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Time to save last elephants standing



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With over 60 percent of forest elephants killed in protected areas in Southeast Cameroon in under a decade, Cameroon has been hard hit by poaching. Urgent and necessary measures must be taken to safeguard the last surviving elephants.

Time to save last elephants standing



Two hundred and sixteen elephant tusks seized in December 2017

Three mega seizures of elephant tusks made in Cameroon in 2017 shows the grave danger forest elephants face. In March 2017, customs officials seized 159 elephant tusks in Bertoua, the chief town of the East Region of Cameroon; in November 2017, police seized 158 tusks in the city of Douala while rangers seized 216 tusks near Djoum in December 2017. This brings the number to 533 of elephant tusks seized in just three operations within 10 months. Forest elephants particularly within the TRIDOM landscape and the central African sub region, have never been in danger like now.

WWF wildlife census published in November 2017 revealed that over 60% of the region's elephant population was decimated in under a decade. Nki National Park, one of the biggest and richest parks in Cameroon, was hardest hit with over 75% of its elephants killed.

Cameroon is hard hit by elephant poaching. In the last ten years (2006 to 2015) the

country lost about 75% per cent of its elephants in some protected areas in the east region, according to a WWF wildlife census published in 2016. Cameroon is used both as a source and transit for smuggling of elephant tusks coming from Central African Republic, Gabon and Congo Republic. Some 300 elephant tusks were seized from poachers in different parts of Cameroon in 2016.

Elephant poaching is unfortunately witnessing a boom at a time WWF and its partners as well as Cameroonian authorities have multiplied efforts to curb wildlife criminality. This latest seizure comes at a time Cameroon's Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) and partners like WWF have redoubled efforts to fight wildlife crime. Rangers, police and customs officers have arrested more than 20 poachers. Several law courts have slammed heavy jail terms on poachers in recent months. Anti-poaching efforts have been strengthened in and around protected areas and rangers are better equipped to face wildlife criminals. In February 2017, the Cameroon government ordered the burning of three tons of pangolin scales seized from traffickers. Earlier in April 2016, Cameroon ordered the burning of 2,000 ivory tusks and 1,753 ivory objects in a move that was aimed at dissuading traffickers. However, the hemorrhage is persisting.

Unfortunately, well placed government officials are involved in aiding and abetting most poaching operations as evidenced by the seizure of 216 elephant tusks reportedly in the vehicle of a military colonel.

"It is frustrating to know that elephants continue to fall in such an alarming rate in spite of efforts deployed on the field. It is time for urgent action to save the last elephants standing. We really need more support and concerted efforts in this fight," states Gilles Etoga, WWF Jengi TRIDOM Programme Manager.

As WWF and its partners pursue efforts to end poaching, it is hoped that Cameroon's wildlife law under revision that envisages tougher penalties for wildlife offenders will soon see the light of day to bolster efforts on the ground.

Captured African grey parrots regain freedom



Ranger freeing rescued parrots

An estimated 100000 African grey parrots live in the southeast of Cameroon, especially in Lobeke National Park.

One hundred and ten African grey parrots captured and kept in captivity by traffickers south of Lobeke National Park in eastern Cameroon were rescued and released by park rangers.

The rangers seized the parrots from a certain Mussa Hallilu, during an operation on December 4, 2017. Hallilu, now in custody, caged the birds for over three months seeking means to smuggle them out of the area to potential buyers. He reportedly contacted a ranger to help him in the operation. Rangers later arrested Hallilu in the village of Socambo on Cameroon borders with the Republic of Congo. Lobeke conservation service released the parrots back into the wild on December 6. This is the second time in less than one month that police and rangers have seized parrots from traffickers. On November 23, police in the city of Douala seized 124 parrot heads from three traffickers. Hallilu faces up to three years in prison and FCFA 10 million (circa US \$ 20000) as fine for illegal capture of parrots.

"I wish to hail rangers for seizing and releasing the parrots. We are sparing no effort in curbing poaching and bringing wildlife criminals to justice," says Achile Mengamenya, Conservator of Lobeke National Park.

