

Project Update: March 2024

Introduction

This report provides an update on the *Rungwecebus kipunji* monitoring and awareness raising project in the Livingstone Mountains Ecosystem, Rungwe District, in Mt. Rungwe Nature Forest Reserve. *Rungwecebus kipunji* is a critically endangered primate species found in the patches of the Livingstone Mountains of Tanzania. The project aims at enhancing human-*kipunji* coexistence, through sharing and documenting strategies through which crop raiding could be minimised and communities are well informed on the species conservation status. The project engages both local communities, government institutions and NGOs working in the area.

Implemented Activities

Transect Walks: This project utilised 16 transects, previously established in the Mt. Rungwe Nature Forest Reserve, to maximise data collection within the known *kipunji* habitat. Bi-weekly transect walks were conducted by trained staff to increase the likelihood of sightings. A total of 35 individuals were sighted, sometimes alone and sometimes in groups with other primates like velvet monkeys and baboons. Most sightings occurred along maize farms.





- Household Interviews:** A household interview was conducted using a stratified random sampling technique in eight villages bordering the Mt. Rungwe Nature Forest Reserve. A total of 297 respondents were interviewed, with 98.99% confirming the existence of human-wildlife conflict, primarily crop raiding (92.93%) and crop crushing (62.63%). Primates were identified as the main culprits, with 68.01% reporting monkeys, 27.27% reporting *Rungwecebus kipunji*, and 26.94% reporting velvet monkeys. Wild pigs were also mentioned as a significant threat (65.99%).



Youth engagement (Environmental Education)

Environmental clubs in schools were strengthened, which is a crucial step in promoting long-term conservation awareness within the community. Three village environmental committee members were involved in weekly environmental education sessions. Most lessons were conducted outdoors, employing an inquiry-based learning approach that fosters a connection between students and their environment, particularly the kipunji habitat. This will cultivate a sense of moral concern and inspire future generations to participate actively in kipunji conservation.

The project is collaborating with ECOWICE to identify partner organisations in the USA and Germany. This initiative aims to connect students from these countries with students in the local villages. By sharing nature-based activities, students will develop friendships and gain a broader perspective on global environmental challenges.



Ongoing and planned activities

Monitoring of Rungwecebus kipunji: Transect walks are ongoing to monitor kipunji populations within the established transects.

Quantify Crop Loss by Species: While the household interview revealed that 27.27% of reported crop raiding incidents were attributed to kipunji, further data collection is needed to quantify the specific crop losses associated with each primate species.

Document Crop Raiding Mitigation Strategies: Comprehensive documentation of both lethal and non-lethal strategies employed by communities to reduce crop raiding from primates is needed. While the interview indicated that lethal methods like killing and forest clearing were rarely reported, some non-lethal methods, like snares and forest clearing, need to be explored more. Next activities will focus on documenting these existing practices.

Evaluate Effectiveness of Mitigation Strategies: The survey indicated various non-lethal mitigating strategies, such as farm guiding and scaring. The next activities will focus on assessing the effectiveness of these strategies. This will involve monitoring the

success rates of different methods and promoting the most sustainable practices among the communities.

Identify Less Preferred Crops: Exploring the feasibility of planting crops less favoured by primates as a potential mitigation strategy can be investigated.

Empower Environmental Champions: The project will continue to strengthen environmental clubs and empower student leaders within these clubs to design and manage programs, fostering a sense of ownership and long-term commitment to conservation efforts.

Stakeholder Decision Workshop: A 3-day workshop involving agricultural extension officers, foresters, district game officers, conservation organisations, village executive officers, and one representative from each village will be conducted. This workshop aims to share project findings, discuss challenges, and collaboratively develop a shared framework for forest and kipunji management. Companion modelling with the aid of ARDI will be used to design a decision matrix that will be shared among stakeholders and policymakers.

The *Rungwecebus kipunji* monitoring and awareness raising project has significantly progressed in understanding kipunji distribution, human-wildlife conflict, and community engagement. By continuing the planned activities and incorporating new data on crop loss quantification and mitigation.