

Starring Gabon

Gabon is set to benefit from huge TV exposure after being selected as the next film location for the popular American reality show *Survivor*

THE TRIBE HAS SPOKEN. Millions of fans will be familiar with the signature phrase of Jeff Probst, presenter of *Survivor*, the show that captivates 12 million American viewers.

In the next series, *Survivor's* 17th season, these words will come from Gabon which has just been announced as the programme's new film location. Camera teams are already en situ at a secret site and *Survivor Gabon* is scheduled to shoot this summer and premiere in the autumn in the first version to be filmed in wide-screen high-definition format.

Each show involves the stranding of a group of contestants as one or more tribes in a remote location, where they have to fend for food, water, fire and shelter for themselves while competing in challenges to earn rewards and immunity from being voted off in progressive eliminations. The last challenger remaining at the end of the competition wins a \$1 million prize and title of Sole Survivor.

Survivor is an Emmy Award-winning TV series that is one of the US's top ten TV shows and also airs in several other countries. The

programme maker is CBS, one of the largest TV networks, which broadcasts the series first on its own network, followed by wide syndication to other cable channels.

Previous series have been filmed in exotic locations all over the planet including Micronesia, Australia, China, Thailand, Borneo, Malaysia, Brazil and Guatemala. It is only the second time that the show has been filmed in Africa since the third season played out against the backdrop of Shaba National Reserve in Kenya.

"We chose Gabon because it is one of the last pristine wilderness areas on the planet," said the show's executive producer Mark Burnett. "We couldn't pass up the chance to film among gorillas and forest elephants and highlight the amazing work the Gabonese government has done in preserving this last wilderness."

"The title of our series in Gabon will be *Survivor Gabon: Earth's Last Eden* because in many ways it really is like Eden – untouched

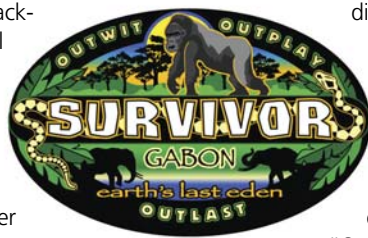
and unspoiled. Where else could you imagine seeing hippos surfing in the ocean?"

The *Survivor* production team was joined during its nationwide quest for the perfect film setting by wildlife expert Lee White, director of conservation strategy for the Ogooué and Congo Basins for the Wildlife Conservation Society. The precise location is to remain a secret to ensure that the cast remains in isolation and that filming is not disturbed by onlookers.

"We flew over a lot of sites then visited the promising ones by foot, by vehicle and by boat, covering about 2,000 kilometres on three separate expeditions," said Mr White.

"Our brief was to find a location that was remote and beautiful, with a variety of habitats, including open areas for the challenges, with wildlife, but with minimal chance of contestants being at risk from crocodiles or charged by elephants."

He said that there was great excitement in Gabon about the opportunity for worldwide



MONTY BRINTON/CBS 2007

exposure that the programme would give. "This is *Survivor's* first visit to the African rain-forest and it is likely to prove its most ambitious setting yet. This represents a great opportunity for Gabon to showcase the natural and cultural treasures that are the foundation for its emerging ecotourism industry to a global audience of millions."

CBS executive Ghen Maynard said that *Survivor's* locations had always served as another character in the show. "Shooting in high definition gives our production team tools for storytelling beyond what was previously possible," he added. "Viewers will feel as if they are on location instead of in their living rooms."

Secret location

The *Survivor Gabon* production team has benefited from strong logistical support from the Gabonese government. Dozens of cameras, helicopters and cranes will be used to create the programme and engineers from the Gabonese army have played a key role in establishing a base camp at the undisclosed site that will house the 250-strong crew.

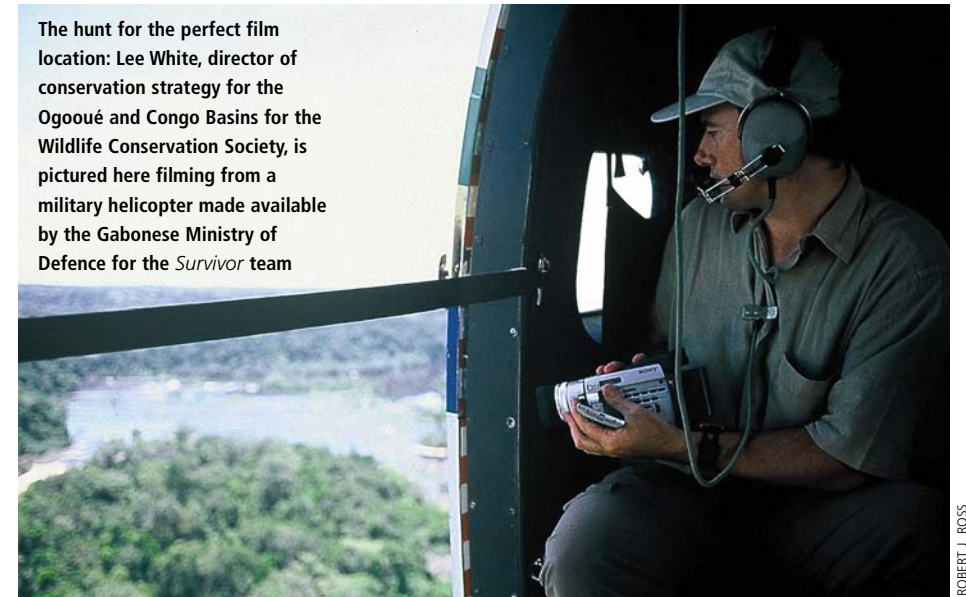
"One of the ironic disadvantages of going to such a remote and untouched region of the world is that it creates logistical challenges for us," said Mr Burnett. "There is very little infrastructure in the forest so we have had to land equipment and supplies on a beach that is open to the ocean. There are few roads but the Gabonese government and military are helping us by improving existing roads to facilitate getting our contestants and crew to the filming locations."

He stressed however: "By the time we leave the location, no-one will know that we were there. As a company, we have produced 25 epic remote foreign productions in pristine areas including a World Heritage Site area. We pride ourselves on trying to leave these locations even better than we found them."

Mr Burnett added that Gabon could expect positive publicity from the show: "To actually pay for 15 hours of prime-time TV exposure like this would cost millions of dollars." ■

Sarah Monaghan

Left: *Survivor* presenter Jeff Probst has just completed filming in Micronesia and is looking forward to working in Gabon. "I still get excited to get on the plane and travel to another exotic location with another group of adventure-seeking, type-A personalities," said Mr Probst, who has been host since the series' inception. "It is without question the best job I've ever had." Right, centre: The *Survivor* cast in Micronesia for the show's 16th season. Below: The cast in China for the 15th season. Contestants are selected following casting calls held across the US



The hunt for the perfect film location: Lee White, director of conservation strategy for the Ogooué and Congo Basins for the Wildlife Conservation Society, is pictured here filming from a military helicopter made available by the Gabonese Ministry of Defence for the *Survivor* team

ROBERT J ROSS



MONTY BRINTON/CBS 2007