

Project Update: January 2013

Introduction

With funding from the Rufford Small Grants Foundation and further technical support from the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), chimpanzee population viability surveys commenced in October 2012 in two priority sites identified in the species' action plan – the Idanre cluster in Ondo and Edo States and Ise forest reserve in Ekiti State. Further support in the form of intellectual input and technical advice is provided by Drs. Oates, Greengrass, Ogunjemite and Gonder.

Objective

- To determine the population status/abundance of chimpanzee within these priority sites.
- To map chimpanzee distribution within each site and their point locations using GIS;
- To determine the type, distribution and intensity of human activities and key threats directly affecting chimpanzee and their habitat and identify existing conflicts;
- To examine management issues and its correlation to other threat factors

Activities so far

10th October 2012 – 31st October 2012: Accessed funds, organised logistics, mobilised team members and consulted with stakeholders at the Ministry of Environment – Department of Forestry in Abuja, Ministry of Natural Resources - Department of Wildlife Conservation, Parks and Ecotourism/Honourable Commissioner in Akure, Ondo State.

Field surveys ran from 1st November 2012 –25th January 2013 with intermittent breaks to re-stock field supplies, consult with government officials/community groups and a 10-day yuletide celebration from the 24th December 2012 – 3rd January 2013.

Preliminary Results

1. Although, chimpanzees still survive in Ise forest reserve, survey findings suggest the population may not be considered viable for long-term conservation, owing to several factors particularly the accelerated rate of habitat loss.
2. Two groups of chimpanzees were identified in the Akure-Ofosu forest reserve within the Idanre cluster and this population was monitored closely for about two weeks and are considered viable for long-term conservation but pressures from logging and farming activities remains very intense. Direct observation of two individuals was made in the same site on the 19th of January 2013

Achievements so far

1. As a result of preliminary reports and consultations with the government on the status of chimpanzee in the Akure-Ofosu forest reserve, urgent calls was made for the strict conservation of the chimpanzee range as chimpanzee sanctuary and the

Ondo State Government through the permanent secretary – Ministry of Natural Resources have given the go-ahead to delineate areas within the reserve that could be gazetted as chimpanzee sanctuary.

2. The paramount ruler of the Idanre Kingdom – King Aroloye of Idanre land has lent a voice to the urgency of conservation actions in the Idanre forest reserve and for this reason, specifically summoned relevant government officials to his palace on the 4th of December 2012 to urge them to initiate quick actions.
3. Leopard have been confirmed present in the Idanre forest reserve and as top predator/keystone species performing critical functions in the forest ecosystem, this is exciting discovery. However, their status was not determined.

Challenges

1. Marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*) plant cultivation is spreading like wildfire in south-western Nigerian forests and the growers have become ruthless in their determination to cultivate the illegal plant. Therefore, this situation poses real and present danger to the survey team which have had two 'close calls' with the armed gang who believe we may be spies/informants for the NDLEA (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency). Consequently, the recce-transect methodology was abandoned for direct search methods and reconnaissance walks in areas known by local hunters where these marijuana farmers can be completely avoided.
2. Some initial proposed team members were at different times engaged at the place of their primary assignment and could not participate in most parts of the survey i.e. Monday Ubiri (promoted as chief surveillance officer).
3. The dry season (December – January) that is associated with the peak of human activities in the forest reserves due to the relatively easier accessibility into the forests via motorable roads poses tremendous challenge to the survey in general. Firstly, because trees are felled by farmers and loggers at a very high rate such that accurate nest counts cannot be made and some chimp nest have been observed on newly felled trees. Secondly, it also threatens to leave the team with what might best be described as historical data (even before any analysis is done).

Next steps

1. Two articles titled - ***Illegal marijuana (Cannabis sativa) cultivation drives massive deforestation and threatens wildlife species to extinction across the Nigerian lowland forest ecoregion*** including ***Chimpanzees in SW Nigeria – going...going...GONE!!*** are due to be published in one national daily and www.mongabay.com to raise awareness to the plight of the species and other wildlife in the survey sites.
2. Funding to support demarcation and protection activities for the chimpanzee sanctuary will be sourced from grant organisations, government and relevant private companies.
3. GIS work and draft report will be completed at the end of March 2013
4. Preliminary results will be developed into PowerPoint slides that will be presented to state governments and community groups in April 2013.
5. Final Report is due by the end of June 2013