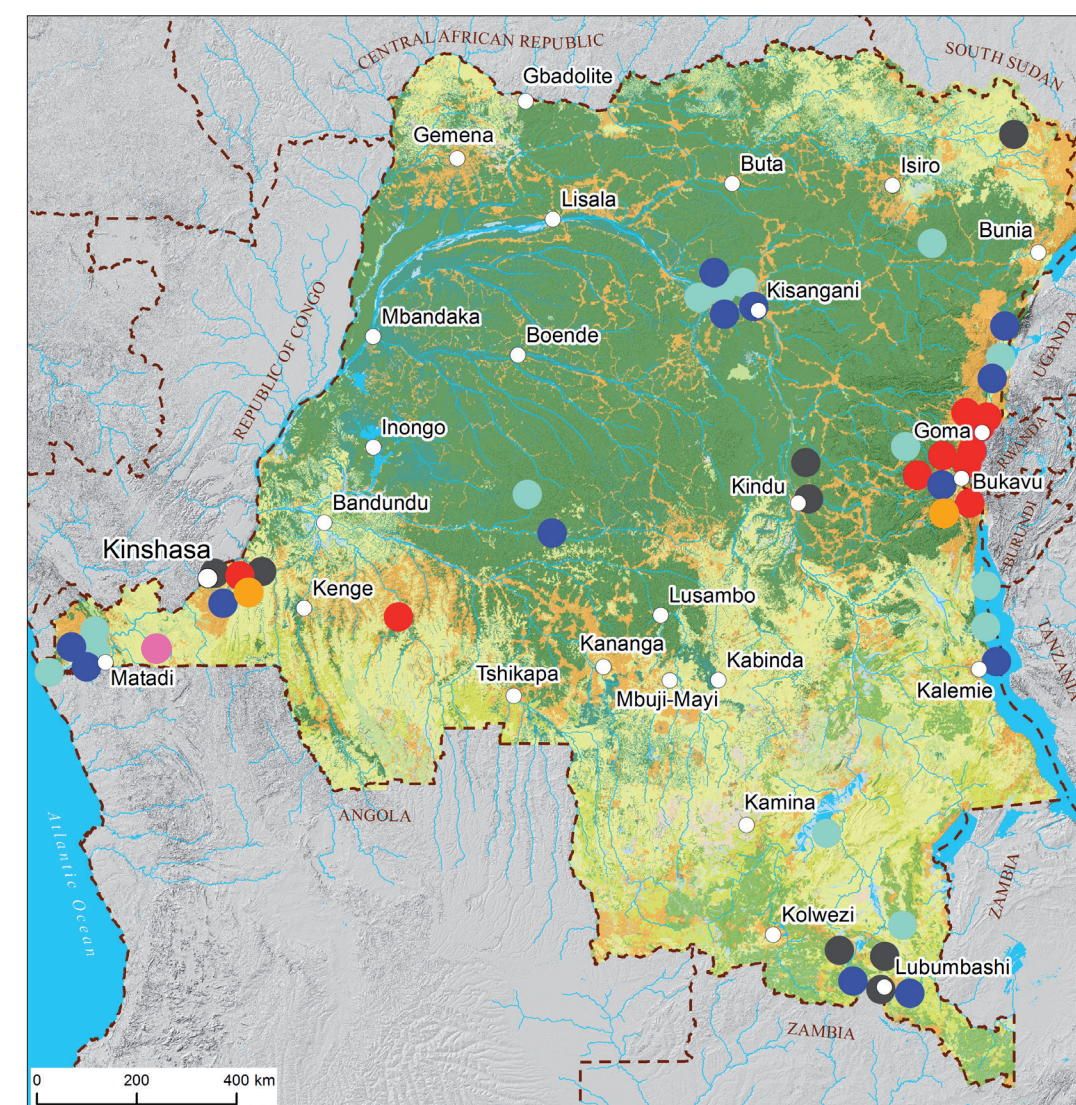
Although the RMCA is active in more than 20 African countries, the majority of its projects are carried out in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Managing and preserving biodiversity, building the capacities of scientific institutions, and preserving and promoting the cultural and scientific heritage of the DRC are the guiding principle of many of the institute's projects. All these projects are designed to contribute to the sustainable development of the DRC, one of the key concerns of the RMCA's researchers.

