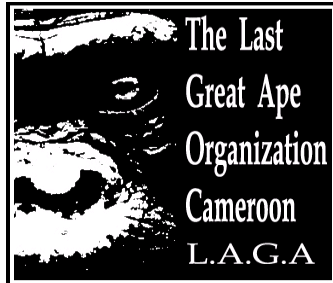


THE LAST GREAT APE ORGANIZATION, CAMEROON LAGA

SECOND SEMESTER REPORT JULY – DECEMBER 2023



Executive Summary

Many achievements were recorded in LAGA's collaboration with the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) despite several challenges posed during the period July to December 2023. These achievements were obtained in the fields of investigation, arrest, prosecution, media exposure, government relations and international activities. Focus was on the fight against the illegal wildlife trade; principally trafficking in pangolin scales and primates. The EAGLE network's Central Coordination Unit (CCU) continued to provide vital technical and organisation support that facilitated several operations resulting in the of arrests 9 traffickers.

9 major traffickers were arrested at a rate of one for every 20 days and 87% stayed behind bars from the day of arrest. 9 new cases were brought to the courts. 3 traffickers were found guilty and handed prison sentences, fines and damages during 8 court judgements passed. Damages amounted to some 19,701,000 FCFA (about \$39,402). awarded to Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF).

The EAGLE network achieved some good results as 47 traffickers were arrested across 6 countries. In order to provide a deterrent effect across the Network, 728 media pieces were published in national media.

The work of LAGA was supported by Wildcat, AVAAZ, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation (DSWF), Dutch Gorilla Foundation, Pangolin Crisis Fund, Prowildlife, Marchig Trust,

LAST GREAT APE ORGANISATION, CAMEROON (LAGA)
SECOND SEMESTER REPORT
July – December 2023

OVERVIEW

Investigations

- A total of 60 investigation missions (of varying lengths) were carried out in 6 regions.

Operations

- Operations were carried out in 3 regions arresting 9 major traffickers resulting in 9 court cases at a rate one every 20 days.
- Operations were on pangolin scales and primates including a chimpanzee, a drill and a mandrill.
- The rate of imprisonment of arrested offender stood at 87%.
- A chimpanzee trafficker was arrested, a chimpanzee rescued, 2 primate traffickers arrested with a mandrill rescued in August.
- 138 kg of pangolin scales were seized and 5 traffickers arrested.

Legal

- 9 new cases were brought to court. Many of the cases began during the period have not yet reached the prosecution stage but procedures are ongoing.
- 10 traffickers were found guilty and handed prison sentences, fines and damages. Damages amounted to some 19,701,000 FCFA (about \$39,402). awarded to MINFOF.
- 5 court judgements were passed during the 6-month period.

Media

- A total of 97 media pieces were produced in national media (radio, written press and internet) achieved at a rate of one media piece every two days.

Management

- The first semester report of 2023 was made available online.
- Recruitment was intensified with candidates selected and some tested.
- Focus was on maintaining high standards in every department and on improving recruitment for investigators.

External Relations and Policy

- Several meetings were held with MINFOF officials, the diplomatic community, national and international NGOs to discuss issues on collaboration, governance, wildlife law enforcement among others.

Strategic Highlights

- Operations were focused on several species but traffickers arrested were trafficking in pangolin scales and primates
- The strategic focus was ensuring investigations and operations were smoothly carried out despite challenges of diverse nature that were posed.
- A new round of recruitment targeting investigators with specific skills and competences was carried out.

- The CCU evaluated and provided strategic assistance to management to the operational and organisational functioning of the organisation.

EAGLE Activities

A total of 90 traffickers were arrested across 7 countries of the network during the semester. In order to provide a deterrent effect, 1,262 media pieces were published in national media across the network.

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Also available:

1. Annual Financial Statement 2023
2. First Semester Report 2023
3. Media archive – Excel database linked to recorded media pieces
4. Photo archive for media use

For copies contact email; eric@laga-enforcement.org

NARRATIVE REPORT

This report covers the period July to December 2023 and focuses on progress in the activities of each department, notably, investigations, operations, legal, media and management. It also includes a strategic overview and an analysis of the impact of operations on wildlife crime in Cameroon, relations with the Cameroonian government, non-governmental bodies and collaboration with international partners and non-enforcement initiatives that LAGA undertook.

