

The Last Great Ape Organization – LA GA

June 2013 Report



Highlights

- **Ivory previously deposited in National Stock discovered among elephant tusks seized in LAGA – MINFOF operation in Douala – Littoral.**
- **2 operations within 1 hour arrests 4 major dealers in ivory in Douala** with a total of 18 elephant tusks and 32 ivory pieces.
- **Unprocedural behaviour observed in MINFOF Delegations**
- **An ivory dealer sentenced to 3 months imprisonment in Djoum - South**

General

This month was marked by the arrest of 5 dealers, 4 in ivory and 1 in leopard skin

2 operations carried out within 1 hour in Douala – Littoral arresting 4 major ivory dealers. In the first operation, **2 dealers** also owners of an artefacts shop were **arrested with 18 elephant tusks and 16 worked ivory pieces**. They are well connected to other major ivory dealers in other parts of Cameroon. **Among the 18 tusks, some had been seized already during past LAGA-MINFOF operations and were stolen from the National Stock**. Investigations are on-going to track the source of the stolen elephant tusks especially in MINFOF looking into complicity and corruption in that Ministry. Barely 1 hour after the first operation, **2 other well-known ivory dealers were arrested with 16 worked pieces of ivory**. They have a network of suppliers in the Eastern Region and claimed to have very good packaging methods that will facilitate the transportation of the ivory out of Cameroon if needed.

Lack of collaboration and breach of procedure was observed in 3 different MINFOF delegations this month alone. In Douala – Littoral, investigations discovered several different types of Class A life animals and parts including gorilla and chimp skulls; life crocodiles, sea turtles and African grey parrots but instead of descending to the field to carry out the necessary operation, **the MINFOF Regional Delegate categorically refused to collaborate with the LAGA team stating that the suspect was “his friend”** and that he has been aware of the presence of those animals.

In Bafoussam, after tracking down a dealer for 4 weeks and finally arresting him with a leopard skin, **the MINFOF Regional Delegate for the West** despite the fact that the trafficker admitted he tried to sell the skin for 80,000 FCFA **declared she does not work with LAGA at the same time blocking any of her sworn-in officials to establish any PV, slandering LAGA’s undercover methods** (that stand on 100% court conviction rate) and without examining the nature of the case said the trafficker should be released.

In Nanga Eboko – Center, after tracking a wildlife dealer for 2 weeks, recording him while explaining his role in ape trade and the connection to export of ape meat to the US, **the MINFOF Divisional Delegate and another MINFOF official (Chief of Transformation) knowingly prevented the arrest of the trafficker who had a baby chimp with him and completely sabotaged the investigation efforts**. The Delegate was reluctant to contact the police as procedure demands and asked for a mission order not stipulated in LAGA’s convention with MINFOF all geared to delaying the team.

Because of these and other prior governance issues with MINFOF, **a joint letter** (part of this report – Annex) **was addressed to the Minister – MINFOF by LAGA, WWF and WCS to immediately remedy the situation**. Specifically for LAGA, **more criminals had been illegally released by MINFOF Delegates in the past year than in the whole of 10 years of work that preceded it, combined**. The constant correspondences highlighting the illegal behaviour of MINFOF Delegates for now remains unanswered.

Two criminal investigations are held concerning ivory stock management and CITES, joining a worrying trend of unprecedented governance problems in MINFOF.

The Court of First Instance of Djoum - South sentenced an ivory dealer to **3 months imprisonment** and to pay a sum of **600.000 FCFA (about \$1200) as damages and 100.000 FCFA (about \$200) as fine**. He was arrested in Djoum for illegal detention of 22 elephant tusks.

LAGA Director trained in the International Law Enforcement Academy on Corruption and Wildlife Crime.

Investigations

- **26 investigations** of varying lengths were carried out in **7 Regions** of Cameroon- North West, South West, South, East, West, Littoral and Center.
- For further improvement and more operations in regional enforcement, training sessions continue to be held in Yaounde – Cameroon. An investigator arrived from GALF – Guinea Conakry to be trained under the regional exchange program; training and exchange of project personnel in regional enforcement will continue with the other projects in the forthcoming months.
- Good investigations led to 3 operations with 5 major wildlife dealers arrested.
- The distribution of flyers in both English and French was re-launched this month. Strategies have been put in place to track distribution and for it to be more effective. This is part of a new strategy to get credible information and to make the Investigation missions more performant.
- LAGA Investigations Department assisted PALF-Congo Investigations Department on Investigations and assisted in operations.
- LAGA Investigations Department also collaborated with AALF Investigators and Jurists on setting up a network of informants and joint investigations in North Gabon and South Cameroon.

