SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION AND CONSERVATION OF FOREST ELEPHANTS (*LOXODONTA AFRICANA CYCLOTIS*) IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

BEING A PROGRESS REPORT

BY
AMUSA Tajudeen Okekunle, PhD.
Department of Forest Resources Management
University of Ilorin, Nigeria

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Rufford small grants foundation
(for nature conservation)
www.ruffordsmallgrants.org
6th Floor, 248 Tottenham Court Road London W1T 7QZ

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SUMMARY OF PROJECT UPDATE

The project- *Spatial distribution and conservation of forest elephants (Loxodonta africana cyclotis) in Southwestern Nigeria* continue as set out. Our broad objective lies on the need to contribute up-to-date and accurate information on elephant population in the project area. We have conducted series of conservation education outreach to stimulate environmental sensitivity and awareness towards elephant conservation in several communities within the project area.

Some of the socio-economic data relating to the project which were obtained from administered questionnaire have been processed for relevant analysis. Preliminary results revealed the need for us to step up sensitivity and awareness on elephant conservation in a few communities within the project area, particularly in the Omo Forest Reserve axis. This is because, despite our initial sensitization and planning meetings with community stakeholders as well as earlier conservation education outreach, there are indications that a few people within some of the communities still have a negative attitude towards elephant conservation in the area. The experience people have of forest elephants tend to influence their perceptions of, and attitudes towards them. There is an emerging relationship in people's attitudes towards elephant conservation and land use for farming, especially in core elephant habitats.

Meanwhile, we have also completed our field survey on determining population size and spatial distribution of the elephants for the wet season. We used two methods of census: The Line Transect Survey Method (Barnes and Jensen, 1987) and the Short-cut or Reconnaissance ("recce") Method (Barnes, 1988). As earlier planned, there were two important aspects to the data collection: One was the finding and recording of dung piles along transect lines; and the other has been the regular checking of a number of dung piles to measure decay rate. As each pile of dung along the transect is found, its state of decay was categorized according to the MIKE 'S System' for dung-pile classification (Hedges and Lawson, 2006). The data collection protocol also involved recording habitat-related data such as land cover, land use information and threats. Direct observations of elephants are being aided with the mounting of trail cameras. Signs such as footprints, dung, trails and feeding evidence have also been recorded.

So far, the project has helped in increasing the practical capacity of forest guards and park rangers on systematic elephant survey. We have received informal request from research officers of the Nigeria National Park Service at the Okomu National Park to help further in raising the capacity of Park staff involved in data collection on ways of processing and analysing the data with the relevant softwares.

PHOTO SPEAK

Line transect survey at project sites

Elephant dung piles along transect lines at survey sites

Dung piles collection for measuring of decay rate at survey sites

Mounting of camera trap along elephant routes at survey sites

Elephant habitat-related factors including land use information and threats at survey

Conservation education outreach in Omo Forest Reserve (OFR)

Elephant survey late into the night

Elephant and others trapped on camera at survey sites

Members of the elephant survey team and park staff involved in data collection