



# Jengi

WWF Jengi Southeast Forest Programme Newsletter

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## Assessing wildlife population dynamics in southeast Cameroon



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## ASSESSING WILDLIFE DYNAMICS IN SOUTHEAST CAMEROON

### Progress made so far...

**W**hile the spatial distribution of elephant population in Lobeke National Park remains essentially stable though fragmented due to poaching and logging activities in and around the park, respectively," says Dr. Zacharie Nzooh, WWF Jengi Scientific Advisor. Dr. Nzooh's assertion could not have come by if data had not been painstakingly collected through WWF's ecological monitoring programme.

The monitoring programme that was introduced in 1999 and reviewed in 2002 has made it possible for WWF to establish the dynamics and population trends of flagship species (elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees and bongo antelopes) in Boumba Bek, Nki and Lobeke parks. These data are necessary for the orientation of strategies for better management of natural resources in and around protected areas in southeast Cameroon.

Thanks to monitoring, estimates of densities of large mammals and great apes (gorillas and chimpanzees) and poaching zones have been established.

#### Wildlife trends

Flagship species populations have remained wholly stable. In Boumba Bek, that harbours about 1000 elephants, spatial distribution of this large mammal shows a steady movement towards the north of the park, according to recent data collected during reconnaissance and surveillance missions. "Between 2004 and 2007 spatial distribution of elephants has been gradually expanding from the south to the north. Increased surveillance in the north and poach-

ing pressure in the south have forced most of the animals to drift north in search of safer havens," states Dr. Nzooh.

In Nki, recent monitoring report showed an increase in elephant population. Between 1998 and 2006 the number of elephants rose from 1547 to 2577. The south western zone of the park is considered most important due to high concentration of large mammals around Ikwa forest clearing. Gorilla and chimpanzee populations are also relatively stable.

Gorilla population is reportedly high in the southern part of WWF Jengi Programme area while increase in gorilla poaching in the north has orchestrated a decline in the number of this great ape. This trend was established from data collected on monitoring of bush meat trade during anti-poaching patrols.

With regards to bongo, the most sought after by sport hunters, monitoring of sport hunting concessions and community hunting zones revealed a fragmentation of the population of this mammal. This could be attributed to logging activities, poaching and unsustainable sport hunting. "Hunting quota for bongo is not scientifically established. Results from sport hunting zones indicate a variation in the quality of trophy from sub-adult to old bongo. This is a prob-



Ph. David Rouge/WWF Jengi

Gorillas in Lobeke forest clearing

lem," complained Dr. Nzooh. In-forest monitoring, according to the Scientific Advisor, is done in three ways. "We monitor animals sighted in selected forest clearings, considering high or low intensity of human pressures. Through this we can easily detect and interpret the frequency, time spent and behaviour of the animal sighted," Dr. Nzooh explained.

Signs of animals and human activities are also recorded during in-forest reconnaissance missions. There is the triennial large mammal survey using standard methods to evaluate trends in densities and spatial distribution. Data are further collected during surveillance patrols to combat poaching. During such missions, game rangers destroy poachers' camps, dismantle snare cables and gather information on large mammal activities.

### ...Poaching threat to conservation efforts

**P**oaching is hampering WWF's ecological monitoring efforts, making this activity ever more indispensable for the establishment of a proper framework for protection of wildlife. In the southeast of Nki, trans-boundary poaching is rife. Poachers pitch tents in Bwala, a town in neighbouring Congo Brazzaville from where they cross into the park to hunt.

In Socambo, south of Lobeke, poaching is on the increase. Poachers hunt in the southern zone of Nki and sell the meat in a flourishing bush meat market in Ouessou, a town in Congo Brazzaville, according to WWF Research Assistant for Nki, Charles Bassama.

Poaching also remains a major problem in the Ngoyla-Mintom corridor, that constitutes Cameroon's segment of TRIDOM inter-zone, which links protected areas in Cameroon (Dja) Minkebe (Gabon) Odzala (Congo Brazzaville). Poaching is orchestrated by existing network of new mining and logging companies, with the complicity of locals. Illegal hunting is intensive in the northern segment of the zone (Lomie,

Ngoyla) as well as in the south (Djoum, Mintom, Ntam, Lele, Mbalam). Huge amount of elephant tusks is smuggled out to Gabon and Congo into Cameroon across River Ayina.

