

# **Strengthening Collaboration Management for the Protection of Critically Endangered Nigeria Cameroon Chimpanzee and Pangolins in the Kimbi Fungom National Park, Cameroon**

## **Brief Background**

The Kimbi-Fungom National Park is located between latitude 6.5-6.9° N and longitude 9.8-10.5° E in the Northwest Region of Cameroon covering a total land surface of 95,380 ha. This national park is located in three divisions of the Northwest Region of Cameroon cutting across four subdivisions. These divisions are Menchum, Boyo and Dongo Mantung and found in the respective subdivisions of Fungom and Fru Awa, Misaje and Bum. This park was created under Prime Ministerial decree number 2015/0024/PM of 3 February 2015 with a total surface area of 95,380 ha. This park is a consortium of two old reserves that were created on 2 May 1936 as the Fungom Native administration Forest Reserve (Forestry Ordinance, 42 of 1936) and 1964 as Kimbi Wildlife Sanctuary. These two reserves existed with respective sizes of 327.25 sq. m and 51.4 km<sup>2</sup>. The northern area of the park runs along the Cameroon-Nigeria borders while the eastern, southern and western parts of the park are within Cameroon territory stretching to the Nigerian border at the Gayama Basin. These vegetation types are the low land rainforest, gallery forest, woody savanna and grassland savanna. Some good research has been carried out in the park but with very little about the most threatened pangolin.

This project was designed to strengthen collaboration between the local communities and the park authority to improve on the knowledge of local communities in and around the Kimbi Fungom National Park on the protection of the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee and pangolins. Specifically, this project sets out to assess the present population of the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee and pangolin in the Kimbi Fungom National Park for effective protection. Secondly, to assess indigenous knowledge on the recurrent human-chimpanzee conflicts, carry out sensitisation in 10 peripheral communities on the role and benefit of chimpanzee and pangolin conservation. Finally, to hold collaboration meetings between the local community representatives across the four compartments of the park and the government. This helps policy makers and park managers in effective formulation of planning and conservation policies that will help protect the surviving of local communities alongside wildlife especially the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee and pangolin populations.

## **Project Progress: November 2022 - May 2023**

This project kicked off in November 2022 and went through to May 2023. This is a period when field work designed, and implementation is done. Within this period, the entire research team together with the focal point members and the officials of the park developed the required plan and came up with an outstanding project implementation plan. Survey plans and maps were produced, data collection sheets were designed, questionnaires were designed, and sensitisation banners were produced. Field equipment to be used in the field such as GPS and compass were also prepared. During this period too, there was great search on existing literature on the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee, human-chimpanzee conflicts and pangolin related research especially in savanna ecosystems, it trades and related problems. This desktop search increases the knowledge of the research team and better their skills to deliver the best, especially during sensitisation and training. The holding of the collaboration

workshop was very instrumental as the massive turnout of the local representatives gave a good impression from the interactive discussion. The Muslim communities assured us that they will do their best to be good ambassador of conservation although they face problems with non-resident grazers during the dry season transhumance in the park. As planned, all the different objectives were achieved in time, that is a period where the entire research work was implemented.

### **1. Survey of the Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee and Pangolin Population**

The project made use of both biological and socioeconomic survey methods. For biological survey, the park was divided into 15 blocks. This was to avoid bias in data collection on chimpanzees and pangolins and human activities affecting their distribution. The line transect technique was employed. In the study area a total of 35.3 km line transects were randomly laid with the use of the GIS software. With the help of the GPS, the transect end points were located from our position. These points were trailed using the compass by following the orientation of the angle given by the GPS. Where necessary, a machete was used to trim impeding portions of the vegetation along transects to ensure easy access and identification of pangolin or their signs. Data recorded included number of chimpanzee vocalisations, nests and feeding signs as well as pangolins signs, habitat characteristics, activity, habitat type, weather condition, time of day and season. Human signs were also recorded and included farms (active and abandoned), settlements, snares, gun shells, gun sounds, hunting camps, hyrax snares, human paths, hunting camps, dogs and actual sightings of hunters. The survey started in February to July 2021.

Results obtained from the field detected a troop of chimpanzees with 11 individuals sighted in impenetrable rocky landscape at Etchem, 17 chimpanzee nests were also detected: three very old, eight old and seven recent nests. Most of the nests were detected in hilly rocky gallery forests while three were found in thick woody savanna. A total of 27 vocalisations were recorded across all vegetation types in the park. Twenty of these vocalisations were detected in highly steep rocky landscapes where chimpanzees have been resorted due to high human pressure from habitat fragmentation and hunting activities.

