

Project Update July 2024

The goal of this project is to improve the conservation status of the critically endangered pancake tortoise (*Malacochersus tornieri*) in northern Tanzania through conservation education and community awareness programmes. The project aims to engage local communities, increase their understanding of the importance of pancake tortoise conservation, and empower them to become active stewards of this unique species and its habitat.

Project activities conducted between January and June 2024

1. January-March 2024: Permit processing and project initiation

After receiving the funds for the mentioned project, before starting fieldwork, we requested for research permit from the Babati District Council through the University of Dodoma (UDOM) and the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) of Manyara Region. After getting the research permit in early March 2024, the research team met with various stakeholders including the Regional Game Officer (RGO) of Manyara, the District Administrative Secretary (DAS) of Babati District, and the District Game Officer (DGO) of Babati to introduce the project and to plan on how the project will be implemented successfully.

Also, in collaboration with the district leaders (i.e., DAS and DGO), we identified Vilima Vitatu, Minjingu, Kakoy, and Ngoley villages as study villages where the project will be implemented based on their proximity to the Vilima Vitatu hills. The research team conducted meetings with the Village leaders (Village Executive Officer i.e., VEO and Village Chairperson) of the four study villages to elucidate the primary goal of this project (Fig.1-5). Finally, in collaboration with the village leaders in study villages, we selected four primary schools (i.e., Vilima Vitatu, Minjingu, Ngoley, and Kakoi) and two secondary schools (i.e., Mdori and Nkaiti) for implementing this project.

Some pictures showing the four study villages



Fig.1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Researchers & village leaders of Vilima Vitatu (Fig. 1 & 2) and Ngoley (Fig. 3)



Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig.6

Researchers with Village leaders of Minjingu (Fig 4.) and Kakoi (Fig.5); and RGO of Manyara Region (Fig.6) Manyara RGO

2. April 2024: Habitat survey

The research team conducted a habitat survey in April 2024 in the project area to identify the current potential threats to the existing tortoise population and their habitats (Fig.7-14). This activity involved the research team and representatives from the Village natural resources committee from Vilima Vitatu village. The project team recorded all signs and pictures of threats that may affect the conservation of the species and their habitats.

Some pictures during the Habitat Survey in the study site.



Fig 7,8,9,10,11 &12 showing habitat of Pancake Tortoises



Fig.13 and 14 showing *Pancake tortoise* in the field

3. May-June 2024: Social survey

The research team conducted social surveys in the study area to assess local people's knowledge and perceptions towards pancake tortoises and their conservation. Villagers (Fig. 15 & 16) and school children from selected primary and secondary schools

(Fig.17 & 18) were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured questionnaire. This activity was conducted by the research team in collaboration with village leaders and teachers from the respective primary and secondary schools.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Researchers conducting interviews with villagers in the study villages (Fig.15 & 16).

Activities in progress:

- Data sorting and analysis.

Next Activities:

- Conducting conservation education and awareness programs for school children and villagers.
- Strengthening the community awareness campaigns by exploring additional communication channels and increasing the visibility of the project.
- Fostering deeper engagement with local stakeholders, empowering them to take on more active roles in the conservation of the pancake tortoise.