Operations

3 operations carried out this month led to the **arrest of 5 major dealers** in ivory and leopard skin

- **21/06/13 – 2 major ivory dealers** also owners of an artefacts shop **arrested with 18 elephant tusks and 16 worked ivory pieces** while attempting to illegally trade in them in Douala - Littoral. They are well connected to other major ivory dealers in other parts of Cameroon. **Among the 18 tusks, some had been seized already during past LAGA operations and were stolen from the MINFOF conservatory in Mvog-Betsi in Yaounde - Center**. Investigations are on-going to track the source of the stolen elephant tusks especially in MINFOF given that they are responsible for the conservatory and seized wildlife products.
- **21/06/13 – Barely 1 hour after the first operation, 2 other well-known ivory dealers arrested** in Douala – Littoral **with 16 worked pieces of ivory**. They have a network of suppliers in the Eastern Region and claimed to have very good packaging methods that will facilitate the transportation of the ivory out of Cameroon if needed.
- **25/06/13 - A regular dealer arrested with a leopard skin** while attempting to illegally trade in it in Bafoussam – West Region. After the arrest operation, **the MINFOF Regional Delegate for the Western Region in an unprocedural manner refused that the statement of offense should be taken and the dealer to be duly locked up and taken to court**. This is not the first time she is disturbing normal LAGA work for reasons best known to herself, using her position to block her colleagues from collaborating with LAGA in the fight against illegal wildlife trade.

Legal

- LAGA Legal Department carried out **13 missions** out of Yaounde - Centre Region: 2 in Douala (Littoral), 2 in Limbe (South West), 1 in Mamfe (South West), 2 in Djoum (South), 2 in Sangmelima, 1 in Ebolowa (South), 1 in Kribi (South), 1 in Abong-Mbang (East), 1 in Bertoua (East), 1 in Yokadouma (East) and 1 Nanga-Eboko (Centre).
- There are **43 dealers behind bars during this month**: 16 in the East Region, 4 in the South West Region, 7 in Centre region, 1 in North West region, 13 in South Region.
- **44 cases** were followed up by the Legal Department this month.
- **41 cases** are scheduled and being trailed in the court this month.
- **Prosecutions**: 1 dealer was sentenced this month.
 - 18/06/2013: The Court of First Instance of Djoum - South sentenced ESSONO Ebio to **3 months imprisonment** and to pay a sum of **600.000 FCFA as damages and 100.000 FCFA as fine**. He was arrested in Djoum for illegal detention of 22 elephant tusks.

Media front

- **16 media pieces** were produced and pushed through to radio, and written press including: 7 written press material (4 in English and 3 in French), 5 radio talk shows in English, 2 radio news feature in French, and 2 news flashes (1 in English and 1 in French).
- **Guests included**: The traditional ruler of Bafut in the North West Region, the Director of Cameroon Environmental Watch (CEW), the Executive Director Environment and Rural Development Foundation (Erudef), and a lion researcher and Lecturer at the University of Dschang.
- **Subjects focused on wildlife law enforcement including**: 2 operations in Douala arresting ivory dealers; Sangmelima arrest of a woman dealing in huge quantities of meat of protected wildlife, and the dwindling populations of big mammals especially lions.
- Out of the 16 media pieces recorded in June, 10 were in English and 6 in French representing 67.5 % in English and 37.5 % in French

External Relations and Policy

- LAGA Director trained in the International Law Enforcement Academy on Corruption and Wildlife Crime.
- LAGA Director presented on wildlife crime and corruption to Nicolas Hulot - Special Envoi for the Environment for the French President.
- LAGA met with ERUDEF on cross river gorillas and stepping up wildlife law enforcement in their habitat range.
- A meeting with Birdlife International on the illegal trade in African Grey Parrots.
- LAGA Director met with CARPE on training magistrates and wildlife law enforcement.
- A meeting with WWF and WCS on wildlife law enforcement and governance problems.
- LAGA director met with World Bank Africa Sector Manager for Environment on the LAGA approach to wildlife crime. And continued discussion with the World Bank conflict analysis team on the situation in the Central African Republic.
- LAGA met with Traffic on problems in CITES management as well as a network of environmental jurists.
- LAGA director met with IUCN on wildlife law enforcement and corruption.
- A meeting with WCS on a new strategy integrating governance to a wildlife law enforcement objective.
- LAGA Director met with TNSF on wildlife crime and the Donors' Governance Investment Manual.

