ABSTRACT. In 1929 a subspecies of chimpanzee was classified as Pan satyrus paniscus, a subspecies of the eastern chimpanzee, and elevated to species level, Pan paniscus, in 1933. Review of the literature indicates that this ape type was known since 1881 from several locations throughout the Congo Basin and first scientifically described in 1887 as Troglodytes niger var. marungensis, a subspecies of the western chimpanzee. The evidence presented here demonstrates that the synonym marungensis was known and used as an earlier name. According to the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, the earliest name awarded to a species is the one which has to be recognized in use. However, maintaining the emphasis on stability and assuming that to change the name would cause considerable confusion in the literature, it is this author’s recommendation that the earlier name marungensis be suppressed and the later synonym paniscus be conserved while an application is being considered for ruling by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature.

Key Words: Pan; paniscus; marungensis; Nomenclature; Taxonomic type.

In 1929 a new subspecies of Pan satyrus was described as Pan satyrus paniscus (Schwarz, 1929). Coolidge (1933) proposed the reclassification of this form to full species status, Pan paniscus. Review of the literature suggests that the original scientific description of this taxon was made as Troglodytes niger var. marungensis by Noack (1887) in recognition of the geographic collection locality of the type specimen from the Marungu Mountains (Fig. 1).

African ape specimens in the late 1800s and early 1900s were typically infant or juvenile chimpanzees and exhibited the pale flesh-coloured facial pigmentation of immatures. At that time, chimpanzees were generally identified as western or eastern forms depending on the orientation of their provenance from present day Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC (Fig. 1). By 1887 two species of chimpanzee were recognized: Troglodytes niger from west Africa and Troglodytes schweinfurthi (sic) from east Africa.

The earliest known ape specimen originating from south of the Congo River was recorded at Lukolela (Fig. 1). Bentley (1900) published a photograph (Fig. 2) of the specimen shot between 1881 – 1882 when naturalists and missionaries first penetrated the southern Congo Basin area accessed by waterways. Hermann von Wissman also reported the presence of the marungensis ape (Elliot, 1913) observed during the June 1884 ‒ July 1885 Wissman Expedition when he revealed the main features of the Kasai River system (Fig. 1). He joined his colleague Ludwig Wolff during an exploration campaign throughout the Kasai/Sankuru region of south-central DRC, commissioned by King Leopold II of Belgium. In 1886 von Wissman again ascended the Kasai but continued to the western limit of the Manyema (sometimes spelled Maniema) District to the headwaters of the Lomami and Lualaba Rivers where he wrote of his earlier observations.

Reichart (1884) published a report which described a subpopulation of the western chimpanzee (Troglodytes niger) found living in an area along the Marungu Mountain slopes on the western shore of Lake Tanganyika (Fig. 1) but whose distribution “extended northwestern as an
Fig. 1. Collection localities for marungensis ape, locations mentioned in text. 1: Lukolela (Bentley, 1881); 2: Marungu Mountain range (Reichart, 1883); 3: Kasai/Sankuru (Wissman, 1884); 4: Equateur (Forfeitt, 1893); 5: Bongandanga (Cole, 1894); 6: Lukenie/Sankuru (Verner, 1895); 7: northern Kasai (Nordiglia, 1910); 8: Lebalu (Molin, 1920); 9: Lubefu (Lewis & Yerkes, 1923); 10: Lodja (Trompet, 1926).

arc into the interior of the DRC Basin (p. 20). This assumed that its habitat was previously continuous with the present day range of Pan paniscus but is currently disassociated by degraded vegetation, seasonal development of waterways, and expanded headwaters (Myers Thompson, 1997). Review of ecological evidence suggests that the ancestral ape distribution was expanded more southerly (Myers Thompson, 1997). On June 17, 1883 Reichart began a three-day hunting trip and was personally able to follow the prints of this large primate moving bipedally along the course of a dry river-bed (Noack, 1887). He examined and described several night nests. While tracking the ape Reichart encountered a “gang of about 20” apes. His brief observation centred around his unsuccessful attempts to shoot a specimen as the “gang” fled the agricultural field where they had been feeding. Viewed at a distance this muscular, nest-building ape was remarkable to Reichart for its dark-pigmented face (Reichart, 1884).

As explorers, traders, naturalists, and pioneering missionaries continued to survey the frontier south of the Congo River additional reports of the ape inhabiting the Central Basin forests ensued. Forfeitt, based at Bopoto (currently Lisala), reported that the marungensis ape was encountered in the forests of Equateur Province (Fig. 1) from 1893 (Johnston, 1908).

In 1894 Reverend Richard Cole presented to the British Museum of Natural History the skull of a female ape (BMNH 1895.4.1.1.) collected at Bongandanga, Congo Balolo Mission, in