To carry out its projects, the RMCA receives support from the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO), the Belgian Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD), and the European Union.

In this brochure, you will find a few examples of the projects carried out in the DRC, listed according to the RMCA's main fields of work.

The RMCA in the DRC

- Study, management and conservation of cultural heritage
- Fight against tropical diseases
- Assessment of natural risks
- Development and education support
- Conservation of biodiversity
- Sustainable management of natural resources





STUDY, MANAGEMENT, AND CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Sharing heritage and knowledge

The RMCA works with the Institut des Musées nationaux du Congo, the Musée national de Lubumbashi, the Académie des Beaux-Arts, the Université de Kinshasa, the Centre de Documentation de l'Enseignement supérieur, universitaire et Recherche à Kinshasa (CEDESURK), the Musée géographique de Bukavu, the Institut géographique du Congo, and various other research institutes to build capacity for managing and conserving collections and to facilitate the sharing of collections. To achieve this, the project members are improving the digital accessibility of a specific series of collections, selected according to the needs of the partners and their audiences. The creation of an expert conservation and restoration network will enable the various partners to share their knowledge in this field.

Training in archive management and in historical research methods

The RMCA organises training programmes for archive managers of public institutions in the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, in order to improve the management, conservation and accessibility of such archives. Another training programme offers young researchers in human, political and economic sciences and law the opportunity to hone their historical research and analysis methods. These training programmes are provided with the École du Patrimoine africain in Benin and are followed by a work placement in the RMCA's archives.

The archaeology and cultural heritage of Maniema

The arrival of slave and ivory traders in the 19th century is a major event in the history of the DRC. By studying the presence of Arab and Swahili traders in the province of Maniema using oral evidence and material heritage, the RMCA and the Groundworks non-profit association, the Université de Lubumbashi and the Université de Kinshasa are working to improve the conservation and protection of this historical heritage. Applying multi-disciplinary research that includes history and art history, linguistics and botany, the RMCA is also studying the archaeology and more ancient history of the province of Maniema going back to 3000 years BCE.

ASSESSMENT OF NATURAL RISKS

Natural risks in the African Great Lakes region

Natural risks in Central Africa have a significant negative impact on development. The African Great Lakes region is prone to frequent volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, flooding, and landslides that cause casualties and severe material damage. These events, however, remain relatively under-researched.

Working alongside a number of Congolese, Burundian, Rwandan and Ugandan partners, the RMCA is studying these risks and developing tools to help improve their management, reduce the risk of disasters, and promote sustainable land development. To ensure the continuity of the activities and safeguard the progress made, expertise in these fields is being developed by providing researchers with academic and technical training.

CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

Central African fish

The Congo basin is home to an exceptional diversity of fish. These fish are a major source of animal protein for many populations. However, little is known about them. This lack of taxonomic knowledge hinders research into their biology and into the impact of fishing and human activity on fish stock. The RMCA is conducting research both in the field and using the museum's collections in order to study the biodiversity and evolution of fish in the Congo basin and in the East African Rift Valley region.

The Mbisa-Congo project, funded by the Belgian Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD), is studying fish in ten protected areas in Central Africa, seven of which are in the DRC. The goal is to document the diversity of each of these protected areas and to make proposals to improve the protection and sustainable management of this still largely unknown fauna.

Since 2005, the RMCA has also hosted an annual three-month internship for five African researchers on fish taxonomy and on the use of FishBase, the world's largest online fish database.