A total of 106 signs of pangolin were encountered along transects, recce and opportunistically, 12 live pangolins were encountered through recce walk and 28 live pangolins were encountered opportunistically in the woody savanna. The highest number of pangolins encountered opportunistically was in the dry season between December and February. This period in the park is called the "pangolin season" because even women encounter and pick live pangolins. This harmless species continuously being present in the park is through the mercy of God as it is being harvested throughout time. We were happy that two live pangolins were taken from a hunter and released back to the wild. Other species and signs detected were the olive baboons, velvet monkeys, mona monkeys, putty nosed monkeys, patas monkey, bay duikers, blue duikers, antelopes, cane rat, African civet, African wild cat, rock hyrax, porcupine, the monitor lizards and rock pythons. These species were detected in both ecosystems, lowland forests, gallery forests, woody savanna, grassland savanna and swampy ecosystem. A greater proportion of rodents were detected in the savanna and gallery forests. We detected some human activities including snares, gin traps, gun shell,

farms, human paths and the timber exploitation in the park which remain potential threats to these protected species in the park.



Recent Chimpanzee Nest at Etchem in the Kimbi-Fungom National Park.



Old Chimpanzee nest at Mbwi-mbwi





Active Pangolin Nest at Mudzey

## **2. Assessing Indigenous Knowledge and Perceptions**

We conducted a survey on Indigenous knowledge on the recent recurrent chimpanzee attack in the park. This was done using 300 questionnaires, interviews and focus discussion. A total of 300 questionnaires were administered purposively to 10 communities in and around the park. The aim of the survey was to assess their knowledge and perceptions about the recurrent chimpanzee attacks in the park and their feelings about conservation output. Interviews were granted to the park officials and some conservationists to see if their perceptions and thoughts are the same as that of the local communities.

Findings showed some similarities and disparities amongst the local population perception, the park officials and conservationists. All local respondents to the questionnaire had knowledge of the attacks. Between 2020 and 2021, there have been five serious chimpanzee attacks. The local described the conflict as being very serious. On the question of what must have caused these recent attacks, the local advanced reasons based on their past knowledge: when a chimpanzee is being wounded either from a trap or gunshot, sound from a vehicle/motor bike, normal aggressiveness to human, when see human with dogs. The consequences of these conflicts have been far reaching spanning from one death, one deformation on the face and three fighting (chimpanzee and humans). This according to the brought fear and misery to the families of the affected and the entire park area because they have never witnessed such things for over 50 years of their occupation of the park area except in some cases more than 20 years back where they heard reports about chimpanzee fighting with hunters in cases where the chimpanzee is shot. On the question of whether there is anything that can be done to prevent the conflicts, local people were of the fact that the park authority has hinted them on precautionary principles to follow to avoid such conflicts. But their worries are about the fact that four chimpanzee attacks have been on people on motor bikers on the major roads that pass through the park to Fru Awa subdivision which is very difficult to avoid. The entire local people were of the fact that

despite the causes of the attack that they have mentioned, they strongly believe that this is linked to spiritual problems. They were therefore of the fact that some people transform into chimpanzees to settle scores with their enemies or family members on disagreements.

On the side of the park officials, the conservator stressed that chimpanzees are very jealous animals that remain territorial and do not want any encroachment into their territory. According to him, the human activities in the park are threats to the habitats and peace of the chimpanzee. Conservationists were of the fact that human-chimpanzee conflicts remain paramount in many protected areas in the African continent and so must handle with care that with not jeopardize the peace existing between the local population and the government officials. According to them, the only difference in these conflicts across protected areas is their causes, frequencies and magnitudes. They both agreed that these conflicts in the park are serious and so must be handled.

### **3. Sensitisation of Ten Peripheral Communities**

Sensitisations were done in six peripheral communities and four communities inside the park. A total of 10 communities were sensitised in and around the park. The sensitisation was done in different areas including palaces, community halls, community working days (village clean up days) and market squares depending on the advice of the chiefs. Our team members alongside trained community field guides played key roles in the sensitisation campaign. They took part in community cleaning up in some peripheral communities just to make sure that the messages went through to the people. Two banners were produced carrying images of the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee and pangolins. This sensitisation was focused on the importance of pangolins conservation. Snaring, hunting of pangolins as well as chimpanzees and bush fire were the main threats that were re-echoed during the sensitisation campaign.

