

Voice of Nature **VON** Magazine

Speaking for Nature & the Voiceless

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GREAT APES CONSERVATION: WHEN KIDS GET INVOLVED



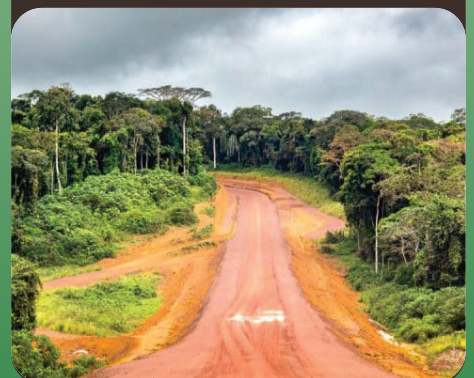
**UB, Reversing
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**New Amphibians
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Restoring Our Only Home, a Collective Responsibility

We, humans, are known to be the greatest ecological offenders of all times after natural catastrophes. The food, health, water, and climate crisis and our ever-increasing angst can be traced, at least in part, to our relation to the environment.

Planet earth remains our only home. It provides us with sun, food, water, air, soil, forests and all necessary for our very existence and survival. We enjoy its beautiful mountains, lakes, rivers, deserts, and use its resources to construct the buildings and infrastructure that give us comfort. Yet we have weakened ourselves with ecological malpractices that have caused devastating landslides, droughts, floods, diseases, climate change, poor crop yields and famine amongst others.

When world leaders and countries the world over, meet and sign conventions, treaties and agreements to protect planet earth and the resources therein, as well as fight against crisis induced by our ecological malpractices, it gives the assurance that our leaders are conscious of the solutions to global challenges. But when the same signatories turn to take or better still approve actions that deplete the same earth and resources they committed to protect, it casts doubts on the future sustainability of “our only home”, planet earth.

On July 20, 2020, for example, President Paul Biya of Cameroon signed to the agreement on the conservation of gorillas and their habitats. On July 22, 2020, barely

two days after, a Prime Ministerial Decree was issued approving the logging of some 68,385 hectares of the Ebo Forest, a 2,000 km² proposed national park in the Littoral Region of Cameroon, home to gorillas and other endangered species. Though the Government later revoked this degree following petitions and widespread online condemnations, there is apparently a road construction project around the corner that will see part of this carbon sink and biodiversity hotspot destroyed. On July 22, 2022, eight Cameroon-based conservation organizations addressed a letter to the Delegation of the EU to Cameroon, British High Commission, German, French, and U.S. Embassy, requesting their urgent intervention to halt the construction project.

The Government, like every individual may have several arguments to advance but it is again a truism that rapid industrialization, pollution, deforestation unchecked consumption of natural resources do not only endanger nature but our existence too!

Just like the theme of the 2022 World Environment Day; ‘Only One Earth’, which highlights the need to live sustainably in harmony with nature, it is time to make peace with nature before it completely takes away our peace than it has already done. It is time to shift from harming nature to healing it; it is time to build a greener, safer and more sustainable planet for all to thrive. From the presidency to the slums, now is the time for every individual,



communities, companies and organizations to save the Earth; to control environmental pollution and global warming by saving water, trees, biodiversity species, and other natural resources for the future generations and ourselves. Like Helen Caldicott said: “we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children”!

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Cameroon's Pangolins, Primates Going.....



Cameroon is host to three species of pangolins (white-bellied, black-bellied and giant pangolins) and two species of chimpanzees (central and the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzees), which are classified as endangered or vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. Despite this, the country's wildlife sanctuary, national parks and other biodiversity hotspots are increasingly being emptied of pangolins, great apes and other wildlife species as wildlife trafficking continues unabated.

Case of Pangolins

A report on the operations of the Last Great Ape Organization (LAGA) in East, Littoral, West and South regions of Cameroon indicates that over 700 kg of pangolin scales were

seized from wildlife traffickers between January and June 2022. 242kg of the pangolin scales were seized, February 2022, in the East Region from a trafficker, with more pangolins and monkey carcasses found in a refrigerator at his residence. Some 476kg of pangolin scales were also seized from traffickers in the Centre Region of Cameroon in April 2022. These traffickers were arrested.

Case of Primates and other species

The operations of LAGA according to its 2022 First Semester Report, also led to the seizure of two baby chimpanzees, March 2022, in the Centre Region of Cameroon from a traditional authority, who had iron cages to detain and imprison

wild animals including the baby chimps. The traditional authority is said to have been arrested.

In the South Region of Cameroon, the Report indicates that 5 elephant tusks, chimpanzee meat and parts of several other wildlife species were seized in Sangmelima from 6 traffickers, who were also arrested. Leopard skins and a civet skin were also seized from a trafficker closed to the West Region of Cameroon. The trafficker was arrested.