1. Investigations

LAGA's investigation unit carried out 60 investigation missions in 6 regions of the country during the second half of the year. The focus was on running important investigation missions with high quality targets and building synergy with other government partners in fostering effective investigations. This was strictly supervised at the level of management and at the Central Coordination Unit (CCU). As has been the case over the last years, the collaboration with the Central Coordination Unit provided vital investigation support and guidance. New investigative strategies were put in place earlier in the year continued to strictly followed. Collaboration with other countries was effective and the department provided investigative support to some of them.

The recruitment was intensified with a couple of candidates interviewed and more efforts to enlarge the recruitment base were made This is aimed at recruiting investigators from some trafficking hotbeds and some with special skills.

The Head of Department and or his assistant met with some administrative, wildlife, customs and law enforcement officials at divisional levels to strengthen collaboration in the fight against wildlife law enforcement.

Number of Missions



Figure 1: Number of Investigations Missions per Month

2. Operations

LAGA and the Government of Cameroon carried out operations in 3 regions against 9 individuals resulting in 9 court cases at a rate of one every 20 days. Some basic and old investigation strategies were used to produce the operations and this resulted in getting two kinds of operations, the first against pangolin scales traffickers and the second against ape traffickers. Below are operations carried according to the various months;

In July, 2 traffickers were arrested in Nkoteng, Centre Region with 47kg of giant pangolin scales. The scales were from the endangered giant pangolin that was poached around the Sanaga River where they collaborated to obtaining the scales. The traffickers took steps to avoid arrest and used a motorcycle to move around. They transported the pangolin scales in a bag and moved hesitantly, conscious of the risks of their illegal business

An ape trafficker was arrested, a chimpanzee rescued and 2 more primate traffickers arrested with a mandrill in August, in Ebolowa, South Region. The ape trafficker was arrested while attempting to sell the chimpanzee. The animal had been chained and caged alongside a dog in the home of the trafficker. The little female was frail and aggressive and looked like she had suffered from trauma. The trafficker talked about trying to sell the chimp to a governor. The mandrill was spotted in the street by the arresting team. The trafficker was arrested as he tried to escape and a second detained at the police station when he showed up after police requested for his presence.

In September, 3 pangolin scales traffickers were arrested in Ntui in the Centre Region during two back to back arrests. 2 traffickers were arrested as they attempted to sell a bag of pangolin scales. A third trafficker was arrested immediately after he arrived in Ntui, where the arrest took place. He transported the pangolin scales on a motorbike from a nearby locality. They are well connected, at a significantly high level, to trafficking of pangolin scales in the area. They were known to some local law enforcement officials as traffickers and had links to smaller traffickers of pangolin scales. Wildlife trafficking is rife in the area that has historically been weak in wildlife law enforcement. Before a road was tarred and a bridge built over the Sanaga River, it was very difficult to access and wildlife trafficking was intense. The tide seems to be turning and couple of operations has been carried out in towns not too far away from the Sanaga River.

Finally, in November, a primate trafficker was arrested and young drill rescued in Yabassi, Littoral Region. The very young drill, an endangered primate, stressed and agitated, was tied with a rope in the waist. He kept the animal at his residence in a Yabassi. The trafficker, who works for the local city council, transported the cage with the drill on his bike. He was waiting for another supply of a baby primate that was killed when local poachers shot dead its mother.

Operations Table

<i>Number of Operations</i>	<i>Number of Traffickers</i>	<i>Contraband</i>
4	9	47kg giant pangolin scales, one chimpanzee, one mandrill, 91kg of pangolin scales, a drill

Figure 2: Operation Table



Figure 3: Case profile

3. Legal

A total of 9 new cases reached the court and the cases joined old cases that were scheduled, followed-up and tried in various courts. Some jail visits were organized. Very few court procedures came to the judgement stage and some very weak sentences were recorded amidst persistent challenges including the absence of lawyers for MINFOF during court procedures, the absence of MINFOF representatives who either do not have a letter of representation from the ministry or simply do not turn up in court and the administrative bottlenecks of renewing of the MoU with the ministry. In the light of these difficulties, up to 6 traffickers were acquitted by the courts and of the 10 traffickers who were found guilty by 5 court rulings only 3 were effectively given a prison sentence. This equally failed to meet the requirements of the law that stipulates a prison sentence of 1 to 3 years. We are taking the challenges seriously and working hard for remedies as our scope permits. Damages awarded to MINFOF during the court rulings stood at 19, 701, 000 FCFA. Encouragingly though, the rate of keeping the accused behind bars at the onset of the procedure stood at 87%.

A total of 53 missions were carried out of the Centre Region for follow-up of new cases and the creation and strengthening of relations with judicial authorities. Emphasis was on all the cases against the 9 pangolin scales and primate traffickers arrested during the period.

