

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 26 March and 6 April 2012, an independent audit of government ivory stockpiles in Gabon was undertaken at the request of the Gabonese authorities, with a view to later burning the audited ivory. Field teams comprising representatives of the Ministry of Water and Forest (MINEF), the National Agency of National Parks (ANPN), WWF, Conservation Justice and TRAFFIC undertook the inventory and marking of ivory specimens in 22 ivory stockpiles hosted by provincial administrations of MINEF, ANPN, tribunals and, to a lesser extent, the police force (gendarmerie). The audit was carried out country-wide except, for logistical reasons, in Ogooué-maritime province. This report documents the principal results of this mission.

The participative and transparent process embraced by MINEF, WWF and ANPN greatly assisted the audit process and outcomes. Broadly speaking, all decentralized administrations encountered during the audit welcomed the inventorying of ivory stockpiles and marking ivory specimens. The objectives of the audit were mostly achieved, despite some problems and difficulties encountered. Makokou Court, for example, did not permit the auditors access to certain stockpiles.

The total stock audited within the 22 stockpiles totaled 4,825 kg, including 4,438 kg of raw ivory comprising 1,293 specimens (mainly tusks), and 391 kg of worked ivory comprising around 17,700 specimens (collars, bracelets, statuettes etc). More than 79% of the ivory (by weight) and 73% of the tusks (by number) were hosted in the MINEF building in Libreville. The total stock audited corresponds to an equivalent of 4,946 kg of raw ivory. The mean weight of tusks was 3.4 kg (n=1278). These figures can be used to estimate that the ivory audited during the mission corresponds to 774 elephants. However, this does not take into account those ivory stockpiles not audited during the mission, namely those held by Makokou Court, Libreville Court and the Court of Appeal in Libreville, ANPN's head office in Libreville, and all stocks within Ogooué-maritime province (Port Gentil, Gamba, Iguela etc). Unaudited stocks are known to include i) 108 kg of worked ivory seized in November 2011 by MINEF, with the support of AALF (Appui à l'Application de la Loi sur la Faune), and hosted by Libreville Court (equivalent to 140 kg of raw ivory), and ii) 36 ivory tusks seized by ANPN and hosted by Makokou Court. If these stockpiles were included, the ivory stock held within Gabon would correspond to 846 elephants, although this is certainly a minimum figure and would need to be adjusted upwards once all ivory stockpiles have been audited.

The audit noted the absence of available and/or existing ivory stockpile inventories in many cases. Most of the ivory for which information was available came from seizures, and poaching was the principal cause of mortality identified. These data reflect the involvement of Gabonese authorities in anti-poaching activities, leading to numerous ivory seizures, but also the persistence and intensity of poaching of elephant populations in Gabon, particularly in recent last years.

The audit has also permitted TRAFFIC to develop a database of marked ivory in Gabon. About 62% of the raw ivory ( $\geq 1$  kg) was already marked with a code identification system. In most stockpile locations, there was no database or specific ivory register. The audit found that storage of ivory (and firearm) seizures and/or held as part of ongoing cases, particularly in decentralized administrations (but also in Libreville's "SFAC" zone) was generally in cramped conditions and not adequately secured, especially in courts and Provincial Ministry of Water and Forest (DPEF) buildings. It should be noted that ivory stockpiles at Oyem Court and some firearms stored at DPEF buildings in Makokou were stolen shortly after the audit. Further investigations are underway.

By comparing existing available documentation for some ivory stocks with the latest audit enabled the auditors to identify differences between the two; in particular, 51 kg of worked ivory in Libreville's "SFAC" zone) were missing compared to data from July 2011.

In parallel with this mission, the auditors also documented 617 firearms in weapon stockpiles, including 4 military grade weapons (Kalashnikovs and M16s). This figure does not include firearms stored in Libreville's "SFAC" zone (estimated at minimum 132 firearms), the court of Makokou (estimated at minimum 16 firearms), Oyem, Franceville, Lambaréné and Libreville Courts, the Court of Appeal in Libreville, the headquarters of ANPN in Libreville and also firearm stocks within Ogooué-maritime province.

Overall, this report highlights some specific aspects relating to the current poaching and trafficking of ivory, human-elephant conflicts, the difficulties of sensitizing field staff, lack of equipment, problems of governance etc. Finally, this report also illustrates issues connected with the interpretation of procedures to curtail the illegal ivory trade and seize ivory and firearms, and also issues relating to wildlife law enforcement, such as the recording of offences, seizures and prosecutions, sanctions etc.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **To finalize an ivory stockpile inventory and the marking of ivory:**

