African Wildlife Foundation comes in rescue of the last elephant's population of West African savanna: A year summary of elephant conservation actions in Benin Protected Areas


Continued threats against elephants and their habitats in the landscape call for periodic assessment of the population status and implementation of appropriate strategies to counter those threats. With the financial support from the Species Protection Grant of the African Wildlife Foundation the Laboratory of Applied Ecology has implemented some activities for the sustainable elephant conservation in Benin Parks.

1- Rangers Training on anti-poaching strategies

From the 15-16 March 2016 all rangers of the W Biosphere Reserve have undergone extensive tactical training. Such actions resulted in the enhancement of field strategy and operating control. A total of 25 participants (details on the participant name is provided in appendix I) attended the workshop including the manager of the ecological monitoring of the reserve (Photo 1a.). The training was given in two parts, the first days lectures were given in classroom and the following days some practical exercises on the field. The lecture in classroom covered a series of training on camera traps using, and ecological monitoring, conservation principles, field data collection, GPS and camera use, advanced anti-poaching techniques. During the field work for practical aspects of the training the participants learned some new functions in GPS, how to install the camera trap on field and how to record data on MIKE form while on patrol (Photo 1c.).
2—Establish rapid response units in Benin Protected Areas

One of the activities of this project is to form a team of rangers that could respond quickly and efficiently to poaching incidents across the Benin Protected Areas landscape. Regarding this we established a first team of rapid response unit in of 6 members and provided to them four motorbikes (Photo 2.) for rapid intervention in the difficult areas. Also an amount was donated for fuel
purchasing in the motorbikes during the operations of the rapid response unit. The Unit responsibilities include: anti-poaching patrols, poacher arrests, updating poaching reports, rapid-response and resolution of human-elephant conflict, collecting intelligence and communicating with communities. Although still in its early stages, this unit is already making a difference: raising awareness of the issue, stopping elephant poachers, and doing the science necessary to provide even greater protection for African elephants. The highly mobile unit will have the ability to survey areas known, or suspected to be, points of high human-elephant conflict. In addition to their anti-poaching efforts, the unit was mandated to work with local farmers to develop safer methods for chasing elephants away from crops. With the collaboration of the informer network some intelligence information gathered helps the rapid unit to arrest one poacher with elephant defenses. The security officer’s investigation is ongoing to find more members of this trading network.

Photo 2. Ceremony of motorbikes donation in Pendjari to the establish rapid unit
3- Supply basic equipment for patrolling

After checking from the needs expressed by the rangers themselves, we provided some equipment for surveillance. This equipment included 20 tents, 2 cameras, 20 water bottles; 2 powerful torches (Photo 5). The tents will help for camping in the bush and especially during the rainy season as well as the water bottles which will help to walk in a very wet and flooded area. The cameras are provided to take some field pictures for reporting purpose and torches for the night patrolling.

Photo 3. Ceremony of equipment (tents, cameras, water bottles, powerful torches) offering in W Park
4-Education in village surrounding elephant range

The project team conducts an intensive outreach program consisting of lectures and public discussions on elephant conservation. We also conduct educational seminars, meetings and workshops in the villages within the range of elephant in Benin (Photo 4). We work with local elders in each village and the local leaders to facilitate the availability of meeting venues and also to bring people together. We on many occasions use local language to communicate with locals as this makes it easier to follow and understand the discussions. We also use graphics, drawings and other materials such as pictures or photographs to illustrate conservation issues of elephant.

Photo 4. Educational seminars conducted in Pendjari Biosphere Reserve