Conservation News

New surveys reveal high biodiversity of Lake Télé, Congo

Lake Télé is an ovoid, endoreic 23 km² lake in northern Republic of the Congo. Surrounded by vast areas of swamp forest, Lake Télé is famous for its rounded shape (long thought to be the result of a meteorite, a theory now abandoned; Masters, 2010, *Journal of African Earth Sciences*, 58, 667–679) and the reputed presence of a dinosaur-like creature, the Mokele-Mbembe. The lake lies within the eponymous Lac Télé Community Reserve. This, in turn, is part of the largest peatland complex known in the tropics: the swamp forests of the Cuvette Centrale of the Congo Basin, which are of global importance for biodiversity and carbon stocks (Dargie et al., 2017, *Nature*, 542, 86–90).

Because of its remoteness, Lake Télé has been the subject of few scientific studies, the last one dating back to 1992 (Laraque et al., 1998, *Journal of Hydrology*, 207, 236–253). As a financial and technical partner of the Reserve since 2001, the Wildlife Conservation Society, together with the Ministère de l'Economie Forestiere, organized two biodiversity surveys of the lake in July and August 2024. The first focused on the amphibians and reptiles of the swamp forests surrounding the lake, and the second on the fish community of the lake itself. A total of 37 amphibian and 38 reptile taxa were found, of which 26 (15 amphibians and 11 reptiles) were unidentified and could be new to science. Thirty-two fish species were recorded, including eight taxa that could not be identified to species. Water samples were collected from the lake for subsequent eDNA analysis. The fish community is dominated by the family Cichlidae, unlike that of the nearby river Likouala-aux-herbes, where Mormiridae is the most common family (Biloa et al., 2024, *Sustainability*, 16, 3353). Our findings confirm the high biodiversity of the lake and its conservation significance. Further surveys are scheduled in 2025, for insects and ungulates.

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