Pangolins, chimpanzees, and elephants are Category "A" animals under the 1994 Cameroon Forestry Law. The maximum penalties for killing any of these protected species according to the Law are 3 years of imprisonment and/ or FCFA 10 Million.

UB, Reversing Climate Change



(MINFOF-SW) planted different tree species on its campus. This was done as part of commemorative activities to mark the 2022 edition of the World Environment Day celebrated under the theme: “Only One Earth”.

The tree planting exercise was carried out under the auspices of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Buea, Professor Ngomo Horace Manga, with the full participation of the regional delegates and staff of both MINFOF-SW and MINEPD-ED-SW, and staff and students of the different faculties of the University of Buea.

“The trees will help in regulating the climatic condition and high temperature in Buea. It will absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and improve on the quality of air, reduce soil erosion, increase volume of streams and prevent the risk of landslides,” Professor Horace Manga said, shortly after taking the lead in planting some trees.

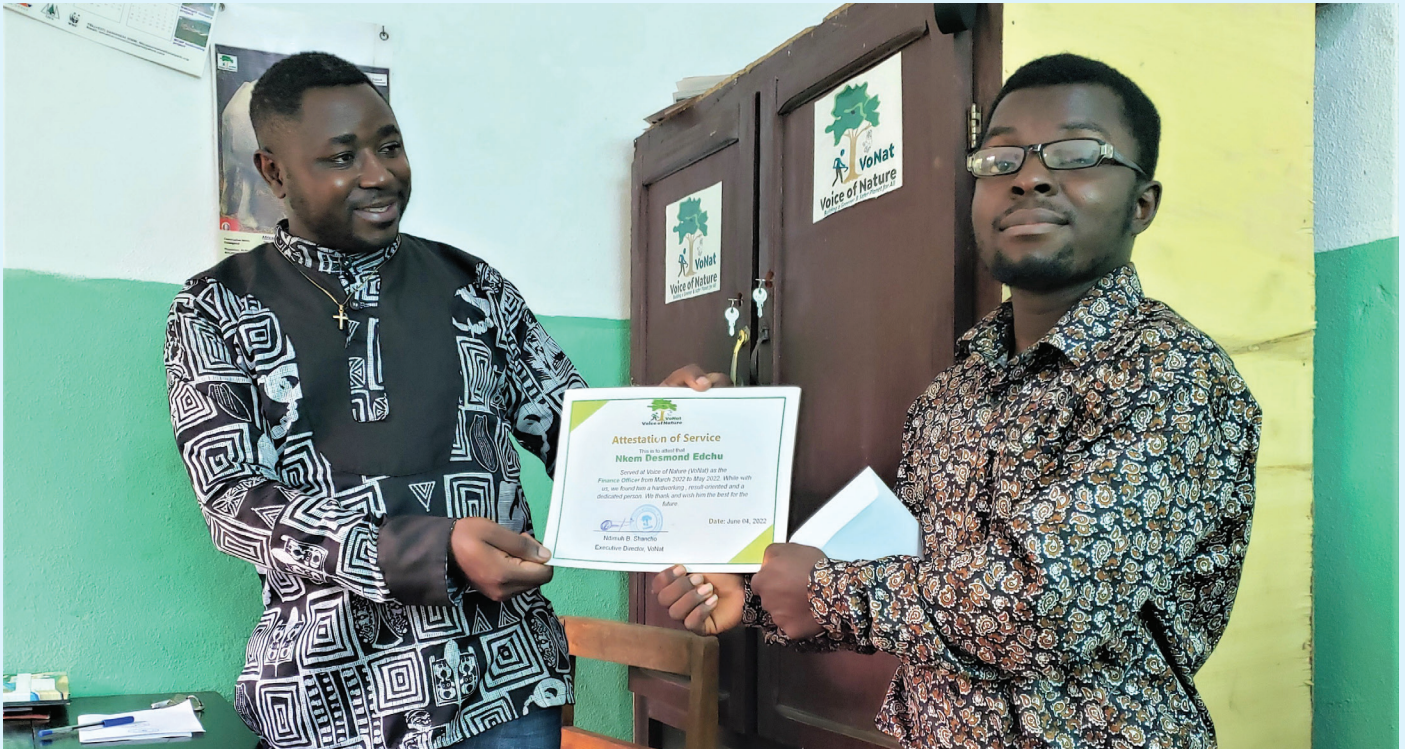
UB plans to plant more trees at its Campus B (Faculty of Health Sciences) in Bomaka in August 2022, as part of the University’s strive to contribute in the fight against the climate change crisis, affecting the world today.

Universities around the world are increasingly recognizing their responsibility to actively contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to climate change, with the University of Buea in Cameroon not left out. Since its creation in 1993, the institution of higher learning, commonly known as UB, has played a vital role in grooming environmentalists, conservationists, environmental auditors, community organizers, corporate managers, and others. These persons are engaged in climate change mitigation and adaptation actions at both the national and international scenes.

