

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Hounnouvi Fidele Ezechiel Koffi
Project Title	Saving vultures in Benin: Reducing habitat loss and the illegal slaughter of vultures with the involvement of the local community in north-east Benin.
Application ID	43413-1
Date of this Report	02/07/2025

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
Survey and identification of vultures nesting sites.				<p>This activity enabled the localization and mapping of key nesting sites within and around the protected areas. A total of three (3) vultures were sighted and seven (7) nests were identified during the survey.</p> <p>The data collected serve as a baseline for targeted protection efforts and future monitoring of vulture populations. However, we would like to point out that there are very few nesting sites and a low presence of vultures in the three targeted protected areas.</p>
Survey of local populations perception and use of vultures.				<p>We administered closed and open-ended questions to village residents around the three project sites. Twenty-six (26) villages in six (06) different municipalities (Kandi, Segbana, N'dali, Kalale, Gogounou and Sinende). Using semi-structured interviews, 200 individual interviews were carried out for this study in a first time and after we added 250 others individuals. In all, we questioned 450 people.</p> <p>People's perceptions and beliefs about vultures:</p> <p>Considering all respondents, approximately 30% of respondents (n = 135 assigned positive values to vultures, perceiving them as symbols of</p>

			<p>prosperity, peace, and good fortune. Conversely, 60% (n = 270) associated vultures with superstition, witchcraft, and disease, reflecting a predominantly negative perception. The remaining 10% (n = 45) expressed a neutral stance. Regarding beliefs about vultures, 398 respondents acknowledged their familiarity with these species. The most widespread beliefs were that vultures possess medicinal properties (100%, n = 398) and serve spiritual purposes (88%, n = 350), such as invoking rain or bringing good luck. Additionally, 51% (n = 204) believed that vultures circling above a property signified an impending misfortune.</p> <p>Causes of vultures decline by residents and conservation perspectives:</p> <p>Intentional poisoning using chemical pesticides and tobacco for belief-driven practices, commonly referred to as traditional medicine, was reported as the leading cause of vulture mortality (70%, n = 315). This was followed by unintentional poisoning (20%, n = 90) and habitat loss and degradation (10%, n = 45).</p> <p>This survey provided valuable insights into local beliefs, practices, and traditional uses related to vultures. The findings highlighted knowledge gaps and socio-cultural drivers of vulture persecution, which guided the design of awareness and</p>
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				engagement activities.
Implementation of conservation, awareness-raising and environmental education actions.				<p>A series of sensitization campaigns and environmental education sessions were conducted in schools and communities. These initiatives significantly improved public understanding of the ecological role of vultures and fostered local support for their protection.</p> <p>4 awareness-raising sessions in schools (3 awareness-raising sessions in the first phase and 1 in the second phase) and 350 children reached in total. A total of 10 villages were selected for the 10 planned awareness-raising-education sessions, where we reached around 450 local people (farmers, stockbreeders, teachers, association leaders). We distributed 50 posters and 200 T-shirts.</p>
Organization of workshops with project stakeholders to define and implement vulture conservation strategies.				<p>The participatory workshops brought together all relevant stakeholders, including local authorities, ecoguards, NGOs, and community representatives. The process led to the co-development and validation of a unified conservation action plan, ensuring ownership and long-term commitment.</p> <p>10 workshops were conducted with the aim of discussing and finding a consensus that integrates the interests of all stakeholders and brings all parties into agreement. 28 participants including forestry officers from the three protected areas, members</p>

				of local NGOs and members of the team attended these workshops.
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). Development of a strategic conservation action plan

The project successfully led to the co-creation of a comprehensive vulture conservation action plan, developed and validated through a participatory process involving all key stakeholder's government agents, local communities, NGOs, and conservation professionals. This plan provides a strategic framework and shared vision for vulture protection over the next ten years and serves as a valuable tool for guiding coordinated conservation efforts.

