

Project Update: September 2010

In two Igbo communities in Nigeria, monkeys (specifically Sclater's monkey *Cercopithecus sclateri*, a globally threatened species) are considered sacred and thus informally protected by associated taboos. The indigenous beliefs that confer protection on the monkeys are eroding due to the influence of outside (western) religions and cultures. Nonetheless, indigenous beliefs have endured among individuals to varying degrees, and the monkeys have persisted, despite their crop raiding. In June-August 2010, I used oral-history methods to



record and preserve the stories of local people regarding the origin of the monkeys' sacredness and their role in daily and spiritual life, as well as local understandings of perceived and real changes in the community due to religious change over time. I also conducted a census of each monkey population and compared these estimates to previous census data; both populations had increased. Habitat mapping throughout one community uncovered several previously undocumented monkey groups along the periphery of the community.