Apart from educating and grooming current and future climate action leaders, UB has been directly engaged in climate change mitigation efforts through tree planting, and is arguably the greenest university in Cameroon.

One of UB’s latest actions to fight against climate change took place June 9, 2022. The University, in collaboration with the Southwest Regional Delegate of the Ministry of Environment, Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED-SW) and the South West Regional Delegation of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife

VoNat's Volunteering & Youth Mentorship Programme



The VoNat Volunteering and Youth Mentorship Programme is dedicated to grooming young university graduates from Cameroon and beyond into refined professionals and providing them with the experience and skills much-needed in the job market. It also serves as a platform for devoted and passionate individuals across the globe to use their skills, knowledge, experience and resources to contribute to building a healthy and safer planet for current and future generations, as well as put smiles on the faces of vulnerable children and women in forest communities in Cameroon.

To be part of the VoNat Volunteering & Youth Mentorship Programme, please submit an application including a letter of motivation, Curriculum Vitae, and a general statement on your area of interest, start and end date of volunteering, and what you expect to gain at the end of your stay. The application should be sent to: info.voiceofnature@gmail.com

“Most Remarkable Volunteering in My Career”

Taking some over 50 kids from the Nkwen and Bamenda through an experiential session on climate change education, outreach and climate change information gathering, tree planting in public spaces and radio sensitization within the first two months gave me the most remarkable volunteering experience in my life. It was so enriching and professionally rewarding that, I applied and got an extension for 6 months when my volunteering period ended in September 2021. Beside the field experience, the continuous professional mentorship and skills-based trainings organized intermittently by the organization deepened my understanding in grant writing and resource mobilization, business communication, effective planning & reporting, project management and public speaking amongst others. I am very elated to say that the 8 months spent under VoNat Volunteering and Youth Mentorship Programme have been very remarkable in my life and my career; a major milestone in my career development agenda.

KIYAM Lamech, postgraduate student in the Pan African Institute for Development (PAID-Buea).

New Amphibians Conservation



More conservation and careful stewardship is needed to halt the depletion of some nine endangered amphibians species including world's largest frog species, the Goliath Frog (*Conraua goliath*) in the Mount Nlonako Area and to protect the ecosystems from further degradation.

Despite their invaluable role in stabilizing the ecosystem and fighting against diseases, these globally endangered amphibians most especially goliath Frog risk extinction due to wanton hunting for food & pet trade, and habitat destruction. Report shows that up to 19,440 of goliath frog are harvested every peak season, and sold between FCFA 5000 (\$10) and FCFA 30000 (\$60). Community kids and young adults hold the key to reversing this narrative. They are the future hunters and trappers of these species, and remain the only ones who can successfully talk their parents

and friends out of the depletion of these species.

Amphibians Conservation Education



Cognizant of the threats amphibians in the Mount Nlonako Area are exposed to, the British Ecological Society and Voice for Nature Foundation partnered with Voice of Nature (VoNat) in February 2022 to raise 50 young amphibians conservation stewards in the Mount Nlonako Area. With the consent and involvement of some key community leaders, VoNat and partners took the youngsters from some seven communities in the Mount Nlonako Area through experi-

ential learning sessions on the different amphibians species, their conservation importance, threats, and the role they can play to conserve the species.

Ecological Studies in Mangamba



The learning and amphibians conservation immersion sessions also took the kids and young adults, to some amphibians hotspots to understand the different feeding signs, tracks, vocalization and other signs of amphibians and the different threats they are faced with. This was accompanied by some traditional tales about the goliath frog and amphibi-

Stewards in Mt. Nlonako Area

ans in the Mount Nlonako Area. The experiential learning sessions boosted the appetites of youngsters, hitherto mostly glued to their TV and phones screens, in amphibians conservation. The kids pledged to be amphibians conservation stewards in their communities. “We learned a lot about the goliath frog and other amphibians species today. I will educate my friends and parents to stop killing these species and polluting their habitats,” Kwah Beltine, from Nkongnine village promised.

Nembo Evarestus from the Mangamba community, who has been involved in goliath frog hunting, said “we never knew there was anything wrong hunting goliath frogs until today. I will educate my friends about this and also caution them against polluting this river where the frogs are found”.

Actions Against Amphibians Depletion



On 20th May 2022, World Wildlife Day, which coincided with Cameroon’s National Day celebrations, the 50 new amphibians conservation stewards translated their zeal into concrete actions for endangered amphibians conservation. They marched past in front of over



1000 children, young adults and parents from communities within the Mount Nlonako area with posters of some endangered amphibians species they want protected. They also brandished drawings and presented poems, songs, articles and debates with unique conservation messages.

