

Project Update : March 2023

The dry season phase of our work took place in January and February 2023 and several activities filled this phase: francolin inventory; consultation with local communities to find sustainable francolin conservation strategies; start of awareness campaigns.

1. Francolin inventory

This survey was a little disturbed by the presence of elephants because of the only water point in Mt Cameroon ("crater lake") where they come to drink as it is the only place where they can find water in the dry season.

A sampling effort of 55 points counts following the altitudinal gradient in the forests and pastures on the eastern slope of Mt Cameroon was made. It follows that a large number of presence of the francolin was observed in the pastures (elephant camps) than in the forests contrary to the rainy season. We have even observed several times on the elephants dung the imprints of francolins which search these dung to consume insects. Further studies need to be done to better understand because perhaps the elephant as a keystone species would contribute to the protection of the francolin by creating a favourable habitat for them.



Figure 1 : Left : Crater lake in Mt Cameroon. Right : Elephant dung scatter by the francolins.

The fact that francolin is present in the elephant camp is a good news for its protection because many people are afraid of elephants, which is why there are fewer signs of hunting in the elephant camp. But because of the modifications of the vegetation structure of this environment by forest elephants *Loxodonta cyclotis*, their effect on this ground-dwelling species is still to understand. Besides vegetation modification, there are bush fires in the forest/savannah borders, lit by the hunters and beekeepers leading to the species habitat loss. Moreover, the species and its eggs are targeted by hunters.



Figure : Left : Francolin feathers on the trap. Right : Bush fires.

2. Education and consultation with local populations

In order to formulate recommendations (for awareness campaigns) that take into account everyone's opinions (authorities and local communities), we have decided to consult with people who live near the mountain because more and more we realise that the majority of the conservation strategies undertaken by the authorities in charge of conservation do not work because the opinions of the local populations have not been taken into account. Here we proceed by explaining to the populations the ecology of the francolin and the threats it faces and asking them what they think for better protection.



Figure 3 : Consultation session with the local peoples.

3. Awareness campaign

We have started with awareness campaigns and we intend to continue in the coming weeks.

