Final Evaluation Report

We ask all grant recipients to complete a project evaluation that helps us to gauge the success of your project. This must be sent in **MS Word and not PDF format**. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please DO NOT fill in and submit this form until the project has been completed.

Complete the form in English. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email this report to jane@rufford.org.

Your Details	
Full Name	Azihou Dètchégnon Chadrack
Project Title	Towards effective conservation of the Benin Potto: Bridging ecological and ethnozoological knowledge gaps in the Lama forest reserve (West Africa)
Application ID	42955-1
Date of this Report	15/09/2025

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Estimate the population size and the distribution of the focal species in the Lama Forest Reserve				Due to the very secretive nature of the Benin Potto and the difficulty in capturing it on camera traps, we proceeded with 10 months of camera trapping instead of the 8 months originally planned. We deployed 24 camera traps for 10 months of camera trapping from November 10, 2024, to September 10, 2025. In total, we accumulated 7,200 trap-nights (24 cameras x 30 days x10 months) and obtained 602 images/videos of the species. The species was only recorded at night. 10 other species were captured in addition to the Benin Potto (*Cercopithecus erythrogaster erythrogaster, Cercopithecus mona, Civettictis civetta, Chlorocebus tantalus, Dendrohyrax dorsalis, Heliosciurus gambianus, Phataginus tricuspis, Potamochoerus porcus, Tragelaphus scriptus* and *Galago senegalensis*)
Assess the micro-habitat factors in occurrence site selection of the Benin Potto				To characterize the microhabitats, in addition to the dendrometric characteristics (height, diameter, number of branches, canopy diameter) that we had planned in our initial

				methodology, we added and collected data on the presence/absence of lianas around the roosting trees. We also quantified the abundance of these lianas (absent, low, abundant, very abundant).
Understand ethnozoology and local people's perceptions and attitudes toward the of Benin Potto.				None

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). During the implementation of the project, the camera trap survey revealed that the Benin Potto is mainly distributed in moist semi-deciduous forest patches with high density. Camera stations located in areas where the forest is degraded, without large trees and dominated by *Chromolaena odorata* and other invasive species showed a very low density of the species. We developed a distribution map for the species and it will be published in our draft manuscript.

b). The species shows a marked microhabitat preference for closed-canopy trees entwined with lianas, which it uses as dormitory sites, notably tree species such as *Afzelia africana*, *Lonchocarpus sericeus*, *Milicia excelsa*, *Dialium guineense*, and *Mimusops andongensis*.

c). Ethnozoological surveys involving 180 people in the villages of Massi, Guemey and Koto revealed that the species is culturally perceived as a symbol of resilience because of its tough skin and highly prehensile hands. The species is hunted mainly for consumption and traditional medicine and is not traded internationally. Some respondents reported buying carcasses of the species from other localities in southern Benin. In addition, some suspected, without much precision, the presence of the species in a few other forest habitats in southern Benin other than the Lama Forest Reserve, where it would also be hunted to supply the black markets for bush meat and traditional medicine. They openly acknowledged the decline in the species' population and indicated that there are no conservation measures in place for the species.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

During the implementation of our project, the study area did not have good telephone network coverage, which meant we were unable to use our mobile phones. It was very difficult to contact stakeholders. We therefore used walkie-talkies

belonging to our home laboratory. To support this, the funds allocated to telephone communication in our initial budget were used to pay town criers who travelled from hamlet to hamlet to pass on information, as is customary in the region.

During our semi-structured interviews, although the surveys were conducted anonymously, many hunters were reluctant to participate, even in the presence of our field guide. We had to enlist the help of a few influential elders from the surrounding villages, who persuaded them, and we were able to survey these hunters.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

We actively involved the local community in implementing the project. Our field guides were recruited from among local residents and compensated for their work. In addition, because of the limited telecommunications coverage, we enlisted a town crier — in accordance with local customs — to disseminate information from hamlet to hamlet. We conducted two behavior change campaign sessions in each of the three target villages (Zalimey, Koto and Guemey) following the Social Influence Approach with local communities, including men, women, youth, farmers, hunters, and local authorities, thereby ensuring that all segments of society were represented and engaged. In total, the six sessions reached approximately 30 hunters (previously identified using the snowball technique during our ethnozoological surveys) and about 1,500 community members (men, women, youth, farmers). During the discussions, hunters showed strong interest in environmentally friendly income-generating alternatives, such as beekeeping, which increased their receptiveness to the campaign messages. we printed and distributed posters and flyers. Our activities were supported by the production and distribution of 1,600 flyers and 12 posters. We entrusted the equipment to the community elders so that they can continue awareness-raising activities even after the project ends.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

