

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	DONFACK FOUEGO Ruth Charline
Project Title	Assessment of the remaining population of Dwarf Elephants in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve, West Cameroon
Application ID	43720-1
Date of this Report	15th June 2025

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

Objective	Not achieve	Partially achieve	Fully achieve	Comments
<p>To evaluate the abundance and distribution of Dwarf Elephants in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve to document the remaining population size, density, and distribution patterns of Dwarf Elephants within the Reserve</p>				<p>The abundance and distribution of dwarf elephants were successfully evaluated using recce lines transects, and camera traps. Analysis of data from the Camera traps shows that there is no evidence of Dwarf Elephants in the Santchou Reserve. However, other threatened wildlife species have been found there for the first time. The Dwarf elephants are reported to have migrated to other areas, such as the Bakossi National Park. Monitoring is required in the Bakossi area to ascertain the existence of this rare species.</p>
<p>To characterise the habitat of Dwarf Elephants in the Santchou Reserve to understand the quality and suitability of the existing habitat for dwarf elephants.</p>				<p>GPS locations of all habitat types found in Santchou Reserve were successfully collected and analysed. Four vegetation types were classified, constituting the main habitat types. Also, our present observation in the field and interviews with locals reveal that all forest and savanna habitats have been reduced in size or altered through various forms of</p>

			<p>human activity, mostly farm and grazing areas. Some natural forest patches are being eliminated or negatively impacted, and such practices are particularly detrimental to reducing the range of threatened species found there. The main threats identified included illegal and unsustainable logging activity, uncontrolled bushfires for clearing grazing lands (by herders), poaching, overgrazing, and mostly farmland. All these are contributing to making the reserve unsuitable for dwarf elephants</p>
<p>Creating awareness on the conservation needs of the Santchou Wildlife Reserve, encouraging responsible behaviour and reducing human pressures negatively impacting the biodiversity of the area.</p>			<p>Education and awareness campaigns were organised in four of the seven surveyed communities through workshops, where about 150 people attended. Chiefdoms were strategically targeted as key locations for conducting these educational and awareness activities, highlighting the significance of conserving the Santchou Wildlife Reserve and emphasising the need to protect the threatened species found there during this study. To support these efforts, 50 laminated pictures, an A0-sized poster for presenting results, and 150 flyers were</p>

				printed and distributed to field assistants, group leaders, and other enthusiastic local residents to promote conservation initiatives.
--	--	--	--	---

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

a) For the first time, a systematic study has been conducted to confirm the presence of the Dwarf Elephant in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve. We used both recces transect lines and camera traps to achieve this result. 8 recces lines transects with a mean of 7.5 Km and equidistant at 1.5 Km, were designed to cover the entire Reserve. From November 2024 to April 2025, field work was conducted in the entire Santchou Wildlife Reserve, accounting for 66 working days (11 days/month x 6 months), and all the direct and indirect signs were collected. 15 camera traps were deployed 1.5 km apart. Camera traps were checked every two months and rotated to another position to cover the entire study site. During this study, no evidence of the presence of elephants was recorded, either directly or indirectly. This suggests that Elephants, once the emblematic species of the area, have deserted the site. During interviews, local communities revealed that these Elephants were intensively hunted in the past and have likely migrated to the Bakossi area. Additionally, this study reveals the presence of elusive species of global conservation concern in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve for the first time. These species include the white-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*) (EN), the Mona monkey (*Cercopithecus mona*) (NT), and the sitatunga (*Tragelaphus spekii*). These results highlight the urgent need to implement a conservation program in the area to protect these threatened species found there. Although the iconic species of the Reserve, the Dwarf Elephant is no longer occurs in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve, we should maintain it as a Protected Area, while just changing the conservation objective for the site.

b) Four vegetation types were classified: secondary forest, agri-plantation, grassland, and swampy area. Agri-plantation and patches of secondary forest were the most common. We found that unsustainable agriculture and grazing activities were the major threats in the area. Also, many forested areas have been converted into plantations since many villages are located inside the Reserve, and most local people depend on cocoa farming for their livelihood. Our discussions with local people revealed that this severe human encroachment is the main cause of the disappearance of elephants in the Reserve. However, considering the discovery of threatened species within the Reserve, we proposed to the government (through Reserve authorities) that the conservation objectives of this Reserve should be revised. We also

recommended the development and implementation of concrete conservation programs, along with sustainable livelihood activities, to enhance the protection of the site and foster a harmonious relationship between local communities and biodiversity conservation.

c) For the first time in the Santchou wildlife Reserve, and with the collaboration of the Santchou Wildlife Reserve authorities, we have developed an intensive conservation awareness and sensitisation program through workshops in four of the eight villages bordering the Reserve. These villages were selected based on their important populations and their location (inside the reserve). About 150 peoples (in overall villages and mostly forest users) attended to the different workshops organised. They were sensitised on the importance of protecting this unique Protected Area in the Western Region of Cameroon focussing on results from this work. At the end of the workshop, most of the participants (at least 65 %) were really happy to know that the reserve still harbours some species of global conservation concern and are willing to eager participate to the protection of this vulnerable ecosystem. In addition, we have also developed a great relationship with the Santchou Wildlife Reserve authorities, and our results will provide valuable support for their patrols, with a particular emphasis on threatened species found during this study, which were previously unknown to occur in the area. Furthermore, in May 2025, during the Coordination meeting with the representative of the Ministry in charge of Forest and Wildlife in Cameroon, the Conservator of the Santchou Wildlife Reserve presented a part of results from this study including the documentation of threatened species recorded in the site for the first time. This was to raise the attention of the government regarding the conservation importance of this site so that effective measures should be taken for its protection.

