

## **Project Update: September 2016**

### **Objectives achieved:**

1. Diversify and enhance livelihoods through alternative income generating activities

This project is evidence that the pressure local communities exert on wildlife through poaching is mainly because natural resources constitute their only source of income. All poachers who take part in this project acknowledged that their livelihoods are improving and they benefit more from these alternative source of income

2. Reduce hunting pressure inside the national park

Determining the impact of the project on the level of poaching inside the national park will require some time but with an increasing number of local people beginning to gain interest in the project and to join those who started, we can ascertain that hunting pressure will decrease with time.

### **Difficulties:**

1. The project started later than we expected because the hunters we had previously identified to work with were absent for kick-off. This was because they had resumed hunting before the project started and we simply had to wait for them to return. Eight out of the 10 we had agreed to work with returned for the project and we simply proceeded with them.
2. Another unforeseen difficulty was that of rearing the cane rats. The available stock from the local supplier from whom we had planned to get starting animals was not available. We could find no other supplier. The reason given was that the fluctuating demand had fallen to a very low level and people were more interested in buying other sources of protein like snails and chicken. In fact, snails sell like hot cakes and that made us to adjust our plans to increase snail production and concentrate the project mainly on snails. The whole idea being that of providing an alternative source of income to these local people to increase their compliance with management policies.

### **Outcomes so far:**

Local community members who took part in the project benefitted a lot from it, and this has encouraged many others to join. These people learned new techniques on rearing a species of animal they see every day but were never interested in keeping. They saw their levels of income rise steadily, and at the same time, have a good source of protein that is readily available in large quantities for their families.

- We significantly improved the livelihoods of all hunters on the project as they saw their monthly revenues increase steadily with the snail trade
- We successfully convinced these hunters to stop their poaching activities as they realised that time spent hunting could be used to increase their snail farms and revenue.

- We contributed to a drop in poaching activities inside the national park as the conservator's office reported that fewer traps have been found inside the park this year compared to last year.

Now that proof of concept has been achieved, we can submit this interim report as the project is ongoing. We plan to monitor hunting pressure and livelihoods in the area every 6 months for the next 2 years. We also have plans to extend this project to other parts of Cameroon, especially to the forest-dependent indigenous pygmy communities in south-eastern Cameroon.

The important next steps are to monitor livelihoods of project participants in the next 2 years, monitor hunting pressure inside the national park through the number of snares and cartridges found, and to encourage other local community members to join. A very important next step would be to extend this project to the forest-dependent pygmy communities in the Congo basin forest (Dja reserve) in south-eastern Cameroon. These people are among the most marginalised on the continent because they were forced to relocate out of their native forests, and have stepped up hunting pressure inside that UNESCO WORLD heritage centre.

The results of this work will be shared through conferences, such as the Student Conferences on Conservation Science (SCCS), and publications in international peer-reviewed journals.

The grant was supposed to be used from December 2015 onwards but due to some unforeseen circumstances, the project rather started in February 2016 and is ongoing.

#### **Promotional materials:**

Yes, the Rufford Foundation did receive publicity during this project as we made it clear during meetings that the project was funded by the Rufford Foundation. We will acknowledge the Rufford Foundation in all publications that will result from this work and use the Rufford logo during eventual presentations at conferences.

#### **Comments:**

One important point worth mentioning is that the hunting pressure inside the national park may not have dropped solely because of our project. The conservator's office stepped-up the fight against poaching at the beginning of this year because it received large funding from the European Union. Nevertheless, by successfully keeping eight poachers out of the national park, our project has also contributed to reduce the hunting pressure and to show that local people can stop hunting if provided with alternative income generating activities that are sustainable and have a good market appeal.