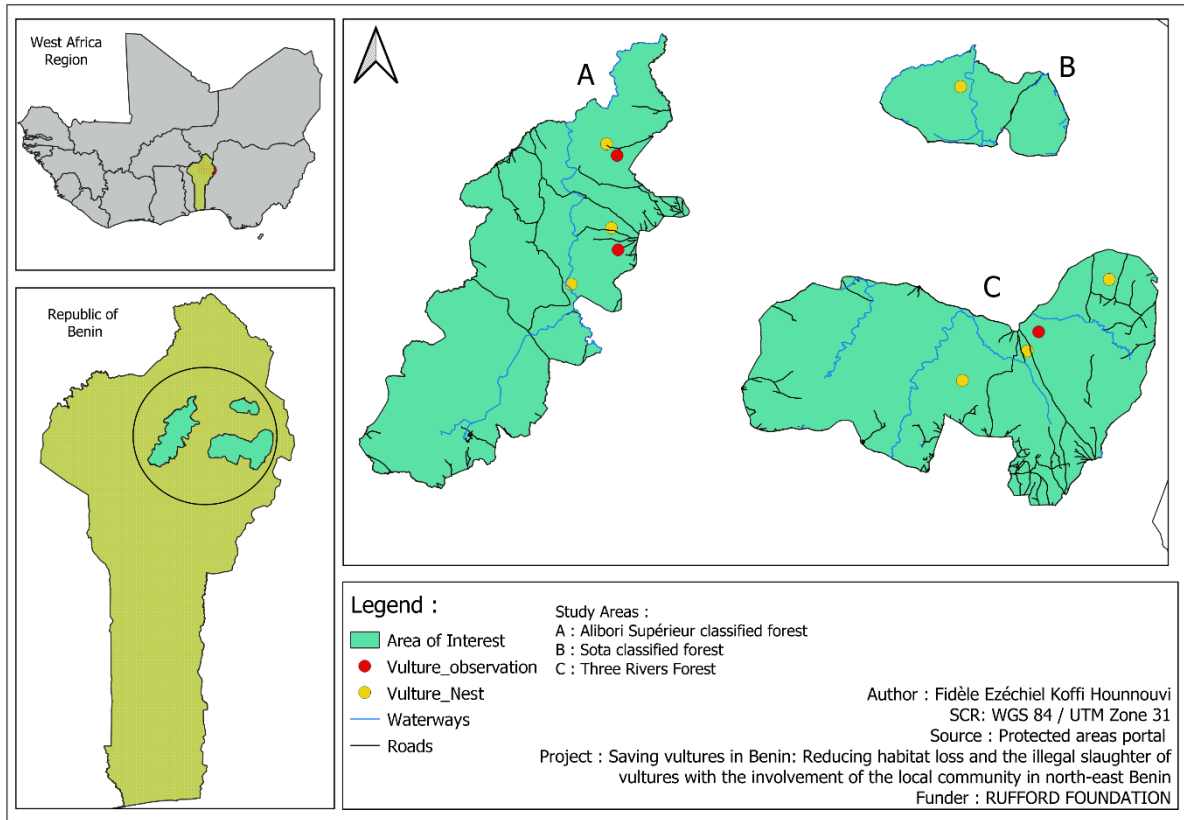
The Vulture Action Plan we developed builds directly on the framework of the West Africa Vulture Action Plan, aligning with its regional priorities while contextualizing the strategies for the specific realities of the Sota, Trois Rivières, and Upper Alibori Classified Forests. It addresses local drivers of vulture decline, such as belief-based practices, poisoning, and habitat disturbance, and proposes targeted conservation actions, community engagement strategies, and surveillance measures. To ensure ownership and wider implementation, the plan has been shared through workshops with forestry services, local NGOs, and community-based organizations, and distributed as a report to key national stakeholders involved in biodiversity conservation.

b). Shift in local perceptions and community engagement

One of the most significant outcomes was the transformation of local communities' negative perceptions of vultures. Through targeted awareness-raising and education activities, community members came to understand the ecological importance and vital role vultures play in the environment. As a result, informal community monitoring groups were spontaneously formed. These groups are now actively reporting sightings of nests and vultures, as well as alerting protected area authorities about any illegal activities involving the species.

c). Mapping of nesting and key presence sites

The project enabled the identification and mapping of several important vulture nesting and presence sites within the target region. This spatial information is crucial for prioritizing urgent protection actions and monitoring, and it lays the groundwork for more targeted conservation interventions in the future.



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

We did not encounter any major difficulties during the project. However, logistical challenges particularly accessing remote nesting sites during the rainy season caused delays in the fieldwork schedule. As a result, fieldwork extended approximately 2 months beyond the planned 7 months period, bringing the total to around 9 months. To address these delays, we adapted our schedule accordingly and worked with local guides who helped us navigate difficult terrain and ensure the successful completion of our surveys.