Management

- A LAGA member of the Operations Department was suspended for 1 month for knowingly allowing the payment of 30,000 FCFA bribe to the police for the release of a person arrested for taking pictures in the Mvan neighbourhood in Yaounde – Center. This is strictly against the values LAGA stand for and this type of behaviour is not tolerated by LAGA.
- An investigator arrived from GALF – Guinea Conakry to be trained in Yaounde – Cameroon under the regional exchange program

Activism Front

All the education activities carried out by the LAGA family are online; this could be gotten at the LAGA website – <http://www.laga-enforcement.org/Activism/tabid/77/Default.aspx>. The education activity this month was on the following:

- **Marketing Pollution – The case of Carbon and REDD** (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) - A power point presentation on the mechanisms of trading carbon as a means of curbing pollution from greenhouse gases. The presentation brings out the difficulties and limitations of the REDD program, ranging from projects areas found only in developing countries, no clear definition of forests, governance issues, technical problems, legal limitations, land grabbing problems, lack of enforcement, social problems etc. The conclusion was that trading forest carbon fails to address climate change because the problem is not attacked at the source. There is a need to find ways to stop burning fossil fuels, not create massive new loopholes to allow the pollution to continue; the North can delay effective and radical action to stop the burning of fossil fuels and claim that offsets of their carbon are stored in forests. The result is no net reduction in emissions and a few people become richer.

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Replication

During this month, LAGA worked with other replication projects in planning and coordinating missions with PALF, AALF and GALF on investigations and operations.

An investigator arrived from GALF – Guinea Conakry to be trained in Yaounde – Cameroon under the regional exchange program for further improvement and more operations in regional enforcement.

LAGA Investigations Department assisted PALF-Congo Investigations Department on Investigations and assisted in operations; collaborated with AALF-Gabon Investigators and Jurists on setting up a network of informants and joint investigations in North Gabon and South Cameroon.

Finance

LAGA Expenditure by Budget Line for June 2013

| Amount FCFA | | | Amount USD |
|--------------------|--|--|-------------------|
| 2,565,023 | Investigations | 26 inv, 7 Regions | \$5,130 |
| 911,500 | Operations | 2 Operations against 5 subjects | \$1,823 |
| 2,990,103 | Legal | follow up 44 cases 43 locked subjects | \$5,980 |
| 1,272,435 | Media | 16 Media pieces | \$2,545 |
| 1,584,811 | Policy & External Relations | Botswana/Kenya Mission/Togo/Chad/Guinea/UK | \$3,170 |
| 975,450 | Management | Coordination | \$1,951 |
| 1,478,782 | Office | | \$2,958 |
| 11,778,104 | TOTAL EXPENDITURE JUNE | | \$23,556 |

LAGA Expenditure by Donor for June 2013

| Amount CFA | Donor | Amount USD |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 0 | FWS | \$0.0 |
| 1,584,811 | FWS-Replication | \$3,169.6 |
| 0 | BornFree UK | \$0.0 |
| 1,875,415 | Rufford | \$3,750.8 |
| 0 | IFAW | \$0.0 |
| 0 | EIA | \$0.0 |
| 667,500 | ProWildlife | \$1,335.0 |
| 4,335,623 | ARCUS Foundation | \$8,671.2 |
| 244,000 | Conde Nast Award | \$488.0 |
| 3,070,755 | NEU Foundation | \$6,141.5 |
| 11,778,104 | TOTAL | \$23,556.2 |

This Month in Pictures



2 major ivory dealers arrested with 18 elephant tusks and 16 worked ivory pieces in Douala – Littoral (*Top Left*). Among the 18 tusks, some had been seized already during past LAGA operations and were stolen from the MINFOF conservatory in Mvog-Betsi in Yaounde – Center (*Top Right*). Investigations are on-going to track the source of the stolen elephant tusks especially in MINFOF given that they are responsible for the conservatory and seized wildlife products. They are well connected to other major ivory dealers in other parts of Cameroon and were transporting the ivory in a travelling bag after wrapping in a 100 kg bag (*Left*).



2 other well-known ivory dealers (*Left*) arrested with 16 worked ivory pieces (*Right*). They have a network of suppliers in the Eastern Region and claimed to have very good packaging methods that will facilitate the transportation of the ivory out of Cameroon if needed.

