

## ERuDeF/ Cross River Gorilla Conservation Project

### The Status of the Cross River Gorilla in the Lebialem-Mone Forest Landscape (including Bechati-Mone Forest Corridor)

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The Cross River gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*) is the most threatened primate in Africa. The IUCN classifies the Cross River gorilla as “Critically Endangered” (CR A2c; C2a(i)) and it is considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. The rapid exploratory gorilla survey conducted in 2007 by ERuDeF mapped out potential gorilla habitats in the Bechati-Mone Forest Corridor. One of the potential sites identified was the Bokwa-Ashukem Hills. The survey conducted in the Bokwa-Ashukem Hills



aimed at understanding the status, relative abundance, encounter rates and habitat utilization of this species in this section of the Bechati-Mone Forest Corridor. The objectives of the education component were to educate, create awareness and sensitize the local communities, to survey indigenous knowledge and attitudes of the local people and to conduct media programmes to create more conservation awareness.

Lebialem-Mone Forest Landscape, SW Cameroon

The survey methods used were line transects and reconnaissance methods. A total of eight quadrants were surveyed in the study area (T14, T10, T06, T13, T32, T12, T04, and T07). Important geographical formations, such as streams, were recorded along the transect line. GPS points for the start and end points of each transect line were recorded.

The education activities used community meetings, questionnaires, discussions with individuals, posters and wildlife manuals and various media (radio, print and television).

Forty four ape nests were recorded along most of the transect lines of which three were gorilla nests. Five chimpanzee calls were heard and several ape trails found. Other mammal signs recorded included feeding signs of the Red River hog, tracks of the Bay duiker and the leopard. There were 8 human signs and low human pressure. The mean encounter rate for chimpanzee and Cross River gorilla was recorded as 2.3 signs km<sup>-1</sup> and 0.2 signs km<sup>-1</sup> respectively.

The analysis of indigenous knowledge and attitudes showed that gorillas are not seen as totems. 61.5% of hunters hunt between 2 to 3 times a week. Many respondents last saw gorillas two years ago and chimpanzees 6 months ago. Twenty community meetings were organized with registered attendance of 480 persons. 90% of the said population was made of farmers and the remaining 10% made of hunters and trappers. Major factors contributing to the disappearance of forest and apes included extensive agricultural activities, poverty and suppressed local economy. Fifteen communities were educated on wildlife laws. Nine gorilla skulls were recovered. Media, including TV, Print and Radio, were employed to convey these activities to the various stakeholders.

Based on the available evidence of the intensity of habitat fragmentation and encroachment, it is recommended that the local populations receive further environmental education on forestry and wildlife laws and that demarcation of the farm-forest boundary is considered as soon as possible. In addition, alternative means of survival need to be considered, discussed and carried out if the last remaining small gorilla population and its habitat is to be saved.



Gorillas in the Bechati-Mone Forest Corridor