Radio Sensitization



This culminated in a special sensitization programme on the Nlonako FM radio station using pro-amphibians conservation poems, songs, articles and debates. Habitat pollution and destruction, trapping and hunting, and other activities that further jeopardise the existence of endangered amphibians, especially the world’s largest frog, goliath frog, are some of the poor environmental practices the young amphibians stewards advocate strongly that their communities stop.

The conservation messages have been well received by community members and their local leaders. “Conserving the frogs is a good initiative. The destruction of one species has a huge impact on the ecosystem. It is thus, necessary for everyone to be involved in endangered frogs conservation,” traditional ruler of Mangamba, Chief Roland Essengue Mbonda said. An elite and resident of the Mount Nlonako Area, Mr. Nkede Henry, is particularly impressed with the strategy of educating children and engaging them in conservation efforts. “Involving kids in the conservation of amphibians is a unique way to fight against the extinction of these species. They will take the conservation message to their parents who are hunters. I think there is hope,” he added.

With more and more amphibians conservation consciousness being generated within communities in the Mount Nlonako area, there is an urgent need to assess and provide alternative sustainability schemes to hunters of goliath frog and farmers destroying amphibians habitat. This will serve as a practical mechanism to convert the attention of community members from the destruction of endangered amphibians species and their habitats.

Great Apes Conservation: V



Kids and young adults hold the key to the future conservation of great apes and other endangered species around the world. They will be the ones to make decisions and enact laws in the future regarding the conservation of natural resources but most of them are today more exposed to television and smart phones than nature and endangered species. This is further compounded by the fact that they are often left out of most conservation efforts and actions, casting doubts on the future sustainability of great apes and other species. With support from New England Biolabs Foundation, a Cameroon-based biodiversity conservation and sustainable development non-profit organization, Voice of Nature (VoNat), has set out to change this narrative.

Through the creative use of media & arts, special conservation education sessions, traditional knowledge & belief systems, and wildlife tracking/biomonitoring, VoNat engaged over 50 community kids and young adults within the Mount Cameroon Area in the conservation of great apes and other endangered species. The youngsters from Bokova, Bova, Bonakanda, Bwitingi and Bwiteva communities in the Mount Cameroon area are already educating their peers and advocating for species conservation within their communities after going through a 7-month experiential learning session on conserving the endangered

ape of Mount Cameroon.

Great Apes Conservation Education

Boosting the interest of community kids and young adults in great apes and other wildlife species conservation is important as attitudes about the earth's natural resources begin at an early age. In the project; "Conserving Endangered Ape of Mount Cameroon with Community Kids", VoNat used charts, power point presentations, great ape photos and videos to instill in over 50 kids and young adults in the Mount Cameroon Area a fresh zeal to get engaged in conserving the great ape of the Mount Cameroon National Park and other endangered biodiversity species. "I am going to sensitize my parents, friends and all those going to the bush to hunt endangered species so that the species don't go into extinction," Mary Namondo from Bokova village, like many other kids, pledged to be conservation ambassadors in her community and schools, shortly after the conservation education sessions. The conservation education sessions



changed the mindset of many kids about hunting. "In our village, when they hear that you are going to the forest to hunt, they will be proud of you that you are a great man. I did not know that it was a bad practice or something that can affect us in the future given that they play a vital role in sustaining the ecosystem," Pieres Nakah from Bwitingi village said. These youngsters will grow up as proactive adults concerned about wildlife species and their welfare.

Wildlife Tracking & Biomonitoring



If kids do not feel connected to nature and species, they will not have a desire to protect it. The increasing exposure of kids and young adults to TV, computer, phone or tablet has induced "nature deficit disorder," requiring a quick fix. Immersing kids in nature and reconnecting them with wildlife species remains the ultimate option. Cognisance of

When Children Get Involved

this, In March 2022, VoNat engaged over 40 kids (7 to 18) years from communities in the Mount Cameroon Area in tracking and monitoring wildlife species within the Mount Cameroon National Park. Under the guidance of the Head of the Research and Biomonitoring Unit of the Mount Cameroon National Park Service, Mr. Esoka Thomas Ngalame, and the technical team of VoNat, the children from Bokova, Bova, Bonakanda, Bwitingi etc. for over 8 hours moved quietly through this protected area; identifying and recording vital data about wildlife species and conservation threats. These included but not limited to feeding signs, direct observation, vocalization, gun shells, deforestation, bush burning, animal tracks, dung, foot prints etc. Though living adjacent to the Mount Cameroon National Park, it was the first time for over 90% of the kids to visit this biodiversity hot spot and to be engaged in wildlife tracking and biomonitoring. "I have seen some species of animals today for the first time; I saw birds, signs, a squirrel, a francolin, and also heard the vocalization of many animal species; I saw the track of an antelope," Zara Buri from Bokova attested. Mbome Theres Nomondo from Bwitingi became connected to nature while carrying out the tracking and biomonitoring exercise. "Honestly speaking, I am here with my friends, it's so beautiful out here and I don't feel like going back home. I hope that we will be able to beautify nature and keep these animals saved," she said.

