

Project Update: July 2010

From June to August 2010, the project team organised capacity building program/workshop on participatory survey, monitoring and reporting for recruited survey corps as well as park rangers on elephant survey procedure. This was premised on the fact that sustainable conservation and management of wildlife species will depend on strengthening the capacity of the local individuals, communities and public to understand and implement conservation initiatives. Emphasis was placed on the need to use standardised methods so that survey results can be used to monitor change over time, whether changes are positive as a result of management interventions or negative as a result of unrestrained anthropogenic/ecological factors.

Participants were informed on the need for participatory survey of large mammals; why endangered species must be protected; that solutions are often beyond the technical realm; that people are part of the solution too; that we must work together; that local people must indeed take the lead in site conservation and; that partnership is the way forward.

The training focuses on two methods of elephant census/techniques: The Line Transect Survey Method (Barnes and Jensen, 1987) and the Shortcut or Reconnaissance (“recce”) Method (Barnes, 1988). Outlines of procedure in each method were thoroughly discussed and analysed.

The proper methods for making observation and recording data were covered. Participants were taught on the use of simple instruments employed in data collection. These include maps, compasses, GPS, meter tape and hip chain. Special emphasis was placed on distance measurements and elephant dung categorisation. We used power point presentations and hands-on demonstration to deliver training.

A first rigorous, participatory and systematic survey of the Kamuku elephant was conducted by the project team and survey corps from 2nd – 5th August 2010. Surveys were carried out at the two main ranges of the Park-Doka and Dagara. We relied on the knowledge of locals for selection of transect lines. There were two aspects to the data collection: one was the finding and recording of dung piles along the transect; the other was the categorisation of dung piles decay state.

Vegetation type and general habitat observations of survey sites were also noted. Because dung encountered was very low, given the unstable nature of the Kamuku elephants (the elephants migrate at a very high rate, and the pattern of migration is still poorly known), we could not commence decay rate study as only old dung piles (D – E) were found.

Achievements:

§ Strengthening the capacity of the locals and park rangers on systematic elephant survey, monitoring and reporting for conservation objectives.

§ Stimulating environmental sensitivity including conservation education and joint action towards the protection of the Kamuku elephants.

§ Conducting a first round of participatory and systematic survey of the Kamuku elephant and.

§ Quite significantly, the community-based elephant conservation/monitoring committees apart from helping to sensitize and educate members of their community on the need for the protection of elephants in their provinces have also continued to provide useful information on possible migration routes of the Kamuku elephants. These routes are presently being monitored as they need to be protected in line with the Bonn Convention to which Nigeria is a signatory.