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

Community members contributed directly to field surveys by sharing traditional knowledge about vulture presence, nesting sites, and local practices. Representatives from farming, hunting, and bushmeat trading communities were consulted through interviews, focus groups, and awareness sessions, allowing their voices and perspectives to be reflected in the final conservation action plan.

Key benefits for local communities include:

- **Increased knowledge and awareness:** Many participants, including youth, elders, and local leaders, developed a new understanding of the ecological importance of vultures. This shift in perception helped reduce negative attitudes and increased local support for vulture protection.

- **Empowerment and engagement:** The project encouraged the creation of informal community watch groups committed to reporting illegal activities and vulture sightings to protected area authorities. This not only fosters local ownership but also strengthens the link between communities and conservation institutions.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

While we do not plan to directly continue project activities in the immediate future as our focus is shifting toward the conservation of other threatened species the foundations laid during this project will enable the autonomous continuation of vulture conservation efforts.

Key systems and partnerships have been established both within local communities and among protected area managers. The awareness raised, knowledge shared, and action plan developed have created a strong framework that local stakeholders can continue to implement and build upon.

To ensure ongoing momentum, we have proposed organizing an annual stakeholder meeting around International Vulture Awareness Day, where updates can be shared, challenges discussed, and joint action reinforced. This approach encourages long-term engagement while allowing us to broaden our conservation impact to other species and ecosystems.

As for our next steps, we plan to focus on primate conservation specifically the Geoffroy's Colobus (*Colobus vellerosus*) and the Red-bellied Monkey (*Cercopithecus erythrogaster*) in the swamp forests of southern Benin. This shift is both strategic and effective, as I have recently been assigned to work with a local primate conservation organization. Building on my previous experience working on bonobo conservation in the DRC, this direction allows for deeper specialization and stronger contributions to primate conservation efforts in highly threatened ecosystems.

Although our main conservation focus is shifting, we still plan to carry out awareness-raising sessions on vulture conservation during special occasions, particularly on International Vulture Awareness Day and during local environmental events.

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

To ensure wide dissemination of the project's findings and impact, we have adopted a multi-platform communication strategy:

A scientific article detailing the methodology, key results, and conservation implications of the project has been prepared and submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. We are pleased to report that the article has been accepted for publication, which will contribute to the global body of knowledge on vulture conservation in north-eastern Benin.

The project team has also shared outcomes with the general public through presentations held during International Vulture Awareness Day, helping to raise awareness and generate public interest in vulture conservation.

In addition, we plan to share the results on social media platforms, using visual content and accessible language to reach a broader audience, including local communities, conservation practitioners, and policy makers.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

Looking ahead, the most important next step is to ensure the effective implementation of the vulture conservation action plan developed during this project. This will require continuous engagement from local authorities, community groups, and protected area managers. Additionally, regular monitoring of nesting sites and threat levels should be encouraged to detect any new pressures on vulture populations.

While our team will now focus on other species and conservation priorities, we recommend maintaining annual stakeholder meetings during International Vulture Awareness Day to assess progress, share updates, and reinforce community involvement in vulture protection.

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?

Yes, The Rufford Foundation logo was used on all official project materials, including banners, reports, and educational tools. The Foundation received public acknowledgment during community awareness events, training sessions, and especially during International Vulture Awareness Day celebrations. We also acknowledged Rufford's financial support in the scientific article submitted for publication, and will continue to mention the Foundation in all future dissemination of results.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

- Fidèle E.K. Hounnouvi: Project Coordinator: Designed and oversaw the implementation of all project activities, stakeholder engagement, and scientific outputs.
- Djossou Elisée: Field Assistant: Participated in data collection, community interviews, and local awareness campaigns.
- Boko Wenceslas: Data Manager: Assisted with survey organization, data entry and analysis, and workshop logistics.
- BARIKISSOU Nadège: Translator and Community Liaison: Assisted in translating key messages into local languages during awareness sessions and community consultations, ensuring clear communication and cultural sensitivity.

10. Any other comments?

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to The Rufford Foundation for its invaluable support. This project has helped lay the groundwork for sustainable vulture conservation in north-east Benin by empowering local communities, building institutional knowledge, and producing a strategic action plan with long-term impact. We believe this work will serve as a model for community-based conservation efforts in the region.