Pro-conservation traditional knowledge and belief systems

The increasing adoption of western values by community kids and youths has eroded their appetite for the long-standing historical traditional conservation narratives that aided in species conservation before colonialism. Kids and youths,



who hold the key to future conservation actions are glued to computer games, TV sets and the social media, regarding most of these pro-conservation beliefs as primitive. This poses a serious threat to the future conservation of this species, requiring urgent actions. To salvage this plight, VoNat recently organized a folktale and pro-conservation traditional belief information gathering session with kids and youths from five communities in the Mount Cameroon Area. This was organized as part of the project; Conserving Endangered Ape of Mount Cameroon with Community Kids, funded by New England Biolabs Foundation with additional support from Idea Wild. In the Bonakanda community, the traditional ruler, Chief Emmanuel Ndongo Molongo, took the youngsters to a large tree at the center of the village known locally as Mowumba, and told them the traditional and historical link between the Bakweri people and the tree, which makes it difficult for them to cut down the tree. The traditional ruler further thrilled the community kids and youths with stories about chimpanzees and elephant totems. He narrated how an elephant hunter, Pa Mbella, died after attempting to kill a totemic elephant. The traditional ruler took the future conservation leaders to some forest patches and shrines conserved because of traditional beliefs in the Bonakanda community and told stories behind their existence.

The storytelling sessions aided in transferring some vital traditional knowledge and belief about animals and tree species in the Mount Cameroon Area to the community kids and youths. They were particularly thrilled by the belief in totem. "I learned that some elephants and chimpanzees can be human totems and killing them may lead to the killing of the totem owner. This is interesting knowledge for me, I never knew before. I think these species should be left alive" Emmanuel from Bonakanda said.

Media and Arts for Conservation

Media and Arts are a powerful tool with a high propensity to communicate and transform the way people think and act. The interplay and creative use of these tools can change dynamics in the perception and promotion of species conservation. In a bid to conserve the endangered ape of Mount Cameroon and other endangered species of this area, community kids and youths leveraged on the hands-on training on media and arts to produce short articles/stories, songs, drawings, and poems on species conservation and traditional knowledge and belief about some local fauna and flora species in their communities. This boosted their appetite in biodiversity conservation and has contributed in preserving proconservation traditional knowledge.

Ebo Forest In Big Trouble Again!



Ebo Forest, is a 2,000 km² proposed national park in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. It is home to an amazingly rich diversity of plants and animals, including gorilla Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee, forest elephants, drills and Preuss's red colobus, which are either endangered or critically endangered on the IUCN Red List. The proposed protected area is one of Cameroon's largest intact-rainforests, containing an estimated 35 million tonnes of carbon.

There is apparently an ardent strive to destroy this carbon sink and the biodiversity therein. According to a letter addressed to the Delegation of the EU to Cameroon, British High Commission, German, French, and U.S. Embassy, on July 22, 2022, by eight Cameroon-based conservation organizations, Ebo Forest is about to be depleted by a road construction project.

The letter picks holes on the road construction project including but not limited to the fact that

the road building goes against the Prime Minister Decree from 6 August 2020, does not provide inclusive development and is likely illegal. The conservation organizations use the letter to request that the ambassadors and high commissioner act immediately and publicly commit to discuss concerns about Ebo forest with Cameroon and demand an independent investigation of the legality of the road construction operation and the logging in FMU 07 002.

They equally called on the diplomats to publicly commit funds and work with rights holders and other stakeholders to develop inclusive projects for alternative road building and other projects for sustainable development for Ebo forest communities, and to make sure extractive activities that prejudice the outcome of this participatory process are halted. This commitment, according to the conservation actors, "could trigger authorities to suspend and rethink the Ebo road project."

The protest letter is coming barely about 2 years after petitions and widespread online condemnation culminated in the revoking of a Prime Ministerial Decree that was going to see the logging of some 68,385 hectares of the Ebo Forest.

The project to transform the Ebo Forest into a national park, announced in 2006 by the Cameroon Government, seems to have been put to sleep, giving centre stage to projects that rather deplete the biodiversity hotspot. The Cameroon Government is a signatory to many international conventions dedicated to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to protect species and their habitats. One of the most recent agreements was signed, July 20, 2020, by President Paul Biya on the conservation of gorillas and their habitats. Halting projects that deplete a biodiversity hotspot and carbon sink like the Ebo forest will be a great way for the Cameroon Government to show good faith towards these international commitments.