Links of this month

- A long time **female dealer** in meat of protected wildlife species with a network of suppliers in Djoum – South **arrested with 4 large bags of bush meat**; the Court of First Instance of Douala - Bonanjo sentenced a female dealer in live primate – The LAGA Newsletter. This wildlife law enforcement newsletter is produced monthly and distributed electronically so as to expand the scope of readers on issues concerning wildlife law enforcement in Cameroon, the Central African sub-region and beyond.

<http://www.laga-enforcement.org/Resources/Activityreports/LAGANewsletter/tabid/220/Default.aspx>

Annex - Joint letter to Minister on issues of governance in MINFOF



**To: The Minister of Forestry and Wildlife
Yaounde - Cameroon**

Date: Yaounde, 7th June 2013

Subject: Request for audience



Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned, are writing to request an audience with you at your earliest convenience to discuss a number of issues that we see as serious threat to the long term conservation of the rich biological diversity of Cameroon. We have observed a worrying trend, concerning your Ministry's responses to effectively cope with illegal wildlife trade, that we felt are becoming major obstacles to the government of Cameroon commitment and effort for conserving the exceptionally rich biological diversity of the country and the defined policy for the sustainable management of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations, and will like to have the opportunity to discuss some of these issues with you and where possible suggest some solutions or avenues for addressing these problems.

At this point we will be focusing attention mainly on wildlife but it is important to indicate that most of these points are valid for other sectors, as it all relate to governance, transparency and effective law enforcement, bearing in mind that all these goes together to create conditions for efficiency and effectiveness in the realization of define objectives that in our case is the long term conservation of natural resources for the benefit of Cameroon and humanity.

Conservation has long been threatened by bad governance and vested interests. Your noble task, your Excellency, is a constant fight to push back against traders who attempt to use their illicit wealth to subvert the very control systems set to regulate them. More and more policy decisions allow them to benefit from legal trade but in effect facilitate further-illegal trade.

We wish to bring to your attention several problems that fall into this context, soliciting your personal inspection and supervision.

African Grey Parrots

Last year Cameroon's CITES Management Authority requested and was subsequently accorded an export quota for the African Grey Parrot, ending a five-year moratorium on exports, imposed after Cameroon repeatedly exceeded its quota, prompting concern from the CITES Secretariat. The request was regarded by many scientists to be flawed and lacking scientific or even economic logic. The species continues to experience population decline, information on many aspects of its ecology are lacking, and

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it is exposed to 30-50% pre-export mortality (due to poor management and conditions in-country). None of these facts are accounted for in the current decision.

The close relationship between the legal and the illegal trade in Cameroon is well documented and the court cases against the "legal" dealers finding themselves in the heart of the illegal trade are known and analyzed with great concern.

The revenue to the state generated by the export of this species is a small fraction of the total accruing to the operators. It is estimated that Cameroon generates a max of \$380 000 annually. It remains minor if we consider the sale price of between \$1500 to \$2500 for a bird on the international market, and compared to the damage to Cameroon's natural heritage and international image.

The study on which the Cameroon's application was based would not pass the peer review process required for inclusion in any scientific journal, yet here it has been used to override well-documented concerns of overharvesting and reopen a trade that could very possibly threaten the species' long-term survival. Where external appraisal was sought – too late to be taken into account, – the approach and recommendations were roundly criticized: The methodology used to calculate sustainable yield is flawed. The methodology used in ecological data collection is very likely flawed, or at the very least heavily biased towards overestimation. Vital details of the methodology are omitted, obscuring what was done and precluding replicability. Furthermore, Demographic parameters are largely absent from the report, and the unrealistic adult survival rate is given with no justification.

In light of these and other criticisms, the report should be considered invalid. The document was written as a management plan, yet there have been as yet no moves to implement the recommendations made, despite these lapses, the trade was reopened.

The removal of the key markets for wild-captured birds – the USA in 1993 and the EU in 2005 – as well as developments in captive breeding elsewhere have yet to be reflected in Cameroon's position as an exporter.

Elephants

The plight of Cameroon's elephants does not need introduction. Cameroon is struggling with an escalating poaching crisis, and in the international media the Government stresses the need to fight to conserve every single elephant. Yet at the same time, legal "administrative" culling and sports hunting continue, often of already thin populations and with little ecological considerations. Worse still, we have various indications that such presumably legal use of wildlife is often linked to illegal trade and legal killing schemes systematically used for the illegal trade by known traffickers.

