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Valorization of the Indigenous Knowledge of the Melliferous Plants in the Vicinity of the Virunga National Park (DRC) to contribute to an Enhancement of its Conservation

by

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SUMMARY. — An investigation on the knowledge of the melliferous plants by the inhabitants of the Rugari area was completed in 2009. This region, located in the eastern part of the DR Congo, partially includes the southern sector of the Virunga National Park (VNP).

The objective of the research was to increase interest in these plants in order to promote the conservation of their habitats and of the park itself. Indeed, this protected area has been altered to the point it was declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage in Danger in 1994.

The interview involved 120 people, including 50 beekeepers. The specimens of melliferous plants recognized by the inhabitants were collected to confirm their identification. We referred in particular to the herbarium of the Institute of Scientific Research in Central Africa (IRSAC), Lwiro.

The analysis of all data generated a list of 152 plant species. They were recognized as melliferous because they were really visited by bees. Among these species, 65.8 % were wild plants.

The hives were located mainly in forests and sometimes in wasteland. Up to 100 litres of honey /year could be harvested by each beekeeper, who could thus get 500 USD additionally to the earnings from his other occupations, especially subsistence agriculture. This is very important, especially as the average *per capita* income is more or less $ 1/day in this region.

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Apart from the evidence that plants pollinated by bees are the source of honey and that this resource contributes much to alleviate poverty, the study can be used to remind people who live near the park the following other realities: the majority of the plants inventoried are wild; without this category of species, the production of honey would be very low; bees would not be strong enough to ensure good pollination; the subsistence or commercial agriculture would give very low yields.

For these reasons, melliferous plants are to be safeguarded. This depends on the conservation of the entire habitats to which the targeted species belong. The beekeeper is an interested actor who is allegedly involved in such an initiative.