

Project Update: June 2023

March-April 2023

Our team arrived the Obudu Plateau to commence the project. Facilitated by one of our team members on the plateau, Mr. Sabastine Boakem, we met with the management of the Becheve Nature Reserve (BNR), Mr. Columbus, who gave us a warm reception, after introducing our mission. The BNR is technically advised and managed by the Nigeria Conservation Foundation (NCF). The management pledged full cooperation towards achieving the objectives of the project and we were told to inform them in case we come across any challenge during the project in the community. We were then granted access to survey the Becheve Nature Reserve and Grotto Pool Forests and their associated water bodies for the threatened species. We extended the survey to include sites in the reserve which were not previously visited. At the end of the survey, we recorded larvae and adults of two of the threatened species, i.e., *Africocypha centripunctata* (EN) and *Allocnemis vicki* (EN) and the adult of *Neurolestes nigeriensis* (CR).

Thereafter, we met with the president of the Obudu Youths Association, Mr. Kevin Eyos, and the youth representatives from the eight villages on the plateau, who would later make up the first members of the Obudu Dragonfly and Damselfly Conservation Club (ODDCC). The youths were fascinated about learning about the threatened damselflies on the plateau, and how they can be part of protecting them. They were excited about joining the club. They learnt about the story of the critically endangered Obudu relic damselfly, *Pentaplebia gamblesi* and were ready to volunteer to provide any useful information at their disposal on the quest to unravel the mystery behind this species.

We later scheduled a meeting with the clan head, which was agreed to officially hold during our next visit, as we learnt that some specific conditions had to be met prior to the visit. However, we were allowed to survey the different forest patches on the plateau. We also extended the survey to locations we had not previously visited. We again found the larvae of *Pentaplebia* and one adult that was too far to be collected nor photographed by the equipment available at the time. This informed the choice of equipment purchase for the next survey.

April-May 2023

I received news from Mr. Kevin and some other members of the Obudu Community, on some damselflies they have seen on the plateau since our last conversation and needed identification. The most fascinating record was that of *Pentaplebia*! However, due to the quality of the images received, identification was not possible to species level. We agreed to visit all the locations of the records during our next visit.

June-July 2023

We had our second trip on this project, this time, fully equipped with advanced equipment and materials. Upon arrival on the plateau, we officially met the Clan Head of the entire Obudu Plateau, His Royal Highness, Chief Sunday Echile, who received us

very well, commended the project, gave approval, and wished for more projects to bring the natural adornments of the plateau to public attention, which he noted would cause more tourist attractions to Obudu.

Next, we again visited the management of the Becheve Nature Reserve, and made all official documentations on the project, based on an earlier email correspondence with the Director General of the NCF. With additional personnel, we surveyed the NCF-managed Emba Forest Reserve in addition to the Becheve Nature Reserve and Grotto Forests. This period is the early rainy season; hence surveys are usually hampered by poor weather conditions. However, we found only the endangered *A. centripunctata* in the protected areas.

Due to the unpredictable weather conditions during this period, we planned to be opportunistic on the surveys, by venturing straight into surveys at any slight observation of a near clear weather, while carrying out other activities of the project intermittently.

We constituted the first members of the ODDCC, and they were exposed to the world of damselflies through the first workshop. This was followed by a field survey trip to the new locations where *Pentaplebia* was sighted in April-May. We were guided by Kevin, whom we learnt has a new Rufford Foundation funded project on a threatened bird species on the plateau. Therefore, I was happy that we had got someone with like goals to increase the success of the overall objectives of both projects. The trip was a success, as we found *Pentaplebia* at different times, which I identified as *P. stahli* and photographed in the field. I also took note of the ecological conditions of the new discovery sites.

At another time, we met with chiefs and community leaders of the different villages on the plateau, inviting the community members to our first general town hall meeting and awareness programme. At the community awareness programme, representatives of each of the villages on the plateau were present, as well as prominent chiefs and influencers. I made a presentation on the threatened damselflies on the plateau, and the community people learnt about the different threatened damselflies, and how to protect them.

There were several questions from the participants, which revolved around how to practice sustainable lifestyle, without jeopardising the integrity of the habitats of these species, especially considering poverty as a challenge. They showed willingness to refrain from many activities and made enquiries about sustainable alternatives and how they can have access to such alternatives, especially regarding the use of fuel-efficient stoves instead of firewood for cooking. One of the chiefs implored us to proffer sustainable solutions to providing food vis-a-vis farming methods on the plateau in such a way that natural ecosystems will not be affected. Another influencer asked about how to solve the challenge of extensive grazing system. It was a very interactive session, and everyone left with either a take home message, a question to ponder about and most importantly, an action plan.

Next, it was time to officially unveil a permanent information panel at the entrance of the Grotto Pool, which is the discovery site of the Obudu Relic Damselfly, *Pentaplebia gamblesi*. The 3rd of July 2023 marks exactly 50 years since the discovery and the only

record of the critically endangered species at the Grotto Pool in Obudu. Therefore, this permanent information panel serves as memorabilia to mark the golden jubilee of the discovery and to create a permanent awareness of all the threatened species to both the locals and non-locals who visit the tourist site. The ODDCC members were especially thrilled to find out how valued these damselflies were, as they admired all the displayed images of the different threatened species, which they learnt were taken on the plateau. They once again expressed their motivation to activate action plans to protect the habitats of the species and also contribute to providing information on their sightings of the species.

Finally, the remaining days were spent surveying other non-protected areas both in the montane forests of the plateau, and transition areas, as the weather permitted.

I wish to state that the results of the survey so far are being used to prepare a manuscript draft at the moment, hence, information on the survey may not yet be published online in this progress report until the manuscript has been submitted for publication.



Official launch of a permanent information panel, commemorating 50 years since the discovery of the Critically Endangered Obudu Relic Damselfly, *Pentaplebia gamblesi*. Flanked by my new friend and a new Rufford Foundation Grantee, Kevin Eyos.





First meeting of team members with local community volunteers on the Obudu Dragonfly and Damselfly Conservation Club.



Presentation of project souvenir to the Clan Head of the Obudu Community, HRH Chief Sunday Echile.



Presentation of project souvenir to management of the Becheve Nature Reserve.



Community awareness program with representatives of the different communities on the plateau.