#### Solutions

With data from ecological monitoring, WWF alongside Cameroon's Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, MINFOF, have envisaged plans to reinforce protection of wildlife and ensure sustainable management of natural resources. A surveillance base will soon go operational in Socambo on Cameroon's border with Congo. With the creation of this base, it is hoped anti-poaching operations by MINFOF will be more effective. More game rangers have been brought in to bolster security. An anti-poaching expert has been hired to train rangers and follow up day-to-day activities on the field. Game rangers from Cameroon and gendarmes from Congo carry out joint anti-poaching operations in the southeast of Nki.

Workshops, aimed at defining the process



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A poacher's 'harvest' in Ngoyla-Mintom

and data needed to fix a sustainable hunting quota and define sustainable safari hunting norms have been organised.



## The men on the ground

In one of the trails in Lobeke National Park, Southeast Cameroon, Likambo Simon, WWF Junior Field Assistant, led a team to Petite Savane, one of the forest clearings where ecological monitoring had been programmed. For the next five days, the team will observe animals that enter the clearing and note the sound made by others in the surrounding forest.

"We register the specie and number of times it makes a sound. For those that enter the clearing, we note the time they spend, what they do and when they leave. For those that walk in groups, we endeavour to find out the number of males, females and babies," Likambo explained. The clearings are mostly visited by gorillas, elephants, sitatunga, colobus monkeys, buffaloes and sometimes bongo antelopes. Not a very easy job, the team usually takes along food rations, tents, torch lamps, cooking utensils and other basic necessities to guarantee in-forest survival. They run the risk of confronting elephants and gorillas that feel disturbed in their natural habitats. "Gorillas, especially, can be very aggressive; the least disturbance puts them on the offensive. However, we are used to them and know how to avoid them."



Likambo, WWF Junior Field Assistant leading team to Petite Savane clearing

The Junior Field Assistant has been involved in monitoring in Lobeke for eight years now. According to him, monitoring remains the most credible method to establish wildlife trends. "We use the data collected from the field to prepare an annu-

al report that presents the situation of wildlife in the park. Our reports have so far shown that Lobeke is very rich in terms of wildlife," he stated.

"The number of animals that visit clearings in Lobeke is on the increase. This can partly be attributed to the decline in poaching inside and around the park that largely scared the animals," Likambo said.

The monitoring team was happy that game rangers now accompany them into the forest.

"Gone are those days when poachers never got scared upon seeing us in the park. I think poaching is on the decline inside the park thanks to this new approach," he stated. Ecological monitoring is being carried out in six forest clearings in Lobeke, including Djembe, a WWF base inside the park.

## Wildlife film projection attracts hundreds

**W**WF Jengi film projection on protected wildlife species attracted several hundreds of people in Ngatto, a village close to Boumba Bek National Park. The projection was aimed at sensitising the population on protected flagship species, dissuade them from illegal hunting and teach them conservation and nature protection. This was accomplished thanks to a quiz through which WWF explained its mission, the concept of conservation, the different classes of protected species and why they are classified as such. The crowd that turned out to watch the film, was awe-struck at the similarities between great apes and human beings. All through the projection, there were moments of laughter, sadness and sympathy, as the graphic presentation of the grievous consequences extinction of wildlife and the forest will have on the ecosystem were vividly presented. One of the villagers, Ahonda Cael, was upbeat after the projection. "I wished you



Ngatto villagers thronged venue to watch film on wildlife: (Inset) movie entitled 'Great Apes'

could come again soon. I now understand why we have to protect the animals and the forest," she said.

According to Expedit Fouda, WWF Park Assistant for Boumba Bek, WWF is moving from words to images to appeal both rationally and emotionally to the people to desist from destroying the forest and

wildlife. "I think the reaction of the population was positive. Many people came to us after the projection eager to know more about conservation. They wanted to know why some people are called poachers, the law that sanctions this crime and alternatives to poaching," Expedit said.



## Combating illegal wood trade

**T**hough reduced to the lowest ebb, illegal logging remains a threat to the forest in southeast Cameroon. This activity, according to Lemotio Jean, Divisional Service Head for Forestry in Boumba et Ngoko Division, is rampant in a logging town called Kika, situated southwest of Lobeke National Park. Here wood is illegally exploited and smuggled across River Ngoko into neighbouring Congo Brazzaville.