A first in Sub-Saharan Africa: a wood biology laboratory opens in the DRC

The RMCA is carrying out several projects to study the DRC's forests. For instance, the FORETS project, which stands for *FORMATION, Recherche, Environnement dans la TShopo*, supports the integrated development of the Yangambi Biosphere Reserve. Its specific objectives are the conservation and sustainable use of the region's biodiversity and ecosystem services, along with its economic development. Funded by the European Union, the project is implemented by the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), with the help of the RMCA and other Congolese and international partners.

As part of this project, the RMCA has opened a new wood biology laboratory in Yangambi, the only one of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa. The laboratory will enable Congolese and international scientists to conduct cutting-edge research into the structure and growth of trees for a better understanding of the role of forests in climate change adaptation and mitigation.

FIGHT AGAINST TROPICAL DISEASES

Bilharzia, a neglected tropical disease

Bilharzia (also known as schistosomiasis) is a tropical disease caused by parasitic worms called schistosomes. This disease causes nearly 180,000 deaths each year and affects more than 200 million people worldwide, mostly children in sub-Saharan Africa. The RMCA is studying the evolution of these parasitic worms and their intermediate hosts, aquatic snails.

In 2019, the RMCA, the Faculty of Medicine at the Université de Kinshasa and the Institut national de Recherche biomédicale (INRB) launched the ATRAP (Action Towards Reducing Aquatic snail-borne Parasitic diseases) project. Financed by the Belgian Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD), this participatory science project aims to develop a new snail monitoring protocol for non-specialists, enabling citizens to play an active role in monitoring the disease and raising awareness among communities.

DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION SUPPORT

The 26 provinces of the DRC

In 2008, a programme was launched consisting of multi-disciplinary research into the decentralisation of the Congo and a study of the 26 provinces of the DRC. Based on the collection, analysis, update and summary of the data gathered, the RMCA publishes works on each of these entities, examining their natural, cultural, historical, political, administrative, economic, and social dimensions. The project's goal is to provide Congolese authorities, Congolese people, and international actors with a comprehensive tool for constructive involvement in the challenges faced by the various provinces and the country.

Environmental history education in Kivu

The RMCA is a partner in a project run by the Université de Namur and the Institut supérieur pédagogique in Bukavu aiming to halt environmental damage in the DRC, especially in Kivu, a region with high population growth. The project helps to raise awareness among secondary-school students concerning these issues and the impact that human activity has on the environment.



This awareness-raising is delivered by teachers and environmental protection associations using appropriate teaching materials, created on the basis of experience-sharing with teachers, and scientific research. Several doctoral and research theses are being conducted in the field of environmental history and the teaching of history.

Artist and journalist residencies at the RMCA

The RMCA works to enhance information sharing, intercultural dialogue, and co-creation with African communities in a dynamic, multi-partner, international platform.

To achieve this objective, the RMCA welcomes at least one African artist-in-residence every year, whose practice involves a reflection or a work connected with the museum, its identity, its history, that of its collections, and/or the artist's country of origin.

Similarly, in order to open the museum to journalists with a specific perspective and approach, the RMCA welcomes at least one African journalist-in-residence every year. This project offers them the opportunity to expand their professional network in Europe and in Africa.

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Georesources: a major contribution to sustainable development

The development of modern societies relies heavily on the consumption of georesources (mineral, water, and energy resources). Geological research is increasingly taking into account the environmental, economic, social and public health aspects of the use of resources, particularly strategic mineral deposits (cobalt, tantalum) in the DRC.

To ensure sound management of georesources, countries must have the public capacity to carry out academic research and manage information, as well as an administrative framework that ensures the collection and management of strategic information on the ground.

The RMCA is working with the Centre de Recherches géologiques et minières (CRGM) and the universities of Kinshasa, Bukavu and Lubumbashi to improve academic expertise in the geology of mineral resources and their societal impact through integrated management involving all parties concerned: communities, experts, economic stakeholders and political decision-makers. The ultimate goal is for the global demand for mineral resources to contribute more to the development of the DRC, by redistributing and sharing the benefits fairly across all layers of society.