



BUDONGO CONSERVATION FIELD STATION

Standard Operating Procedures During The COVID-19 Pandemic

MAY 2021

CONTENT

Introduction.....	1
Scope of the SOPs.....	1
A.SOPs for Researchers and other visitors.....	1
i.Preparations prior to traveling to Uganda.....	1
ii.Arrival at the airport and traveling to Camp.....	2
iii.Arrival at Camp.....	2
a)Hand washing/sanitisation facilities.....	3
iv.After the quarantine period.....	3
v.SOPS for research activities.....	4
B.SOPs for staff members.....	5
Role of BCFS in facilitating the implementation of the SOPs.....	6
Role of Researchers or any other visitors in facilitating the implementation of the SOPs.....	6
Role of BCFS Field Staff in facilitating the implementation of the SOPs outside the station premises.....	7



INTRODUCTION

Research and tourism are among the global conservation strategies; they deter illegal activities through the frequent presence of conservation-oriented persons within wildlife and conservation areas. On March 25th 2020, primate research and tourism were suspended in all protected areas in Uganda due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The halting of research and tourism activities has been a major setback for the Ugandan economy, conservation of natural resources, and research activities. However, considering the potential risk of infection between humans and chimpanzees, these mitigation steps were justifiable, despite their impacts.

Following the recent presidential re-opening of the airport and the consequent encouraging resumption of tourism and research, on September 25th 2020, Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) launched a revitalisation of tourism and research. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were institutionalised to ensure minimal risk of importation of COVID-19 into primate populations. Thus, the SOPs herein are a supplement to the SOPs given by MoH, UWA and those in the presidential directives in the fight to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Budongo Conservation Field Station (BCFS) is currently, spearheading chimpanzee health monitoring in Uganda, with a mandate of maintaining a healthy chimpanzee population.

SCOPE OF THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

These SOPs broadly apply to the context and operations of the Budongo Conservation Field Station; at the Sonso and Waibira research sites. However, for other research sites, we encourage that the UWA protocols are implemented, but also recognize the need for site specific considerations in implementation and enforcement. For tourism sites, we strongly encourage enforcement of the SOPs given by UWA. These SOPs are therefore meant to guide the daily and specific operations of BCFS, and will apply to researchers, field staff, management and visitors to the BCFS.

A. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCHERS AND OTHER VISITORS

i) Preparations prior to traveling to Uganda

Researchers intending to travel should synchronise their travel to Uganda and to BCFS field station (camp) so that a maximum of four (4) researchers are received at a time, as dictated by the available quarantine space and to avoid solitary living in the quarantine center.

Ensure that you are fully vaccinated with an FDA-authorized vaccine or a vaccine authorized for emergency use by the World Health Organization. Travel with proof of vaccination. Although it is hypothesised that fully vaccinated travellers are less likely to get and spread COVID-19, international travel poses a risk and even fully vaccinated travellers are at increased risk for contracting and possibly spreading new COVID-19 variants.

Carry enough protective gear such as masks for use while in the country. This is to protect you in case the mask materials available in Uganda are not of your preference or could have allergic effects on your health.



ii) Arrival at the airport and traveling to camp

Only one taxi driver shall be designated to transport the researchers or any other visitors to camp and this will be at the cost of the researchers.

All researchers should have a 72-hour negative COVID-19 certificate on arrival in Uganda

(Cross check with MoH of Uganda to ensure this isn't still a requirement by the time of your travel to avoid any inconvenience.)



The designated driver shall have a mask on at all times during transportation and this will also apply for the passengers (the researchers and or any other visitors). Each researcher or visitor is responsible for buying their own masks which should meet the specifications provided for in the Ugandan MoH guidelines on masks.

Alcohol based ($\geq 60\%v/v$) disinfectant should be available in the taxi designated for transportation. The cost of the disinfectant may be factored into the transportation cost, if necessary.

Kampala is currently the hub of COVID-19 prevalence in Uganda with social distancing and proper mask use still great challenges to enforce in such a central business district. Thus we strongly recommend that any money transactions, including shopping, should be done in Entebbe and NOT Kampala. Entebbe is less crowded compared to Kampala. Applications should be done online to avoid frequent movements to Kampala, and online application procedures have recently been enhanced. However if it's still inevitable to stop in Kampala, ensure that you;

- Wear your mask well covering your mouth and nose. Ensure the mask is fitting well to avoid frequent adjusting.
- Avoid crowded places
- Carry your hand sanitizer and use it often when you touch public surfaces

iii) Arrival at camp



Upon arrival at camp, all researchers and other visitors will be settled into Hyrax house; the designated quarantine center for BCFS. Quarantine at BCFS

A 10 days quarantine period will be enforced at BCFS following the current MoH guidelines. During this time, non-contact temperature measurements will be taken daily for each researcher/visitor to ensure no asymptomatic cases are missed. During the temperature measurement, all parties involved will wear a face mask covering both the mouth and nose (One member of those in quarantine will be responsible for temperature measurement to ensure consistency. We hope all those coming to BCFS will be honest enough to report any abnormal signs experienced in order to protect chimpanzees and other people at camp). In case one's temperature increases to 37.5°C and above, BCFS management will inform the Masindi /country' COVID-19 task force team to carry out tests.