"Illegal logging is on the decline but we cannot fold our arms and say all is well. We recently discovered, during an operation near Lobeke that illegal exploiters have been operating inside logging concessions. We seized three chainsaws and destroyed 4000 pieces of wood," said Lemotio. In the face of this repression, the illegal loggers are said to have crossed over to Congo Brazzaville, where they hoped to find a safer haven. "Some of them crossed the river into Congo Brazzaville, but acting under the auspices of Tri-national de la Sangha, TNS, accord, we pursued them and reduced the woods into shreds. This was intended to dissuade them from continuing these activities," explained Lemotio. At first the impounded wood was sold and a fine levied on the defaulter. Now

the approach is changing. "We used to arrest and slam a fine on them. But now that we have discovered they operate in logging concessions, we shall do everything to ensure that they are charged to court henceforth," he said.

Alphonse Ngniado, Senior Forest Officer, WWF Jengi, thinks constant surveillance and awareness-raising on the harms of illegal logging are the appropriate ways to wipe out the practice. "Illegal logging remains harmful to the community because proceeds go to the coffers of individuals to the detriment of the entire population. The administrative and forestry authorities must do their best to check this prac-



Truck transporting illegal wood impounded by forestry authorities

Ph. Pegue

tice," Ngniado advised. The people, he continued, must also be encouraged to set up community forest enterprises whose proceeds benefit the community and provide safeguards for sustainable forest management.

## Locals drilled on community forestry

**S**even communities in Boumba Bek have been sensitised on management of community forest and the disadvantages of illegal logging.

The Network of Community Forest Management Enterprises, REGEFOC, and a local NGO, CIFAD, pivoted the awareness raising campaign with the support of WWF. For eight days, the team moved from village to village explaining the laws spelling out modalities for acquiring community forest. Villagers listened to advice on how to obtain and manage community forest enterprises and were urged to denounce illegal loggers and eschew sales by standing volume. Locals, however, insisted that proceeds from community forest be reinvested in local development projects, which many



Local sawmill

Ph. Ngniado

claimed has not been the case. They also complained of lack of training and were worried about the administration's demand for legalised paper for the commercialisation of non-timber forest product. Spurred by the lesson learnt, the vil-

lagers intercepted a truck transporting illegally exploited wood. According to Alphonse Ngniado, WWF Forest Officer, the awareness raising campaign was prompted by evaluation report of community forest enterprises under exploitation. "The report revealed that local people do not yet understand the concept of community forest and are increasingly involved in illegal logging and sale by standing volume," said the Forest Officer. "We also taught them how to manage revenues generated from exploitation of the forest."

Community forests are 5000ha of forest portions attributed to local communities for exploitation for 25 years renewable. Exploitation is carried out on the basis of a management plan and proceeds are used to finance micro-projects in the communities with the aim of alleviating poverty.



# Rallying against HIV/AIDS

**H**IV/AIDS and hernia still pose serious threats in southeast Cameroon especially amongst indigenous Baka pygmies. That is why WWF Jengi, through its integrated health and environment project, has been supporting initiatives of local health districts, catholic missionaries and education institutions to roll back the pandemic.

The catholic hospital in Salapoumbe, a town sandwiched between Lobeke and Boumba Bek national parks, has been one of the frontline partners in the campaign against the pandemic. Rev. Sister Genevieve, who runs the hospital, says AIDS remains the biggest headache among Baka pygmies. "Baka pygmies are still diagnosed with the virus. This is partly explained by the fact that they are still reticent about condom use. We take care of them because we have the necessary medicine to treat them," explains Sister Genevieve.

The hospital is finding it difficult to run given that Baka pygmies are too poor to pick their medical bills. "They do not have money but they make efforts. Some come with FCFA 10,000, others with FCFA 15,000. Some have cocoa plantations and are ready to take treatment and pay later. We treat urgent cases for free," Sister Genevieve discloses.



Students queue up for HIV/AIDS screening in Yokadouma

Confronted with these difficulties, the hospital has found a helper in one of the nine local wildlife management committees, known by its French Acronym as COVAREF that manages some of the community hunting zones in the area. "COVAREF has given us financial assistance and has pledged to do more," she said.

