

---

# AIMEE'S REPORT

---

## Travel Grant to Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue, Cameroon with the Jim Cronin Memorial Fund



It is really difficult to summarise my 6 months of volunteering at the Sanaga Yong Chimpanzee Rescue Centre in Cameroon, as I feel like one report will not do this phenomenal experience justice, but here goes!

Located in Cameroon's remote Mbarque Forest, Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue Centre works in collaboration with Cameroon's Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), and provides a permanent home in natural habitat for chimpanzee victims of the bush meat, pet and international zoo trades. At the time of my visit, the centre was home to 73 chimpanzees, most of whom had been orphaned as a result of the bush meat trade. Locally employed primate caregivers and maintenance staff do a marvellous job working at the centre, however volunteer primate specialists are much needed, bringing with them a wealth of experience and enthusiasm.

My day to day role varied considerably depending on the season, the priorities at camp and the number of volunteers available, (at times there were around six of us and at other times there was just me), on any given day.

I was responsible for washing and sorting all of the fruit and sometimes I would find myself almost swimming in Guavas – it's quite a task separating the ripe from the unripe. I would also prepare the two daily feeds for the chimpanzees at 7am and 5pm, and two smaller feeds (snacks) to keep them going at 11am and 2pm.

I spent more hours than I would have liked, inside the banana chamber which consisted of an old shipping container, which was kept at a super-hot temperature in order to speed ripen the bananas, a real favourite of all of the chimpanzees at the centre. After the washing regimes, we would hang them – not an easy task as they

are incredibly heavy and I now have the biceps to prove it, and each day thereafter we would spend time rotating and rearranging them.

I was responsible for managing all of the electric fences, from a small 'solar house' at the camp. For example, a caregiver would radio me to 'send energy' to the fence at 'Jacky's group', or to 'check the voltage' for the fence at 'Mintak's group'. These duties often carried on well into the night, as it was incredibly important to ensure that both the chimpanzees and human caregivers were kept safe at all times.

Each day I carried out checks of the enclosures, looking and dealing with fallen branches, termite infestations, wobbly posts, etc. Sometimes I would assist one of the caregivers with trimming the grass and cutting back the trees next to the fence lines. Once and only when all of the checks had been carried out was it finally safe for the chimpanzees to go out for the day.

Every day I made enrichment for the chimpanzees who were temporarily inside during the day. This would sometimes happen if there was an ongoing introduction, or if a Chimpanzee was known to be a bit of an escape artist. The enrichment would involve anything from food puzzles, to mirrors and sometimes it was just a case of sitting and encouraging grooming time. Some of the chimpanzees at the centre really needed additional attention and I provided this to the best of my ability, these were some of my favourite times at Sanaga Yong. Playing chase and tickling with sticks never got old!

Each day I would help the cook prepare and serve delicious heaped bowls of food for lunch for all of the staff and volunteers at the centre, it was much needed after a busy morning and kept us all going.

In my down time I would assist the maintenance team with rust-proof painting any new satellite cages, purchasing the fruit and vegetables for the chimpanzees on the village runs, cleaning up around the camp, signing in and out the tools for staff, and at least a hundred other odd jobs.

As the eyes and ears of the management at most feeding times, it was also my job to observe the chimpanzees, ensuring that everybody ate well, and appeared to be in good health, it was important also to note any interesting behaviour and I would report back to my manager or our veterinary technician if there was anything of concern. For example, if a chimpanzee had a small wound, or if a particular chimp was starting to assert his or her dominance more, to name just a few.

Every fortnight I was solely responsible for the camp inventory, and would take the motorbike into town to buy all of our necessary supplies. I would also have to deal with all of the accounting side of things afterwards. This was probably my least favourite job!

I believe that during my six months working at Sanaga Yong, I played a very important role in the daily care and welfare of the chimpanzees at the centre, Providing the excellent team there with an extra pair of hands and working with them to provide the chimpanzees in their care with the happy life they so deserved was an absolute pleasure. Volunteers play a vital role at the centre and if you have the experience and

can cope with not only the remote location but also a lot of hard work then I would definitely recommend it. Thank you to the Jim Cronin Memorial Fund for providing me with the funding to work at Sanaga Yong, it was an incredible experience!