After a series of question-and-answer sessions, the communities expressed their willingness to limit the killing of chimpanzees and harvesting of pangolins and other threatened species in the park. Many questions were raised on the recent chimpanzee attacks on the local population. The conservator at first sight indicated that chimpanzees are very jealous animals that do not want any trespass in their territory or share their territory with any other species. But the local people questioned that the attacks mainly on passengers on motorbikes through the main road passing through the park to the Fru Awa Subdivision. The good thing about the meeting was that all accepted that the four attacks of chimpanzees were on individuals who were on motorbikes, meaning that these chimpanzees are not used to the sound of bikes or vehicles. Their worries were also about the fact that they have been living in the park area for over 50 years, in which they have invested much. How can they then avoid the road of the attacks? In a polite way it was resolved that for now, they should be moving in groups to avoid attacks on a few individuals. Conservation education was also given in two secondary schools in Esu village, the main entrance into the park.

They also had worries that there is no control of bush fires in the park as bush fires remain the greatest threats to pangolin conservation owing to the fact that grazers set fire to regenerate grass which intend encroached into the park and cause maximum



damage to pangolins. According to them, the highest number of pangolins is harvested opportunistically every dry season as the effect of bush fires. A total of 1,058 people attended the sensitisation workshops. The distribution was as follows: Esu main settlement (614 persons including 253 students), Menkep (32), Gayama I, (32), Gayama II (20), Kpep (44), Mudzey (51), Etchem (103), Tengheukah (78) Mbwi-Mbwi (45) and Munkaa (39). We targeted these villages for the second time because these are villages where chimpanzees have either been killed or spotted or with frequent episodes of continuous hearing of vocalisations. Besides other members of the communities, we made sure that a greater proportion of hunters were present during the sensitization. We also extended our sensitisation to some Muslim notables around the park. They were very optimistic and reaffirmed that they are better ambassadors for conservation since they do not eat bushmeat. The Muslim communities at Kimbi were of the fact that conservation is not really threat to the livestock or livestock being a threat to conservation but that everything work well for the better of everyone.



Community Sensitization in Esu Village



Conservation Education in GHS ESU



Conservation Education.

**4. Collaboration Management Workshops**

Organising collaboration management workshops for the protection of critically endangered Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee and pangolins was very important. This was to reinforce and improve collaboration between the communities who live alongside the chimpanzees and pangolins and government who is the main agent of protection. The meetings were chaired by the conservator of the park, Mr. Ashu Walters, in collaboration with members of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) including all the nine forest guards in the park. In attendant were community leader's focal point members, muslims, members of MINFOF and hunters across the four compartments of the park. These compartments are the Esu Compartment, the Kimbi Compartment, the Nkang Compartment and the Dumbo Compartment. For the fact that during the meeting, there was unrest in the park and many of the officials were out, the meetings were held at the Limbe Wildlife Center. The very rich meeting was well planned and maintained a well desired outcome. Below are the recommendations from the meeting.



Collaboration meeting between the Government and Local Representative





Collaboration meeting.

The main reasons advance by locals for the encroachment into the park were fertile soils in the park which is good for both commercial and subsistence agriculture, hunting opportunities and grazing opportunities and that some of them have been living in the park for the past 50 years and even see the creation of the park as a threat to their survival.

In order to reduce or stop the encroachment of the humans into the park:

1. The farming land and the grazing land should be divided.
2. Soil fertility should be improved through the provision of both chemical and organic fertiliser.
3. The local authorities such as the chief for posts, counselors, Fons, should sensitise/ educate their local communities in language that their subjects can best understand.
4. In addition, punishment and huge tax payment should be levied; posters should be produced and passed round the town/ village, churches and in the mosques; more sustainable livelihood programmes should in introduced in order to reduce massive encroachment such as cocoa, cassava, palms, etc.

More so, some of the best management of these species include:

1. Provide scholarships to deserving students who perform well around the park area to remove their interest in hunting.
2. Encourage pig and poultry farming in and around the park, which is give piglets to local community members, opening of poetry farms before removing.
3. Organise training in beekeeping and provide seed money for them to kick off the business.
4. Negotiate for relocating the locals who are exploiting biodiversity hotspot of the park.
5. Give temporal employment such as tourist guides, porters to local community members.
6. Encourage agro-forestry in peripheral communities through the donation of cassavas, cocoa, palm nuts which will reduce the rate of unemployment and



improve the living standards of the local community members while protecting our threatened wildlife.

7. Community leaders / chiefs should actively implement the laws and punishment measures indicated which would help in the protection and conservation of these endangered wildlife.