

Project Update: April 2018

Objectives:

Assess the conservation status of the species – Completed

1. The population of cycads in Mpanga gorge were inventoried.
2. Threats to the species were also examined.
3. Distribution map created and modelled against current bioclimatic variables.
4. Manuscript of findings in preparation for submission to Cycad Society newsletter.

Collect germ plasm for ex-situ conservation – Completed

200 seeds of cycads have been delivered and process for accessioning at National GeneBank is now ongoing (150 seeds from female plants and 50 seeds from male plants).

Sensitise law enforcement agencies and local communities about importance of species – Partially completed

1. 500 posters were produced and circulated at academic institutions.
2. A meeting with Parliamentary committee on natural resources is not possible due to many bureaucracies.
3. One workshop with law enforcement officers within the area is planned later this month after a discussion of the major challenges identified and solved.

Difficulties, so far:

1. It was difficult arranging a meeting with the chairperson of the parliamentary committee on natural resources to date due to his many commitments. I still hope that I will have an interface with him after the project to bring him up to speed with our findings and pass on our recommendations. This explains the delay in reporting.
2. There was difficulty finding the individuals in fruit. Therefore seed collections were delayed until when we could find them. This also meant that accessioning at the gene bank was delayed. I was lucky that I still managed to find seeds particularly from male plants although this meant delaying the project beyond time proposed.

Involvement & Sharing:

1. The local communities now know about the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) through our training.
2. They are aware of the restrictions placed on the species and the requirements needs for any activity involving the species.
3. There is an appointment with national broadcaster UTV to talk about the cycads in a programme.

4. The posters printed with detailed information about the species will be distributed across the schools in Kamwenge district but also at institutes of higher learning. This has been done at Makerere University. Other higher institutions of learning are targeted.
5. I have incorporated the cycads as topic in my courses I conduct in conservation biology. This is aimed at widening the discussion on cycads in the country and what we can do to save this scientific treasure.
6. I have also developed research questions targeting cycads that I encourage my students to take up for their undergraduate research course.
7. I am currently drafting a paper on the cycad focusing climate effects on the species that I intend to submit for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

Next steps:

1. Create a national law that specifically address this national treasure.
2. Engage with responsible bodies to increase awareness about the species especially in detecting illegal trade in the species by foreigners.
3. Establish nursery centres where propagated materials can be obtained instead of the wildlings.
4. Pollination biology of the species is needed to answer why the male to female ratios is high. Important to understand is also how human activities are affecting the pollination agents.
5. Law enforcement officers and local communities training on the importance of the cycads and there is increased vigilance against illegal wild harvesting of the same is essential.

Our team:

Mr. Sam Ojele I- Environmental education
Mr. Lawrence - Community sensitisation and logistics

Comments:

The small grants provided by Rufford are in fact big grants. With your support, we have managed to contribute to the conservation of cycads. With your support, there is increased vigilance by stakeholder to make sure that the species is not threatened with extinction. With you support, we have a classroom conduct our classes on some of the remaining living fossils of the world. From the bottom of our hearts, we say thank for providing this financial support.

