

# Mayumba National Park

Issue 4

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## Outreach Program News

### *Village Art Contest Winner Shows His Work at Libreville Exposition*



Twelve-year-old Ben-Darcy Tchissan-gou Mboumba had never been in an airplane before. The furthest he'd been from his home village of Malembé was the town of Mayumba, a two-hour boat ride away. As he flew from Mayumba to Libreville, Gabon's capital, he sketched a picture of his village, fishermen and their nets, women waiting on the banks with baskets to collect the fish.

As the representative of his home province, the Nyanga, Ben-Darcy was on his way to Libreville for the opening night of an exposition at the Gabonese National Assembly, where his painting is part of a month-long exhibit which will afterward travel to each of Gabon's nine provinces. He was joined by eight other students from the remaining provinces. The children's artwork was displayed along with paintings and a new sculpture by Gabonese master artist, Georges Mbourou, photographs by Nick Nichols of the National Geographic Society, David Harwood of Images du Gabon, and traditional handicrafts from all over Gabon, including raffia mats and rainforest seed jewelry made by women from Mayumba.



*Ben-Darcy poses with his painting and James Deutsch, WCS Africa Program Director, at the exhibit's opening night at the Gabonese National Assembly.*

**Mayumba National Park would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Sea World/Busch Gardens Conservation Fund for their generous support of the Mayumba Outreach Program.**

President of the Gabonese National Assembly.

This weekend, Ben-Darcy returned to his village, and his family, the same way he left: first by airplane and then in a dugout canoe, winding his way through the mangrove-lined Banio Lagoon. Surely that night's fireside stories glittered with descriptions of his experiences in the big city, an unforgettable journey for a young artist.



*Gabonese Minister of the Environment Georgette Koko with Ben-Darcy and the other artists.*

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*Mayumba National Park's Outreach Program Promotes Tradition and Culture in the Villages*

*Stéphanie successfully completes her first independent school tour.*

*Art supplies donated to local schools used to promote environmental awareness.*



#### Special points of interest:

- 295 people attended our outreach activities during our village tour this month.
- 1224 students and their teachers attended this month's environmental education events in Mayumba's Schools.



Among those attending the event: Gabonese Minister of Environment Georgette Koko (pictured at right with some of the artists; Ben-Darcy is second from the left), WCS Africa Program Director James Deutsch, and Gabonese musicians Annie Flore Batchiellilys and Papé Nzengui, who both performed live that evening.

Over the course of their two-week visit to Libreville, Ben-Darcy and the other winners received the star treatment, with visits to Pongara National Park, the French Cultural Center, the offices of several environmental NGOs, Gabon's largest printing press company, a night at the movie theatre, and a two-day shopping spree for new clothes and shoes.

The young artists also collaborated on a 2 meter by 3 meter oil painting that will be presented to the

## Mayumba's Outreach Program Promotes Culture and Tradition



*Mama Marie (in doorway) and her family showcase the two mats she made for the Mama Nature association, now on exhibit at the Gabonese National Assembly.*

During our May tour of the lagoon villages, while still bringing information about wildlife conservation and wellness, we placed an accent on the promotion of tradition and culture.

The recent undertaking of a hotel redecoration for ecotourism project has given

our outreach program the opportunity to purchase traditional handicrafts from several of the villages. The hotel will be decorated using raffia mats, thatched roofing, split bamboo, with locally made baskets and traditional fishing traps used as decorative lighting treatments.

In addition, the Mama Nature artisans' association continues to grow, with two new women joining and several new clients placing orders. In its first year, this initiative has generated over \$2000 for the village women who are members.

Meanwhile, the spontaneous

addition of an okumé torch into our trunk of materials sparked a late-night dance

party following our film presentation in Yoyo village. And while we didn't have a real campfire to dance around, a projected image of a previous dance ceremony, the beat of the drums and the children's resonant voices provided enough ambiance to make Yoyo the home of what might be the very first "village discotheque".



*Mama Mbadgina of Yoyo village makes thatched roofing for the hotel redecoration.*

Among other notable events: a village sing-along style "music video" filmed in front of the bamboo grove in Tiya village, Papa Jerome's serenade, and Papa "Air Mambi" telling stories of his grandfather taking him hunt-

ing in 1937. Thank you to everyone who helped to make this trip so memorable!

## Stéphanie's First School Tour On Her Own Teaching Environmental Awareness Through Art

Stéphanie Mahinou Makaya, after a month of intensive, hands-on training, took on a daunting task: bring the concept of the food chain to life in 7 schools, for over 1200 students, in just 5 days.

She succeeded.

With help from Richard Tchindongo, Mayumba National Park Ranger and member of the Mayumba Turtle Team, Stéphanie brought a trunk-full of animal puppets, drawings of plants, a ball of string, and a series of posters she made herself, to each of Mayumba's elementary schools.

Stéphanie gave a half-hour lecture at each school, followed by an activity that creates a symbolic "web of life" by weaving string from one student holding an animal toy or plant drawing to the other and so on until a web is



*Stéphanie, our new outreach program assistant, conducts an activity to demonstrate the interdependence of nature at Saint Anuarite primary school.*

formed. She then explained how threats such as pollution, over-hunting and over-fishing can destroy the delicate balance of this system, illustrating it by asking each student holding an animal or plant affected by the threat to drop his or her piece of string in turn. The result: a striking visual representation of the destruction of nature's equilibrium, which is easily understood by the children and reinforces her lecture.

Congratulations to Stéphanie and Richard for a job well done!

This month, Mr. Jean Kouima, a teacher at Public School 'A' and member of the Mayumba Nature environmental association, proposed an artistic activity for his students: design pictures of each of Gabon's protected species so that the students can take them home to share with their families. This activity not only teaches the primary school students about protected animals, but also raises awareness with older siblings who are more likely to hunt the animals.

Another member of Mayumba Nature, Mr. Serge Mackobou ma Mackobou, who is also the director of Public School 'C', proposed holding an art contest with his students to create a collaborative environmental mural to decorate their school. Several beautiful drawings depicting the students' perceptions of life in their fishing village were selected and are currently being assimilated into a mural design which will be

Painted at their school over summer vacation.

Thank you Mr. Kouima and Mr. Mackobou for your great ideas, and also to your students for their enthusiastic participation!



*Gildas Moussavou's drawing depicts a tagged leatherback turtle, a surfer, and a jumping dolphin.*