

Project Update: April 2014

The present study funded by the Rufford Small Grants is planned to be executed from November 2013 to October 2014 and aims to strength the conservation of *Colobus vellerosus* (Geoffroy's colobus), one of the least studied and highly threatened primate species in Benin and promote the valorisation of Kikélé forest through ecotourism.

Short report for the first step (November to February)

The first step of this project consisted in the study of *Colobus vellerosus* population size in Kikélé forest and investigations with local populations to document feeding habits, behaviour, reproduction, mortality, uses, threats, opportunities and constraints linked to ecotourism promotion at Kikélé.

Population size

The observations were conducted for 15 days from 06:30 to 10:30 and from 16:30 to 18:30. We had therefore 6 hours of observation per day and a total of 90 hours of observation. Our observations revealed one group of primates comprising 14 individuals, including 13 *Colobus vellerosus* (three females and three young, seven adults and sub-adults) and one *Cercopithecus mona*.

Feeding habits

Species consumed by *Colobus vellerosus* during our observations were *Azadirachta indica*, *Celtis integrifolia*, *Ceiba pentandra* and *Khaya senegalensis*. Surveys with populations, revealed that they consume species such as, *Newbouldia laevis* and *Ceasalpinia pulcherrima*.

Behaviour

In Kikélé forest, *Colobus vellerosus* are very accustomed to population's presence however, they are distrustful of stranger's presence but can be observed. They are as tame monkeys and can be easily observed by ecotourists.

Reproduction and mortality

The respondents do not have a clear idea of their reproduction and mortality. However, they asserted that birth in the group of *Colobus vellerosus* sometimes correspond to a birth in humans, it is the same for deaths. In 2011, the group size was around 17 individuals and 13 individuals in 2013. This could be explained by death or by migration to other groups. We noted a birth during our observations in December 2013.

Uses and threats

Geoffroy's colobus are not hunted at Kikélé because they are considered by populations as their ancestors. Their habitats is used for cultural and cultural ceremonies. The main threat to Geoffroy's colobus at Kikélé is its habitat degradation. Despite, the forest small size, it is used as a dumping ground for household waste and place of defecation by some local people.



Left: Pollution in Kikele forest. Middle: Adult Geoffrey's colobus. Right: Female Geoffroy's colobus & baby.

Opportunity and constraints linked to ecotourism in Kikélé

85.19% of those surveyed are for the implementation of ecotourism at Kikélé and 14.81% are indifferent to this initiative. This high rate of people interested is a major asset to the ecotourism promotion. The main natural attractions identified were Kikélé sacred forest, gallery forest and primates. We also have cultural and cultural attractions namely: the presence of several socio-cultural groups with different lifestyles, the presence of several deities in the forest, the existence of many traditional artistic groups, the feast of the yam, the traditional annual struggle for youth, etc. However, the presence of household waste in the forest is a constraint to ecotourism development.

Planning for the next step

Information, education and awareness activities started in the village as well as the establishment of the environment club. Member of the Management Committee and eco-guides will be trained, and a short documentary will be produced.