- The Ministry of Justice should instruct and authorize MINEF's General Direction of Fauna and Protected Areas (DGFAP) to audit the ivory stockpiles (and firearms) in Makokou Court and the Court of Appeal in Libreville. After receiving authorization from the Ministry of Justice, DGFAP should quickly send a field team including representatives of MINEF, ANPN, WWF and Conservation Justice, to carry out these audits.
- In the near future, DGFAP should send a delegation including representatives of MINEF, ANPN, WWF and Conservation Justice, to audit those stockpiles currently held in the province of Ogooué-maritime (especially those held in Iguela and Gamba).
- The public prosecutor of Libreville Court should invite DGFAP to finalize an audit of ivory stockpiles as soon as possible. DGFAP should set up a mechanism whereby the public prosecutor is regularly contacted to permit such access to audit stockpiles.
- DGFAP should check the existence or otherwise of ivory stockpiles within the offices of the Direction Générale des Contre-Ingérence et de la Sécurité Militaire (Bureau B2, renseignement militaire) and the gendarmerie of Tchibanga. These were not visited during the latest audit because of time constraints.
- DGFAP should send TRAFFIC all the filled in and signed forms, once all the remaining ivory stockpiles have been audited.
- DGFAP should send TRAFFIC all the relevant signed forms corresponding to i) the ivory (and firearms) stockpile audit in the ANPN headquarters in Libreville that took place on 26 May 2012, and ii) the ivory sent by the DPEF in Lambaréné to the MINEF in Libreville in April 2002.
- TRAFFIC should update and finalize the current report on the basis of the results of the remaining audits noted above. MINEF and all audit team staff are invited to submit their results to TRAFFIC in due course.

### **To collect and burn ivory stockpiles**

- To transport ivory (and firearms) overland to be stored in Libreville, this report recommends the Gabonese authorities take the following route: Libreville – Koulamoutou – Franceville – Makokou – Oyem – Libreville. By air, stockpiles at La Lopé could first be transferred to Koulamoutou. In each case, the Gabonese authorities (Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Interior...) would need to secure the collection and transport operations through the presence of well-trained armed security forces. Moreover, the relevant Ministries (MINEF, Justice etc) and ANPN need to take steps to ensure their staff involved in these operations receive appropriate local assistance. Finally, NGOs should be associated with operations collecting ivory stockpiles, in order to enhance the transparency of the process.
- In the short-term, MINEF should reinforce the security at ivory (and firearm) stockpiles. The announcement of the incineration may increase significantly the risks of robbery at known and poorly secured stockpiles. This is particularly true of the "SFAC" zone in Libreville, where the majority of the country's ivory stockpile is stored.

### **Management of ivory stockpiles**

- MINEF should establish a robust and transparent national ivory (and firearm) stockpile management system to reduce the risk of leakage of contraband into illegal markets. A database developed by TRAFFIC during this audit may help in the development of an ivory stockpile register to facilitate management of ivory stockpiles. However, a system tailored to the situation in Gabon would need to be developed, through the participation of experts from various departments of MINEF, the Ministries of

Justice, Interior, National Defense, Economy etc, plus ANPN, national and international non-governmental organizations. Issues concerning collection protocols, system registration (standardized coding systems, collection forms, databases etc) and data validation, stock management (storage, security, control etc) need to be adequately addressed. Moreover, this report recommends the establishment of secure, adequately spacious ivory (and firearm) storage sites at provincial locations. All ivory and firearm stockpiles in Libreville should be centralized into a highly secure, well-ordered, “neutral” storage area specifically dedicated solely to ivory and firearm seizures, which is regularly audited in a transparent fashion. Seized ivory and firearms, which are not under legal procedures, could then be repatriated into this storage area each year, in accordance with a previously established procedure.

- DGAP should request all relevant administrations (DPEF, courts etc) to mark newly seized ivory specimens in accordance with the coding system agreed during this audit, and to register all relevant information (code, weights etc) using the same or a very similar template to the one used during this audit. Moreover, MINEF should provide its decentralized offices with the appropriate materials (such as weighing scales etc) to mark up ivory items. This should be carried out as soon as possible as part of the setting up of a robust and transparent ivory and firearm stockpile management system.

### Scientific Research and Monitoring Programmes

- DGFAP should authorize the taking of ivory samples for scientific research, such as for DNA identification, stable isotope geo-referencing and other forensic techniques to support the determination of age and the geographical origin of African elephant ivory. Such an approach would enable Gabon to support the implementation of the CITES action plan for the control of trade in elephant ivory that recommends all elephant range States co-operate with relevant research centres involved with ivory identification.
- The national CITES Management Authority should strengthen its contribution to the ETIS programme. The majority of ivory held in Gabon was acquired from seizures, some of which appear not to have been reported to ETIS. Such cases need to be reported by the CITES Management Authority to the CITES Secretariat and/or to TRAFFIC in order to support effective implementation of the ETIS programme.

A number of further recommendations have also been formulated, based on observations, although these are technically beyond the scope of the current work:

- With the support of audit teams, DGFAP should finalize an inventory of firearm stocks during a final audit of the remaining ivory stockpiles. This should include an audit of the firearm stockpile in Libreville’s “SFAC” zone.
- MINEF should support fieldwork by conservation organizations such as WWF and WCS to test methods to repel elephants and reduce crop damage. Such work will help MINEF update its human-wildlife conflict mitigation strategy.
- MINEF should organize training sessions for its local representatives to overcome gaps in administrative procedures. Such work could be realized in compliance with the AALF project which has already initiated these kinds of activities.
- MINEF and the Ministry of Justice need to clarify issues regarding the destiny of seized ivory and other further actions by MINEF staff.

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