Local Knowledge, Neglected Species Conservation Asset



African communities have from time immemorial, developed different belief systems including taboos, rituals and totems that ensured the effective management of natural resources in the continent. These belief systems ascribed much power to some natural resources like rocks, streams, ponds, trees, land and animal species within the community. In many African communities, some people saw animals as the totems of people or communities and were therefore, protected since killing them may lead to the death of an individual in the community or the person who did the killing.

Though the operational mechanism of these traditional natural resources management system has no scientific basis, it undoubtedly served as an indigenous conservation ethic and an effective means of conservation. It is certainly with the discovery of the vital role this traditional knowledge has in species conservation that the 1992 United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) calls for the recognition of ancestral domains, spiritual values and their incorporation into conservation efforts.

Though western technology, the growing influence of other religions and beliefs, lack of modern regulations to enforce the traditional rules, migration, urbanisation and resettlement have worn out the adherence to these belief systems, they still remain a gold mine for species conservation.

The Mount Cameroon National Park, an IUCN Category II protected area in the South West Region of Cameroon, and its environ play host to some fauna and flora species like Cameroon Nigeria chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), Africa forest elephant (*Loxodontacyclotis*) and preuss's monkey (*Allochrocebus preussi*) that were protected by traditional belief systems but are today Endangered on the IUCN Red List

“When I was young, my parents did not eat chimpanzees and elephants. These are animals we used as totems. One could transform into chimpanzee or get initiated into the power of a chimpanzee and become very powerful. With this power, you have the ability to climb very tall trees to harvest fruits and leaves needed for traditional healing,” said Chief Emmanuel Ndongo Molonge,

Traditional Ruler Banakanda Village, shortly after transferring traditional knowledge through folktales to some kids and youths within the framework of VoNat's project to save the endangered great ape of Mount Cameroon.

He cited Mbo'o (mahogany), wutango'o (pronus Africana) mumanki (iroko) and Linyinge as tree species that by tradition, no one is supposed to burn or cut down. The custodian of the Bakweri custom and tradition noted some forest patches (shrines) in his community that most villages are tabooed from entering.

“Some young girls get married but are unable to bear children maybe because they passed through some of these areas they were not supposed to. Some are engaged in business but it is not growing while others are infested by some form of diseases at a very young age because they might have entered in some of these tabooed places,” the traditional ruler added. He calling on all resident in the Mount Cameroon Area to know tabooed areas and species, and endeavor to respect the tradition and custom preserving them, to avoid any calamity from befalling them and their love ones.

Local and traditional beliefs remain a veritable asset in species conservation. Locating and integrating them in conservation initiatives, while continuously educating the younger generation about it, will provide a contextually appropriate form of conservation rationale and education that locals can endorse and understand as their own.



The increasing adoption of Western values and the suppression of indigenous knowledge has eroded the appetite for the long-standing historical and traditional conservation narratives that aided in species conservation before colonialism. Despite recommendation by 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity for the incorporation of local indigenous approaches into conservation efforts, Wildlife conservation education programmes often take a modern or school-like approach, which do not reflect local realities and are often not needed, especially by the least educated folks.

We risk losing valuable local conservation knowledge possessed by the local people like folklore and taboos, which offer an indigenous conservation ethic and an effective means of conservation, if an urgent action is not taken. With the support of New England Biolabs Foundation, Voice of Nature

(VoNat) guided some 50 kids from communities in the Mount Cameroon round some villages including Bokova and Bonakanda. Here, the youngsters listened to traditional authorities and documented some pro-conservation traditional tales and beliefs about the Nigeria Cameroon Chimpanzee and other fauna and flora species in the area. Read on!

“Chimpanzees are ‘Humans’ in the Forest”



We grow up with the understanding that chimpanzees are human beings that live in the forest. Our parents us to understand that they are our friends and incarnates human spirit.

They are our totems. One can transform into a chimpanzee or be initiated into the power of the chimpanzee to be able to climb tall trees. We use to do wild honey harvesting and some of the honey use to be on a very tall tree. To be able to climb those tall trees and harvest honey, some community members will be initiated into the power of a chimpanzee. This built a good relation between the Bakweri people and the chimpanzees and killing them was a taboo.

The *Obasinjom* Sacred Forest



The *Obasinjom* forest is a sacred forest in most Bakweri villages where access into it is restricted

Belief Systems in the Mount Cameroon Area

to specific persons. It is believed that it is where the village ancestors settled after emanating from the cave. This is where traditional rites are performed and only members of the sacred society are permitted to enter there.

Even though they have access into the sacred forest, they are not permitted to cut down any tree or to take anything out of that forest. In the community, you have many young girls and boys who, though very beautiful or handsome, are unable to get married. This could be because they entered this forest that they were not permitted to.