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

1- We were supposed to start this work in May 2024, but since many parts of the Reserve were flooded, we had a delay, starting the field activities in November 2024.

2- Since this work was the first systematic monitoring work in the area, most communities were reluctant to collaborate, pretending that since they are located inside the reserve, it is a way for the government to measure their land to evict them. But with the collaboration of the Reserve authorities, we explain to them the goal and the outcome of this project. Finally, they understood and were willing to collaborate.

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

Each of the surveyed communities provided two locals who were recruited as porters, and in consensus with local chiefs, three people with very good mastery of the forest were employed as field guides/assistants to assist in fieldwork activities. Also, they received financial support (per diem) and acquired significant experience in field data collection, and even basic navigation skills, which will be very useful for further participation in conservation activities in the area. In addition, they participated in workshops. Furthermore, the recruited assistants were very active in helping us to collect scientific data and to educate local people using local and local languages.

Recognising the influence of traditional institutions on the effectiveness of grassroots conservation education, we closely worked with traditional authorities, community members, and focus groups in organising and implementing conservation awareness meetings. The indicator of this successful collaboration was that no cameras deployed in the field were stolen.

As benefits, local communities gained the following:

- Income from serving as field guides during recce transects and camera trap surveys.
- Knowledge of using tools such as camera traps, compass and GPS, which could be useful for them in the future if they are to apply for a field guide position for any future research project in the area.
- Knowledge of laws protecting wildlife.
- Knowledge of how to maintain a sustainable agriculture system.
- Proposals for alternative income-generating opportunities that could improve their living conditions.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, there are plans to continue this work, which is very essential for the conservation of this unique Protected Area in the Western region of Cameroon. Considering the intensity of threats to the habitat and taking into consideration the fact that there are still some endangered wildlife species in the reserve (despite the disappearance of dwarf elephants), it is important to continue with the long-term monitoring of wildlife in the reserve using camera traps. An intensive camera trap survey should then be done in the entire Santchou Wildlife Reserve for at least one year to have insight into the remaining wildlife biodiversity in the area. Moreover, at a moment when it is critical to involve local communities in every action that concerns conservation actions, we are planning to:

- 1)-assess local perceptions and attitudes, which will be helpful to propose a better conservation plan for the area,
- 2) - increase further awareness campaigns in the area, and
- 3) - develop a reforestation program to regenerate and increase the forest cover in the site, which could maintain a certain level of species richness. This will help to create a friendly equilibrium between the local communities and the biodiversity in the area.

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

- In collaboration with the Authorities of the Santchou Wildlife Reserve, we are preparing a technical document, which will be presented to the Ministry in charge of Forestry and Wildlife in Cameroon and other conservation stakeholders to attract conservation actions in the reserve.
- A peer-reviewed paper on a new record of threatened species found in Santchou Wildlife Reserve will be prepared and submitted for publication.
- The results of the study will be published on social media platforms and the website of the host organisation.

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

- Extend our education programme to all communities in and around the reserve in order to increase awareness of the plight of biodiversity in the area and engage the local population in the conservation of the reserve.
- Conduct an in-depth study of the ecology of threatened species identified during this study.
- Collaborate with local communities and identify sustainable mitigation measures to land use change in the area, and propose sustainable alternative livelihood activities that will benefit them.

8. Did you use the Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced about this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during your work?

The Rufford Foundation logo has been used in all promotional materials (posters during the workshop, and laminated pictures). In addition, the Rufford Foundation will also be acknowledged in all communications (talks, posters, technical reports, and research papers) during any scientific event.

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

- 1- **Donfack Fouego Ruth Charline:** Principal investigator. Led the team in the planning, implementation, supervision, and reporting of the project.
- 2- **Neba Bedes:** Project Assistant, she assisted in project planning and training activities.
- 3- **Teba Appolinaire:** Field Assistant, assisted in awareness raising and field surveys.
- 4- **Tio Jean Raymond:** Field Assistant, assisted in awareness raising and field surveys
- 5- **Merveille Ndete:** Eco-guard, assisted during field work, awareness raising, and field surveys.

10. Any other comments?

We are really grateful to the Rufford Foundation for the generous funding provided to support this project. We are truly thankful for your belief in our work and the impact it would have. The funding received has enabled us to ascertain the situation of Dwarf Elephants in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve and pave the way for further conservation actions in the area, with the discovery of threatened species still existing in the area. We are sure that with your continuous support, our activities on the ground will provide long-term solutions for the protection of this vulnerable ecosystem. In addition, this project strengthens our relationship with local communities, traditional/administrative authorities, and field guides, essential for further conservation activities in the area. Sincerely, thanks for your support.

**ANNEX – Financial Report
[Intentionally removed]**



Fig. 1 a & b: Team during meetings with local chiefs in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve area



Fig.2: Project team and community members during village to village awareness meetings



Fig. 3 a & b: Project team members mounting camera traps in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve



Fig.4 a & b: Pangolin images captured by camera traps in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve



Fig.5 a & b: Images of Mona monkey (*Cercopithecus mona*) captured by camera traps in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve



Fig.6 a & b: Images of sitatunga (*Tragelaphus spekii*) captured by camera traps in the Santchou Wildlife Reserve