The results showed that there are no conservation measures in place for the Benin potto despite the drastic decline in its population. The results indicated the presence of the species in other forest habitats in southern Benin other than the Lama Forest Reserve, which has never been documented. The next step will be to map the distribution of the species at the national level by accurately identifying all Benin potto habitats in Benin. Then, conservation actions for the species will be prioritised according to the status of its habitats. These steps are crucial to saving this neglected species from local extinction.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

We are currently working to publish the project results in an international peer-review journal such as the Journal of Tropical Ecology in early 2026. We plan to participate in the national conference/workshop on biodiversity in Benin as well as at the 2026 Student Conference on Conservation Science. We shared the preliminary results with forest managers: poster, flyer and the main maps while waiting to publish the manuscript with implications for conservation addressed to forest managers.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?
The most important next steps are to identify all Benin Potto habitats in Benin, map the species' distribution nationwide, prioritise conservation actions based on the status of its habitats, and conduct large-scale public behaviour campaigns to gain the support of local communities in the species conservation process.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?
We used the Rufford Foundation logo on all awareness-raising and behaviour-change materials. As publicity for the Rufford Foundation, and as a member of the West African Mammal Fellowship (2024–2026 cohort), I shared information about the project with my fellow members from other West African countries. I also spoke about this funding opportunity to my colleagues from the Tropical Biology Association 2024 cohort, which includes alumni from across the world. As an impact, this inspired my colleague Takondwa Kadaluka from Malawi, who applied for and received a First Rufford Small Grant in July 2025 for her conservation project (link: rufford.org/projects/takondwa-kadaluka/habitat-ecology-distribution-and-mobilizing-community-conservation-strategies-of-threatened-mwanamphepo-plants-in-mulanje-mountain/).
To reach a wider and more diverse audience, I made two major posts on my social media: Facebook (link: facebook.com/share/v/1ESM2KRyRc/) and LinkedIn (link: linkedin.com/posts/chadrack-azihou-604414230_small-mammals-have-long-suffered-from-neglect-activity-7369121956316528640-iyup?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAADm532QBjVppTRC2CrWwTt_LIGfcLb3fy7Y).
We have acknowledged the Rufford Foundation in our scientific article currently under preparation, which is scheduled for publication in early 2026. We also acknowledged the Rufford Foundation in our application for SCCS Cambridge 2026, where we plan to present the results of our work carried out under the funding of SCCS Cambridge or the Small Mammal Conservation Organisation.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.
AZIHOU Dètchégnon Chadrack: Study design, Questionnaire design, camera surveys, forest inventory, data analysis.

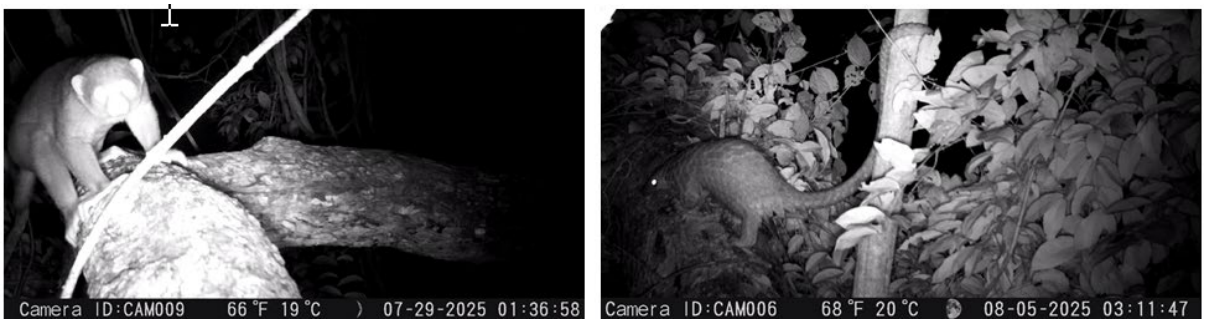
Anne-Marie N'sougan: Interview with local people, data transcription.

Alfred Abiodun: Local Guide for camera trap surveys, forest inventory, and behaviour change campaign.