They are some that are married but are unable to bear a child because they considered the culture primitive and stubbornly entered the forest. We have great trees, animals, birds and other species in this sacred forest.

George Ngu'uh and the Totemic Elephants



There was a notorious hunter in the community in those days called George Ngu'uh. The village elders warned him severally that they are some elephants in the forest that incarnate the spirit of title holders in the community and should not be hunted. He waved the warning aside and kept hunting. One day while hunting, he saw a giant elephant, shot at it repeatedly but the elephant disappeared.

He searched all over the forest but could not find the elephant he shot. He got frightened and ran back to the community panting. This experience taught George Ngu'uh a bitter lesson and he stopped hunting elephants from that day.

A song was composed to mock this elephant hunter for hunting an elephant totem: "...you shot an elephant, but where is the elephant;.....you shot an elephant, show us the elephant". This song is sung till date by the sacred society dance known as Maley (Elephant Dance). There was also another elephant hunter, called Mbella, who died because he wanted killing a totemic elephant.

"Wu'umba" Tree a Pointer to the Settlement of the Bakeri People



Wu'umba is a fruit tree that grows only where people have lived before. Though the tree has seeds, these seeds only germinate where people have lived before. The tree is very important and gives an idea about the settlement of the Bakweri people from time immemorial. Many villages are now extinct.

If you want to know where a Bakweri village had existed before, even in the forest, search for the "Wu'umba" tree. The tree grows only where people

have lived and thus, has a lot of historical connection with the Bakeri culture and tradition. As a result of this, cutting the tree in the Bakweri land is a taboo. This is why all traditional wrestling known as "Pala Pala" in the Bakweri land always take place under the Wu'umba tree.

Lyninge, the Sacred Medicinal Tree



The Lyninge tree is very significant tree to communities in the Mount Cameroon Area. Some of the trees have been transformed into a shrine where sacrifices are offered every year to appease the gods, and the cutting of such a tree is a total sacrilege. The tree is medicinal and also accommodates the spirit of gods and goddesses, as well as other individuals in the village. Community members are restricted from cutting or burning the trees. If any one must do, an announcement needs to be made so that those whose spirit reside in that particular tree can transfer their spirit to another tree.

Green Poetry

Nature's Cry

I am mother nature!
I make the environment conducive for you to live
I provide the air you all breathe for free
I provide the water you drink for free
I provide the food you eat for free
I am what you need to survive!

Yet, you kill me every second, minute, hour of day
You set traps for me as a reward

You use gun, axe and machete to destroy even my young ones

You put me in danger

You know not you are killing yourself

You will regret some day if you don't change now!

By Ngum Ephesians

Nature is Beautiful

Nature, you are beautiful and lovely

It gives me endless joy to see you perform your duty

Having you around is like having a comfortable bed at night

Your breeze and shelter is like a pleasurable ride to Jerusalem

You provide food for animals

You provide shelter for both humans and animals

You provide treatment to me when I am ill.

I won't seat and see man's cruelty fade you away

By Obi Samuel

Pain for Endangered Species

Oh our great species;
Chimpanzee, francolin, drill, elephant, preuss's monkey;
I weep to see you pass away
It hurts to see man destroy you after feeding fat from you

I saw their handwork on you in Mount Cameroon;

Traces of your house set ablaze;

Shells of bullets used to kill you;

Parts of your home inhabited by cocoa yam and maize

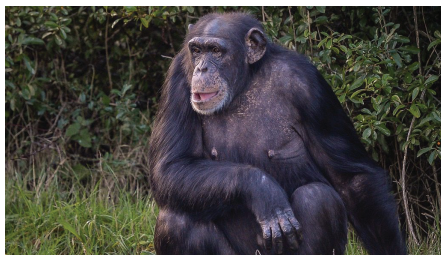
I will do anything possible to keep you all alive.

By Nying Zahara-ou Buring



Conservation Stories

How Chimpanzee Delivered a Pregnant Woman



Once upon a time, some grown up children who had gotten married and left the village decided to get a maid to take care of their 65-year-old mum, who was alone in the village. After searching, they found a young girl called Ada from Besongabang village. Things went smoothly between Ada and her new found home and family until one faithful day when the children of the woman found out that Ada was two months pregnant.

Ada was then sent out of the home and she went living in the forest. While in the heart of the forest, she found large trees with big canopies that provided her shelter. Ada made a small shed in the forest beside a small water body. She lived in the forest peacefully. One day she was in labour; obsessed with labour pain, she started screaming.

A chimpanzee heard her cry and came to her rescue. The chimpanzee delivered her of the baby. After the delivery, it used water from the nearby river to bathe the baby and his mother. The chimpanzee also brought her some fruits which kept her strong and alive.