Given the current economic impacts of COVID-19, cost sharing will be enforced in implementing these protocols in the quarantine center at BCFS.

1. Researchers/visitors will contribute towards purchase of gas for cooking in the quarantine designated house. Researchers/visitors in quarantine will also cook their own food, wash their own utensils and clothes. The quarantine house will have a shower and a latrine will be cordoned off for use only by the people in quarantine.

2. Access to food: Researchers/visitors will be responsible for their meals but BCFS will have a staff member who will pick money (digital transfers preferably) from the researchers/visitors for their shopping and will do it on their behalf. The shopped items will be placed in an appropriate place accessible by the researchers/visitors, to minimize contact.

3. Cleaning of the latrine cordoned off for researchers/visitors will be the responsibility of the researchers/visitors in quarantine. It is also expected that the researchers/visitors will maintain the cleanliness of these facilities to a decent level.

Note: We strongly encourage each person to use more of digital money transfers to mitigate the disease risk posed through direct money exchange.

We also encourage you to carry with you enough entertainment materials such as games, novels and movies to keep you entertained while in quarantine.



HANDWASHING / SANITIZATION FACILITIES

Water points for hand washing will be provided at various points at the field station, starting at the gate and within the camp premises. These points will have clean water and soap. Kindly report to administrator if you notice reduced water levels at any of the points.

Again note:

- 1. BCFS will provide water washing points, water and soap.**
- 2. Each researcher should buy their own hand sanitizer. Alcohol-based sanitizers are highly recommended.**
- 3. During quarantine, researchers and /or visitor will be refilling the water in the hand washing container cordoned off for them and cleanliness of these containers will be solely their responsibility.**



AFTER THE QUARANTINE PERIOD

Researchers will be requested to take the COVID-19 test at their own cost to make sure they are COVID-19 free. Currently, Uganda has various testing facilities which deliver results at different times depending on the cost and number of samples being handled at the facility. BCFS will consult and have a partnering laboratory which will pick samples from researchers/visitors two days before the end of the quarantine period. If any of the researchers is found positive, then, Ministry of Health will be informed to implement the evacuation protocol. The other researchers will undergo the 10 days quarantine protocol again. However if everyone in the quarantine house is found negative at the end of the 10 days, the following will be the evacuation protocol;

1. Researchers will ensure that all masks and garbage used during the quarantine period are collected and burnt in the lab incinerator.
2. The researchers will also ensure that all the utensils used during quarantine are thoroughly cleaned before leaving the premises.
3. The luggage is disinfected before moving into the permanent residential rooms
4. All door knobs and tables in the quarantine house, and latrine handle, taps in bathroom all disinfected before evacuating the quarantine premises.

Please note: No persons in quarantine are allowed to interact directly with other staff and researchers on camp. Any person found interacting with persons in quarantine will join them in quarantine at their own cost.



STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- a) All researchers coming into the protected areas or in close proximity to primates must wear clean clothing and disinfected footwear prior to going to the field for data collection.
- b) Every researcher must carry into the field an alcohol-based hand sanitiser (≥60% alcohol).
- c) Time spent conducting research activities near primates shall be limited to a maximum of five hours per designated research day (i.e once the team locates the primates of interest, only five hours should be spent while collecting data).
- d) The research team shall comprise a maximum number of three people to ensure safety and health monitoring(i.e a researcher, research assistant and or a member from the veterinary department).
- e) Three groups of research teams shall be allowed per chimpanzee group (i.e. maximum of nine people shall be allowed to study each chimpanzee community per day)
- f) A distance of not less than 10 metres from the primates shall be maintained at all times.
- g) A facemask must be worn by anyone coming within 10 metres of primates.
- h) All garbage including facemasks used in the forest should be carried back to camp for incineration in the laboratory incinerator.
- i) Anyone who feels unwell while in the field should report back to camp. In case signs presented are consistent with those of COVID-19, self-isolate and report to management who will then inform the COVID-19 task force of the district to enforce testing.
- j) Report any suspected sick chimpanzees or any other animals seen while in the field.
- k) Designate a pair or two of forest-friendly attire for field work and this attire should not be used in the dining room or accommodation rooms.
- l) All equipment used in the forest (e.g. binoculars, cameras etc) should be disinfected using an alcohol-based disinfectant daily after field work. While BCFS shall provide disinfectant for its staff, researchers and visitors will be responsible for providing their own disinfectant. All equipment should be disinfected in a designated place outside the accommodation houses.



B. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR STAFF MEMBERS

All BCFS staff, both residents and those commuting from home, will be subjected to temperature measurements on a daily basis. Anyone found with a temperature of $\geq 37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ will be quarantined and to establish the cause of the fever including COVID-19 test. Thus COVID-19 task force of the district will be informed accordingly. Given that interaction of residents and commuting staff has been inevitable, all staff members will resume staying where they used to stay before the pandemic.



Other SOPs are standard as for researchers:

- a) All field staff coming into close proximity of wild animals will be subject to COVID-19 vaccination as recommended by MoH for a fully vaccinated person.
- b) All field staff coming into the protected areas or close proximity of wild animals must wear clean clothing and disinfected footwear prior and after going to the field for data collection.
- c) Every field staff must carry into the field an **alcohol-based hand sanitiser** ($\geq 60\%$ alcohol).
- d) Time spent conducting research activities near primates shall be limited to a maximum of **five hours** per designated research day (i.e once the team locates the primates of interest, only five hours should be spent while collecting data). This is adopted from UWA protocols and will be obeyed till the COVID-19 situation ceases to pose risk to apes and public health.
- e) The research team shall comprise a **maximum number of three people** to ensure safety and health monitoring (i.e a researcher, research assistant and or a member from the veterinary department).
- f) Three groups of research teams shall be allowed per chimpanzee group (i.e. maximum of nine people shall be allowed to study each chimpanzee community per day)
- g) A distance of not less than **10 metres** from the primates shall be maintained at all times.
- h) A facemask must be worn by anyone coming within 10 metres of primates.
- i) All garbage including facemasks used in the forest should be carried back to camp for incineration in the laboratory incinerator.
- j) Anyone who feels unwell while in the field should report back to camp. In case signs presented are consistent with those of COVID-19, self-isolate and report to management who will then inform the COVID-19 task force of the district to enforce testing.
- k) Report any suspected sick chimpanzees or any other animals seen while in the field.
- l) Designate a pair or two of forest friendly attire for field work and this attire should not be used in the dining room or accommodation rooms.
- m) All equipment used in the forest (e.g. binoculars, cameras etc) should be disinfected using an alcohol-based disinfectant daily after field work. While BCFS shall provide disinfectant for its staff, researchers and visitors will be responsible for providing their own disinfectant. All these equipment should be disinfected in a designated place outside the accommodation houses.



ROLE OF BCFS IN FACILITATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOPS

1. BCFS to provide a quarantine facility
2. BCFS shall provide a non-contact infrared thermometer (temperature gun) to be used by all staff, researchers and any other visitors entering the premises
3. Hand washing facilities at various points; at the gate, laboratory, at all latrines and at the kitchen premises
4. A foot disinfection point will be provided at one designated point thus all field teams will have to enter and exit at that point to ensure disinfection of footwear
5. All field staff who enter the forest daily will be provided with uniforms so that uniforms used in the forest stay on camp.
6. BCFS shall provide a washable face mask to all its staff
7. BCFS shall provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers to all its field staff.
8. BCFS shall provide alcohol-based disinfectant to disinfect the field equipment used by staff.
9. BCFS to provide an incinerator for burning all used bio-hazardous materials
10. BCFS shall provide the SOPs to researchers via email and BCFS website and any other social media platform used by BCFS to enhance accessibility and habituation prior to travel to Uganda.



ROLE OF RESEARCHERS OR ANY OTHER VISITORS IN FACILITATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOPS

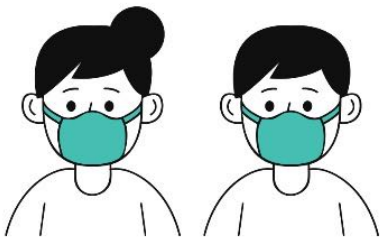


1. Get a copy of the new SOPs before organising for your departure for Uganda
2. Contact BCFS administration for any clarification on any aspects of the SOPs that may not be clear to avoid any inconveniences in-situ
3. Carry your own face mask
4. Carry your own alcohol based hand sanitisers
5. Carry extra pair of clothes both for field work and camp
6. Carry your own gloves to be used during the cleaning and disinfection of quarantine premises during evacuation
7. Synchronise travel plans through the Scientific Director and BCFS management to avoid any inconvenience



ROLE OF BCFS FIELD STAFF IN FACILITATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES OUTSIDE THE STATION PREMISES

1. Avoid crowded places while in communities.



2. Wear your face mask when within two meters of community members who are not living in your household.

3. Sensitise your family members, relatives and neighbours about the mitigation measures of COVID-19.



4. All BCFS staff members should have a functional hand washing facility at their homes.

