

Project Update: December 2014

Activities and Results during the Funding Period in Review

1. Our boundary surveys and all associated field activities focused on monitoring chimpanzee and collecting genetic samples and this time including hair samples expected on fresh nests. So far we have collected some hair samples due to be sent to Dr Christina Hvilsom at the Copenhagen Zoo for analysis.
2. These surveys have updated our knowledge on the current status of the proposed conservation areas and enable us to develop a relevant management plan for these areas which is underway and will represent the final report of our work during this phase of the project.
3. We have set up camera traps in the project areas and have acquired images of some wildlife species in the areas but nothing yet on chimpanzees.
4. Consultations and meetings with the State Government finally reached a major breakthrough in June where the Commissioner and his management team including the Permanent Secretary indicated willingness to push forward with conservation agenda but unwilling to stop licensed loggers from logging in the forests until when their licences are due to expire at the end of the year agreeing to halt any further renewal of licences.
5. As a result of the Commissioner's approval for the establishment of conservation areas, he has put forward a proposal to the Governor for the 487 sq km conservation areas and the governor's approval is pending.
6. Proposal to the State House of Assembly for the promulgation of new policies and laws that will ensure the stringent persecution of those poaching chimpanzees and elephants in the state is pending as governor's approval for the demarcation of the proposed conservation areas has not been received yet.
7. Due to the delay in concrete actions (such as enacting laws and policies that recognises the proposed conservation areas) for conserving the proposed areas, we have also consulted other international and national stakeholders to add pressure on the government to act quickly.
8. We investigated new elephant killings leading to subsequent arrests of poachers and also to help us understand existing human-wildlife conflicts that could be used to propose effective management plan.
9. We have been increasing efforts at media and awareness for the project especially during the March 3rd World Wildlife Day when we made radio and other press briefings.

10. We received funding support from Eco-Sys Foundation to print posters and some educational materials for our school campaigns (posters were redesigned to include logos of other partners and supporters of the project such as AWF logo, Rufford and Margot Marsh logos). We are focusing our school campaigns in six major schools, five in Idanre town and one in Ala town. Large quantities of chimpanzee stuffed toys arrived in June from Eco-Sys Foundation which is being distributed in these schools and in some of our work sites in the Niger Delta.
11. We hosted the Great Apes Director, AWF – Jef Dupain – where we conducted him to project sites and key stakeholders being consulted by the project. Who joined us to call on the government to legalise the proposed conservation areas before it is too late. This visit coincided with the celebration of the International World Forest Day in March.

CHALLENGES

1. One major challenge has been the unavailability of the Governor to meet with project team to consolidate on plans for the demarcation of the proposed conservation areas.
2. Political and administrative changes within the government ministry responsible for forest management i.e. the change of the Director of Wildlife Conservation, the Permanent Secretary and Commissioner at the Ministry of Natural Resources slowed the project's progress as the team had to start all over briefing and negotiations with the new officials.
3. Incessant clearing of forests for Indian hemp and excessive logging within the proposed conservation areas made the team concentrate more efforts in policy advocacy than on the needed survey work on chimpanzee monitoring.
4. Negotiating alternatives for the licensed timber operators within the forest reserves have met with several stumbling blocks. Firstly, the initial idea to relocate licensed loggers to other reserves was opposed because much of the reserves in Ondo State have already been deforested and the Idanre/Akure-Ofosu areas are all that is left. This will make protection difficult when the new conservation areas are announced. We are currently proposing on organising a meeting with the timber association to sensitise them on the purpose of the new conservation areas and establishing limits/regulations to their operations but it is required that the government Ministry of Natural Resources take the lead on such meetings otherwise it will be futile if the project champions this as the project does not have the needed authority. Meanwhile, the government office require us (the project) to help fund this meeting where we do not have the resources for it.
5. Forthcoming national elections in February/March 2015 will slow down process in legislative advocacy for the proposed conservation areas that should ensure chimpanzee conservation in these forests.

NEXT STEPS IN 2015

1. Continue systematic set-up of camera traps within proposed conservation areas and intensify efforts to increase coverage area.
2. Continue focused surveys on collection of genetic sample materials to ascertain chimpanzee genetics (as a strategy rather than scientific objective), perhaps if results show subspecies uniqueness, then it will increase conservation attention for these areas etc.
3. Intensify school educational campaigns with chimpanzee modelled stuffed toys and posters.
4. Publish management plan for the proposed conservation areas as an instrument to continue negotiations with government