In February 2013 for example, four elephants were killed in the Extreme North region in an authorized administrative culling within 3 weeks. These included a female and a very young elephant, and the reasons for the culling were questionable. The individuals commissioned to hunt are suspected traffickers; one of them offered the tusks for illegal sale to a French national.

In another example, a group of American hunters went to South East Cameroon in April 2013 with authorization to hunt elephants, only a few days after the WWF announced it found 28 fresh elephant carcasses in the nearby Lobeke National Park.

Hippopotamus

Cameroon's CITES Management Authority has appealed to the Convention to remove the trade suspension on hippos and applied for an export quota, arguing that a legal killing scheme of hippos would be introduced in Cameroon. This new request for a legal way to kill hippos correlates with the growing interest of traffickers in hippo ivory. This quota was asked without any reliable scientific study to be based upon, and apparently, with no consultation with the CITES scientific Authority of Cameroon, the Garoua Wildlife School.

The latest two surveys of hippopotamus in Benoue NP (one conducted in March 2013 with the Garoua Wildlife School), shows a 50 % population decline compared to earlier surveys in this hitherto stronghold for hippopotamus in Cameroon. It should be noted that these are the only qualitative hippo population trend data available from Cameroon. During the survey, freshly poached hippos were found with their tusks removed, corresponding with data from wildlife crime investigations documenting trade in hippo tusks.

Apes

In April 2013, an endangered cross river gorilla was killed in the North West region, and to the best of our knowledge, no legal action has been taken against the killers by MINFOF. The stuffing and display of the gorilla was authorized by MINFOF without consideration of bones and skull that were likely to get to the illegal trade. The decision to reward a community that broke the law and killed a highly endangered species, and the decision to display the body as an advertisement for the value of illegal trade are both highly disturbing.

In the past few months two ape traffickers were released by MINFOF failing to forward the criminals arrested red-handed to courts.

An illegal private collection of chimps that have attracted hundreds of international complaints in the past five years has still remained unresolved and with no legal consequences. Patricia Leschaeve has been buying and keeping chimps, thereby encouraging the illegal trade, and keeping apes in appalling conditions that often result in their death.

Ivory Burning

Wildlife traffickers in West Africa have been recorded saying that the source of their Ivory is from wildlife official from Cameroon. This is very worrying to think that wildlife official could be involved in stealing and selling ivory confiscated and stored in government storehouses, therefore confirming rumours that overtime seized ivory and other wildlife products have disappeared from the store.

With rising ivory prices it is becoming more difficult to ensure security of the ivory stock. And more and more countries are reporting their stocks have been looted. Guarding ivory stocks has become such an impossible mission that even museums in Europe are broken in to in ivory thefts from exhibits.

Cameroon's chances to legally sell this ivory are close to zero. Gabon like Kenya has burnt its ivory last year with much international media coverage and increased international investment in conservation. The Republic of Congo publicly declared it will burn its ivory stocks this year, DRC has made the same declaration not in public. Such a burn can send a very strong message to traffickers as well as broadcast Cameroon's will to protect its elephants in such dire times.

Pangolins

The illegal trade in pangolin scales to China is booming. In the past two weeks two large seizures of giant pangolin scales took place in Douala and Limbe and another seizure in the Charles de Gaulle airport in France. These three seizures alone represent hundreds of killed giant pangolins.

While the littoral MINFOF regional delegation refused to pursue the culprits, the Chinese and two Cameroon nationals, were arrested two weeks afterwards by the South West regional delegation when they continued their illegal activity. Certificates of Origin are being produced by regional delegates, and threatened Giant Pangolin scales, are described as common pangolin, facilitating a vast illegal trade network in the disguise of legal trade.

Recommendations

Your Excellency, we would like to constructively work with your collaborators on bringing quick solutions to the problems raised in this document, as well as, step up transparency and inclusion in decision making concerning legal trade schemes and obtaining better oversight of regulatory systems that are prone to be captured by traffickers and corruption.

For this purpose, we recommend the establishment of a working group to include MINFOF, the undersigned and other members of the scientific community. The working group will have to produce detailed solutions within a month and an action plan with clear deadlines.

We also recommend the establishment of a schedule for regular visits and inspections of warehouse where confiscated items including ivory other wildlife products and guns are stored. We believe that the first such visit and inspection can reasonably be organized within a week from today.

Sincerely,

On behalf of WWF – Rolf-Dieter Sprung, Conservation Director, WWF Cameroon.

On behalf of WCS – Dr. Roger C. Fotso, Country Director, Cameroon.

On behalf of LAGA – Ofir Drori, Director.