African grey still see red

This amazing talking bird used to be captured as pets, upon issuance of a Cameroon government permit. However, recent upsurge in illegal trade and the decapitation of the birds for rituals prompted Cameroon Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife to raise the grey parrot to Class A (totally protected) species in 2017.

An estimated 100000 African grey parrots live in the southeast of Cameroon, especially in Lobeke National Park. However, conservationists fear incessant capture and decapitation of the bird is leading to decline in its population.

In 2015, a law court in eastern Cameroon sentenced a notorious and recidivist parrot poacher Roger Atangana and two of his accomplices to three-year jail terms and a huge fine. "There was a sense of respite after the court verdict," says Djibrila Hessana, WWF Program Manager for Lobeke. "This latest seizure calls for more vigilance. We trust the court will hand down a severe sentence on the trafficker," says Djibrila.

Lobeke is a part of Sangha Tri-National (TNS) transboundary Conservation landscape involving protected areas in Central African Republic, (Dzanga-Ndoki) and Republic of Congo (Nouabale Ndoki). On September 3, 2012, UNESCO declared TNS a World Heritage Site.

ANTI-POACHING:

TRIDOM conservation services receive field equipment



Material to serve the needs of TRIDOM protected areas

WWF recently provided field equipments to boost biomonitoring and law enforcement in protected areas in the Cameroon segment of TRIDOM landscape .

The equipment comprising GPS, compasses, digital cameras, potable solar panels, Thurayas, camping tents, field bags, uniforms and boots were donated to the conservation services of Nki and Boumba Bek national parks, the Ngoyla the Wildlife Reserve, Kom Mengine Gorilla Sanctuary and the Dja Biosphere Reserve.

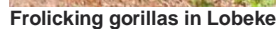
"These sorely needed gadgets will ease the work of rangers during biomonitoring and anti-poaching operations," says Constantine Itoe, Conservator of Ngoyla Wildlife Reserve. "Many protected areas lack basic forest navigation and data collection tools, rendering the work of rangers difficult," he stated.

Protected areas in the landscape grapple with basic equipment and infrastructural challenges, ranging from GPS to vehicles and watchtowers in parks. In response to these needs, WWF Jengi TRIDOM Programme, with the support of WWF Netherlands, constructed watchtowers and base

camps for Boumba Bek and Nki national parks as well as provided the parks with gadgets such as solar panels, Inreach Delrome, Conquests, and computers.

"This donation was made thanks to support by the Central Africa World Heritage Forest Initiative (CAWHFI). Protected areas in the landscape need material support to function well. Given the grave threat posed to wildlife by poaching within the landscape, we need to work with all partners to secure the parks," says Gilles Etoga, Program Manager of WWF Jengi TRIDOM.

TRIDOM landscape is very rich in biodiversity comprising mega wildlife species such as forest elephants and gorillas. However, these species particularly the elephant are highly threatened by poaching. On 11 December 2017, game rangers of the Dja Biosphere Reserve seized 216 elephant tusks near Djoum in the South Region of Cameroon, the third major seizure in the country in just 10 months. Many other seizures of huge quantities of elephant tusks and pangolin scales made in the country had their source from the southeast of the country.



"Much progress has been made with the semi-habituation project thanks to financial support from our donor. This is exciting as it will provide additional attraction for our numerous visitors," says Djibrilla Hessana, Programme Manager of WWF Jenqi TNS Programme.

Supporting Baka students and their dreams



Baka and Bantu pupils of Government Primary School Mambele display WWF donated hand washing campaign messages

The Baka are one of the many indigenous communities living in Cameroon. Historically marginalized, the community faces several challenges in an ever-changing Cameroon but in recent years, improved access to education is helping create change.

"I am going to school so I can become a gendarme (police) officer," states Ngongo Inyas as his schoolmate Mirreille chimes in "I dream of becoming a teacher." Ngongo and Mirreille are two of the 700 Baka children in eastern Cameroon who have received school scholarships sponsored by WWF.

As a conservation organization, education is not traditionally an activity WWF is involved in but the decision to create and fund the scholarship was taken on the request of the Baka themselves.