In the same vein, WWF has given financial assistance to the hospital for the training of traditional midwives and construction of pit latrines. Effort is made to fight HIV/AIDS amongst youths through Health and Environment Clubs created in some schools in the area. A recent HIV/AIDS screening witnessed enthusiastic participation of students in a secondary school in Yokadouma.

## PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Youths of tomorrow in Mintom

**I**n a makeshift classroom in a village around Mintom, in Ngoyla-Mintom corridor, that constitutes Cameroon's segment of TRIDOM inter-zone, pupils braved the odds and listened to lessons generously dished out by their vicarious teacher. The children, most of them bare foot, have been sitting on cement blocks in an open shed without walls to shield them from the occasional storms that

sometimes sweep across their village. Some 150km away, beneath the earth in a village called Mballam, lies huge deposit of iron ore which a mining company has begun exploiting. Will the coming of the miners improve on their lots or will it make things even harder for them? They seem to ask. So far the mining company has promised to build schools and hospitals, but will they be very keen on

respecting environmental norms? WWF has been active in the Ngoyla-Mintom inter-zone, seeking to establish collaborative conventions with the miners to get them buy in to environmental protection with some successes. However, poverty remains the main problem in the area, and plays very much on the people's perception of what has been happening in their environment in recent months.

Ph. Defo



## Pioneer meeting of Lobeke National Park management committee



Ph. Pegue

Participants at management committee meeting in Camp Kombo

**L**obeke National Park will soon have a scientific committee that will examine the quality of research and ecological monitoring activities in the 2173 Km<sup>2</sup> park. This was one of the decisions the first ever Lobeke management committee meeting that held in Mambele village situated 30km from the park, took recently.

The committee will coordinate and ensure

harmony in all scientific activities and validate results of research in the park. It will facilitate publication and implementation of research results and establish the relevance of sustainable management of natural resources to the area.

Chaired by the government administrator for Boumba et Ngoko Division, the committee evaluated the implementation of the park's management plan for 2006 - 2007 and approved the work plan and budget for 2008.

Park authorities plan to complete inventories on parrot capture sites and to establish a consultative platform between capturers and conservation services. Anti-poaching operations will also be heightened with the creation of control posts in areas where poaching has been intense around the park. Meanwhile activities that provide alternatives to bush meat consumption will be encouraged.

Joint patrols will be beefed up with Congo Brazzaville and Central African

Republic under the auspices of the Tri-national de la Sangha, TNS, trans-boundary conservation initiative by virtue of the implication of local communities and the private sector in the management of natural resources.

Greater supervision of community and sports hunting zones will be ensured and steps taken to guarantee that marginalised local people benefit from revenues accruing from trophy hunting.

The government of Cameroon declared Lobeke "national park" on March 19, 2001. Surrounded by six sport hunting zones and five logging concessions, Lobeke has one of the highest densities of forest mammals in the Congo Basin with an estimated population of 2000 elephants and 3000 gorillas. Lobeke is contiguous to Dzanga Sangha in Central African Republic and Nouabale Ndoki national park in Republic of Congo Brazzaville. The three parks make up the famous Tri-national de la Sangha trans-boundary conservation initiative.

### WWF Jengi staff amongst SSWG conservation ambassadors

**S**ocial Science Working Group, SSWG, a global community of conservation scientists and practitioners, recently nominated Olivier Njounan Tegomo, WWF Jengi Senior Field Research Assistant, as one of its eight young African ambassador fellowship winners. Tegomo was chosen amongst 40 applicants and is expected to serve as the umbilical cord linking WWF Jengi to the SSWG. The latter is dedicated to strengthening conservation social science and its application to conservation practice. This dovetails well with a study on access rights on indigenous Baka people and the local wildlife management committee, COVAREF.

"With the SSWG we can present our achievements with regards to conservation of biodiversity and social sciences. This is demonstrated through the creation of COVAREFs and study on access rights of indigenous Baka pygmies residing around protected areas in southeast Cameroon," explained Olivier.

Established in 2003 SSWG is an appendage of Society for Conservation Biologists. It creates forums and mechanisms for information exchange, promote dialogue and debate, and build social science capacity among conservation practitioners.



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