Few days later, Ada decided to

go back home but before she left the chimpanzee gave her a leaf which she took back home and gave to the woman she was taking care of, and she was healed from a stroke she has been suffering from. They then accepted her back since she was the source of their mother's recovery.

Though it was later said in the village that the Chimpanzee was the totem of Pa Mayong, Ada vowed to conserve trees and animal species. She said "the trees welcome and provided food and shelter for me when man sent me away; the animal delivered me when I was deep in pain. I owe them my all".

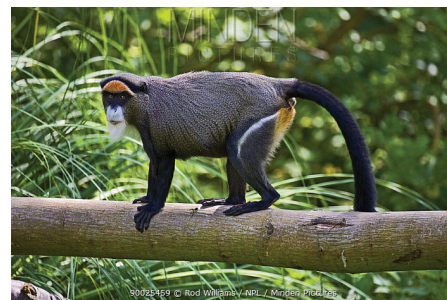
By Mamondo Lyonga

Monkey, My Life

Once upon a time, there lived a woman called Mama Lucy in Kanito village. She was very kind, lovely but fate was not kind to her. The 50 year-old mother had lost her husband, parents and five children and did not see any reason to live again. One day she decided to end her life. She went into the forest, tied a rope to the tree and was about to hang herself but luckily, a small nice and attractive animal started coming towards her. She was distracted by the beauty of the animal, which was later identified as a monkey. She moved closer to the animal and kept admiring it, then Pa Tobias, a hunter arrived the scene, discovered that she wanted taking away her life; took her home and took good

care of her.

Ma Lucy was so happy and thanked God for sending the monkey to her rescue. She named the monkey, "My life", and visited the forest from time to time to play with the monkey and serve it food. One day she went to the were she usually go and sing to attract the monkey but it was no where to be found. After a long walk, through the forest, she heard a voice which sounded like that of the monkey. So she quickly rushed to see and it was "My Life" caught in a trap. She rescued the monkey. Ma Lucy went back home and called on all hunters and trappers to stop hunting monkeys, if they want her to stay alive. Her community



members felt pity for her and decided to forbid trapping and hunting. She thanked them for valuing the wellbeing of mankind and the future generation over money and bush meat. So please, let's keep monkeys alive; let's keep the apes alive!

By, Bechem Nzelle Ebangah

Inside VoNat



Voice of Nature (VoNat) is a Cameroon community-based biodiversity conservation and sustainable development non-profit organization created in 2019 by a group of youths with a strong desire to use their skills, knowledge and experience to finding solutions to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development challenges in their communities while engaging other community kids and youths to do same. It was authorized by the Cameroon Ministry of Territorial Administration following Reg. No.1125/G.37/C84/VOL.I/SASC to operate as an apolitical, non-denominational and non-profit organization on September 30, 2020.

Vision

A planet where every individual intentionally treats nature with love and respect, understanding that their very existence and that of generations is dependent on the environment.

Mission

Building a greener, safer and more sustainable community planet for both wildlife species and humanity to thrive.

Programmes & Objectives

Species Conservation & Environmental Sustainability: This programme seeks to deter biodiversity depletion and environmental pollution with

community kids/youths through media & arts, livelihoods supports, capacity building, research and community engagement. Projects within this programme include; Keep the Apes Alive (KAA), Young Amphibians Conservation Stewards (YACS), Friends of Birds (FoB), Waste Management and Save the ElephantsQ

Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation:

This programme is dedicated to finding solutions to climate change challenges with community kids/youths via tree planting in public spaces/catchments, research, climate education & effective communication etc. Projects carried out within this programme include: Climate Action Kids (CAK), Tree Planting in Public Spaces, Green School Kids Initiative, Landscape Restoration and Carbon Sequestration.

Sustainable Agriculture & Community Development.

This programme seeks to enhance food security and improve on the incomes and basic needs of poorresource farmers via public awareness and experiential sessions on agricultural innovations, and income generating strategies. Key projects include: Micro-Kitchen Vegetable Gardening (MVG) and Regenerative Agroforestry.

Environmental Reporting & Communication:

This programme seeks to raise awareness on environmental issues, stimulate debate and

promote responsible natural resource management while grooming future environmental journalists. Key projects include Voice of Nature News & Magazine and Environmental Journalism Mentorship.

Outreach and Relief Support:

The programme is dedicated to reducing over dependence on natural resources via the provision of relief and alternative sustainability strategies to underprivileged and vulnerable children, youths and women in forest communities.

Volunteering and Youth Mentorship.

It is dedicated to grooming young university graduates from Cameroon and beyond into refined professionals and providing them with the experience and skills much-needed in the job market. This Programme also serves as a platform for devoted and passionate individuals across the globe to use their skills, knowledge, experience and resources to contribute to building a healthy and safer planet for current and future generations, as well as put smiles on the faces of vulnerable children and women in forest communities in Cameroon.

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