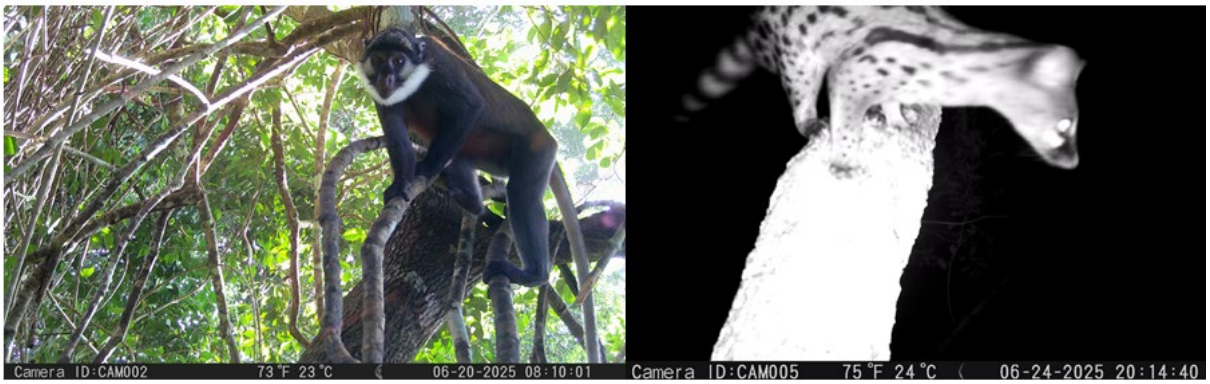
Kola Abiodun: Local Guide for camera trap surveys and forest inventory.

10. Any other comments?

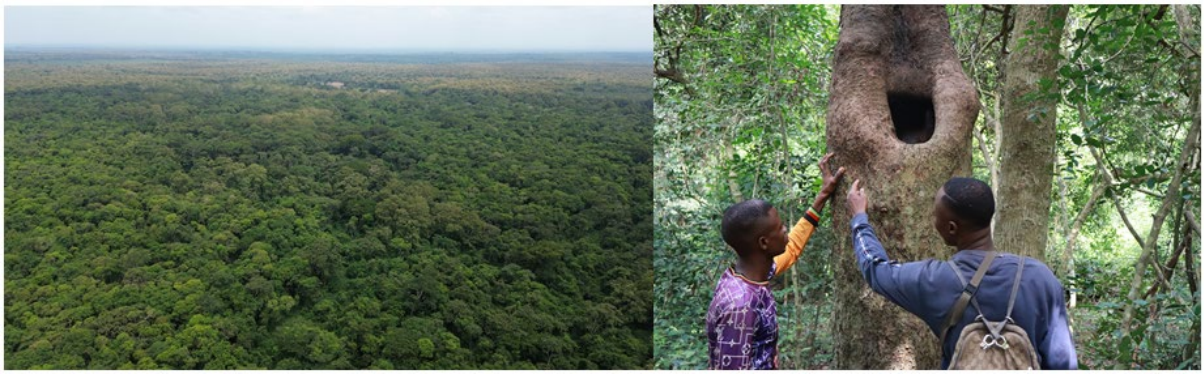
Installation of camera traps in the Lama Forest Reserve



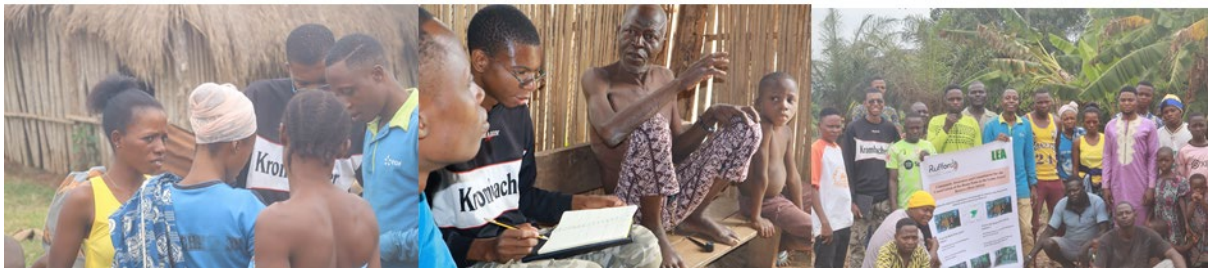
Left: Benin Potto (*Perodicticus potto spp juju*), the target species of this project. **Right:** White-bellied Pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*)



Left: Red-bellied monkey (*Cercopithecus erythrogaster erythrogaster*). **Right:** Genet (*Genetta genetta*).



Left: Aerial view of the Lama Forest Reserve **Right:** Characterisation of a *Dialium Guineense* during forest inventories



Left: Discussion with some women from the local community. **Centre:** Interview with an elder from the local community. **Right:** Awareness-raising session.

Evidence of hunting in the Lama Forest Reserve

ANNEX – Financial Report

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