An estimated 26,000 Baka live in Southeast Cameroon, in and around the country's forests which are a lifeline for indigenous communities like theirs. WWF, which has been present in Cameroon since 1990, works closely with the Baka and other indigenous peoples to identify how conservation can help protect and promote their rights and improve access to services such as education and healthcare.

With the Baka expressing an interest in sending their children to school, WWF launched the Baka education project in 2013. Today, the project supports Baka children in primary and secondary schools in three districts - Yokadouma, Salapoumbe

and Moloundou - in the Boumba and Ngoko Division of eastern Cameroon, covering school fees, uniforms and books. Enrolment fees for public exams are also covered by the scholarships provided.

"Thanks to this grant, WWF takes the burden off the shoulders of Baka parents by enabling their children to attend school. That is why this gesture is commendable," says the Director of Government Primary School Koumela that counts over 40 Baka children among a total of 150 students.

Data by local NGO, CEFAID, an implementing partner on the project, indicates that between the school years of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, enrolment of Baka children rose from 267 to 318, while the number of them admitted to write public exams climbed from 118 in 2014 to 170 in 2015.

"We are pleased that our support is motivating more Baka parents to send their children to school. We have noticed that the school dropout rate among Baka has reduced significantly and are committed to continuing to work with the Baka community to address the challenges they face," states Olivier Njounan, Collaborative Management Officer, WWF-Cameroon.

WWF works with key partners like CSOs and the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education and Social Affairs, to help support indigenous communities like the Baka through conservation activities.

Dialogue with indigenous peoples for change

Issues relating to indigenous peoples' rights will henceforth be better handled if indigenous people (IP) groups honour a commitment taken to collaborate with WWF and local actors in matters touching them.

In order to improve its intervention for the benefit of IPs in Southeast Cameroon, WWF seized the opportunity of the 57th General Assembly of Réseau actions concertées populations pygmées (RACOPY) in October 2017, to dialogue with and enlist the active participation of IPs in issues relating to their rights and projects for their development. Indigenous people are expected to work with different local actors in seeking lasting solutions to multi-faceted problems they face.

"This is a wonderful initiative by WWF and I wish that this consultation is extended to all Baka communities living around national Parks," states Ajina Ernest, President of Baka Association of Boumba and Ngoko Division. "I am optimistic that this initiative will greatly improve the way WWF works with Baka on the field," says Ayina.

RACOPY members committed to continue this consultation with communities and provide feedback during the next RACOPY meeting scheduled for February 2018 in Lomie.

WWF also sought advice on how to better work with IP communities for their effective participation in implementation of projects for the wellbeing of IPs.



Baka willing to collaborate in issues regarding them

"We are ready to dialogue and work with IP groups in order to better address issues relating to their rights and wellbeing. We expect RACOPY to work with the largest number of actors so that they can improve their intervention on IP issues," states Moise Nkono Bidzo, WWF IP Officer.

On the ground, WWF is providing support to local NGO CEFAID to record and follow up complaints as well as support Baka to seek justice against their abusers. The initiative has supported scores of Baka who have suffered abuses of any kind to get justice.

Local communities to set up vigilante groups to fight poaching

Two communities around Nki National Park and the Ngoyla Wildlife Reserve have developed action plans that include setting up vigilante groups to combat poaching. At the end of an awareness raising campaign undertaken in November 2017 by WWF in collaboration with the conservation service of Nki National Park, villagers of Etekessang and Djadom including their chiefs, notables and youths, expressed willingness to play their part in the fight against poaching that poses a threat to the wildlife of these protected areas.

The meeting with the communities comes at a time poaching has intensified in the TRIDOM landscape with over 75% of the elephant population of Nki National Park massacred in just a decade. WWF findings show that

members of local communities are directly or indirectly involved in all poaching operations carried out in and around the parks. These same communities can play an important role in forestalling poaching by denouncing illegal acts or collaborating with the parks' conservation services to arrest suspects.

Discussion during the awareness-raising meeting centered on the importance of conservation and benefits to local communities, involvement of youths in park management and generation of revenue for locals and man wildlife conflicts. The communities then elaborated an action plan on how to collaborate with the conservation services.

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