

# **Congo (Republic of the) (“Congo-Brazzaville”)**

**Last updated: 30-01-2004**

## **Location and area**

The Republic of the Congo in west-central Africa is bordered on the north by Cameroon and the Central African Republic, on the east and south by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), on the southwest by Angola (Cabinda enclave) and the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by Gabon. The country has an area of 342,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

## **Topography**

Along the country's Atlantic coast is a narrow, low, grassy plain that gives way abruptly inland to the heavily forested ridges of the Mayombe Mountains, which have an average elevation of about 550 m and are deeply dissected by rivers like the Kouilou. Inland from the coast to the east of the mountains is the fertile valley of the Niari River, the main agricultural area. To the north lies the central highlands region, the Batéké Plateau.

Numerous tributaries of the Congo and Ubangi rivers cut the plateau area. The River Congo provides the southern and much of the eastern border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Congo Basin occupies most of the northeastern part of the country, giving way towards the north to drier plateaux.

## **Climate**

The climate is tropical, with generally high heat and humidity, although the cold Angolan Current has a modifying effect on the coastal climate. The average temperature is 24° C. Most areas have two wet and two dry seasons. The average annual rainfall ranges from about 1,500 to 2,000 mm. Rainfall is lower on the coast, and highest in the mountains.

## **Land use**

Dense tropical rainforest covers approximately 60 % of the country. Savannah is found in the far northeast and the higher plateau areas (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Wetlands**

Without further reference or description Lappalainen & Žurek (1996c) mention a wetland area of 2,900 km<sup>2</sup> (apparently going back to the Dystric Histosol area distinguished by Bord na Mona (1985).

The World Wildlife Found (2001) mentions a total area for the eastern Congolian swamp forests of 92,700 km<sup>2</sup> and for the western Congolian swamp forests of 128,600 km<sup>2</sup> ([www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/at/at0110\\_full.html](http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/at/at0110_full.html), [www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/at/at0129\\_full.html](http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/at/at0129_full.html)).

## **Peatlands**

Dudal (1980) mentions the presence of extensive Histosols (organic soils) within large swampy areas of Congo. Markov et al. (1988) reports that “swamps” are concentrated in the

northern part of Congo. In the floodplain of the Congo River he reports on peatlands with peat layers up to 30 meters thick (woody fossils in the peat).

Bord na Mona (1985), referring to the FAO/UNESCO 1971-1981 Soil Map of the World 1:5,000,000, mentions an area of 2,900 km<sup>2</sup> of Dystric Histosols to occur in the north of the country in the valleys of the Rivers Motaba and Ibengo, tributaries of the River Oubangui. Shrier (1985) uses this figure for the "mire area" and mentions further unquantified deposits in the Congo Basin. The figure of 2,900 km<sup>2</sup> is also used by Andriessse (1988) for the extent of organic soils, and by Schneider & Schneider (1990) and Pfadenhauer et al. (1993) for the peatland area for Congo.

A further 56,000 km<sup>2</sup> of quaternary alluvial and lacustrine deposits to the east of the Oubangui River have peats associated with Humic Gleysols underlying swamp forests and marshes.

According to Howard-Williams & Thompson (1985) the riverine swamps and floodplains of the Middle Congo in Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) cover an area of 40,550 km<sup>2</sup>. Another area of potential peatland they mention in the Malebo Pool (Congo, DR Congo), a shallow riverine lake of ca. 300 km<sup>2</sup>.

Elenga et al. (1991) describe peat swamps from the Bilanko forest (700 m elevation), 80 km NNE of Brazzaville with up to 4 m thick peat horizons in its central part. A piece of wood on a depth of 54 - 48 cm had an age of 10,850 <sup>14</sup>C years BP indicating a pre-Holocene age of most of the deposit.

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 16,177 km<sup>2</sup> of histosols exist in Congo and 82,206 km<sup>2</sup> of gley soils.

Still to be checked:

**Elenga, H.** (1992) Végétation et climat du Zaire depuis 24,000 BP. Analyse palynologique de séquences sédimentaires du Pays Bateke et du littoral. Th. Univ. Aix-Marseille, 238p

**Fabing A.** 1995. Contribution à la connaissance des paléoenvironnements holocènes du sud Congo: étude par spectrométrie infrarouge de la carotte S2 (marais de la Songolo, Pointe Noire). Mem. Maîtrise Géographie, Uni. L. Pasteur, Strasbourg. 92p.