Update report june 2025

This year in Cameroon the dry season extended until April unlike previous years when the rains started again from March (these climatic disturbances delayed the collection of data for the rainy season). The rainy season data collection session took place from May 2 to June 2025 during which we not only repeated the survey in some sites previously surveyed in the dry season but also extended the survey in the mountain forest galleries to try to understand up to what altitude the francolin reaches. The probability of occurrence was significantly lower at high altitudes (above 2000m) compared to mid altitudes (from1000 to 2000m). Francolins were more abundant in forest habitat (see photo 1) during the rainy season, in contrast to the dry season when they predominated in forest/savannah transition zones. The Mount Cameroon francolin has still not been found in habitats where there is no Prunus africana nor in plantations. This reinforces the fact that it is dependent on Prunus africana (as observed previously) and is sensitive to human disturbance and habitat change. The expansion of plantations into the buffer zones of Mount Cameroon National Park (MCNP) is worrying because studies showed that immediate environmental changes near the outside of protected areas (PAs) appear to be as important as those inside in determining the ecological fate of a PA given their role in maintaining the PA's balance.

Photo1: **Suitable Habitat of the Mount Cameroon Francolin (Montane Forest)**

The habitat in the image is the habitat where we detected the most Francolins. It is the mountain forest undisturbed by humans, home to populations of forest elephants whose activities cause changes in the vegetation structure. The francolins seem to take refuge in these elephant bushes (rarely frequented by hunters because they are afraid of elephants), especially if they are dotted with mature Prunus africana trees producing seeds that francolins consume. Although researchers who have worked in Mount Cameroon claim that elephant disturbances would prevent the ground-nesting Mount Cameroon francolin from nesting, this remains to be proven, because the breeding ecology of the species is not yet studied. Its nests and eggs remain

undescribed as well as nesting microhabitats. Knowledge on the breeding ecology of the Mount Cameroon is essential in designing appropriate conservation and monitoring measures. It is what we plan to do in the future.

In addition to the activities we have also carried out, we have trained local people on the identification and monitoring of francolins and other bird species and meet with park authorities to discuss conservation strategies for the species.