In July, The Dschang Court of First Instance discontinued the procedure against DJOUOTE Hubert following the death of the accused and found the accused FOSSO innocent and not guilty for lack of evidence. On the other hand, the court found the accused BOUNA Jean Valerie and MBE Jean guilty and sentenced them to pay 150,000 FCFA (about \$300) each as fine and 4,587,500 FCFA (about \$39,402) jointly as damages. They were arrested in Balessing on the 23/06/2023 for illegal possession of 3 leopard skins and a crocodile skin.

In October, The Akonolinga Court of First Instance found the accused EDIMA Martine, ANGOULA Paul, NYASUNG NUHUM MBENTE and ABADA Florence not guilty and acquitted them. They were arrested in Akonolinga on the 19/04/2022 for the illegal possession of 91,6kg of pangolin scales.

05/10/2023: The Yaounde – Centre Administratif Court of First Instance found the accused LOVET MBANWECK and MBOUOMBOUO ADAMOU and sentenced them to pay 200,000 FCFA (about \$400) each as fine and 13,355,000 FCFA (about \$2,671) as damages. They were arrested in Yaounde on the 29/10/2022 for the illegal possession of 180kg of pangolin scales.

In November, The Bafia Court of First Instance found the accused ANDELA EDZIGUI Maximin Junior, EMBOM Jean and ISSEKSEK Pascal guilty. ANDELA EDZIGUI Maximin Junior was sentenced to 2 months in prison and the two others to 6 months suspended sentences during 3 years. They were also ordered to pay 100,000 FCFA (about \$200) each as fine and 1,758,500 FCFA (about \$3,517) jointly as damages

The Nkongsamba Court of First Instance found the accused NGUEKENG Gilbert Pacôme and LAPA Dieudonné Gabri guilty. The court ruled that they should pay 3,000,000 FCFA (about \$6,000) each as fines and 150.000 FCFA (about \$300) each as court fees. They were arrested in Melong on 23/2/2022 for illegal possession of a leopard skin and a civet skin.

In December, The Yabassi Court of First Instance found the accused LAMBO Ruben Fabius guilty and sentenced him to 100,000 FCFA (about \$200) as fines and 31,950 FCFA (about \$62) as court fees. He was arrested in Yabassi on the 21/11/2023 for the illegal possession of a drill.

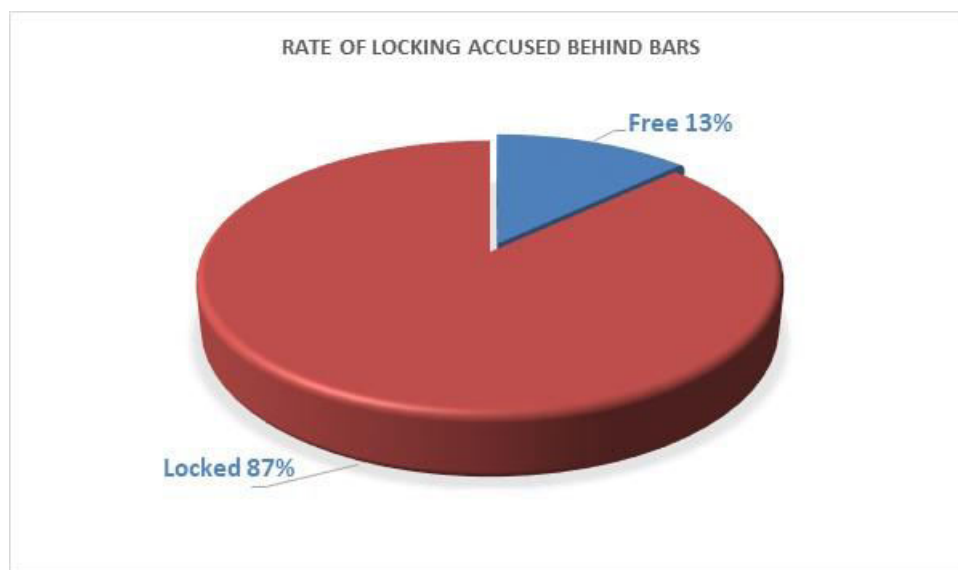


Figure 4: Rate of locking accused behind bars

4. Media

A total of 97 media pieces were produced and pushed into media including numerous articles in the media including radio, written press and the internet; achieved at a rate of one media piece per two days. July no media pieces were recorded due to low results from operations and court proceedings and in September the highest number was recorded. The failure to meet the targeted media output this year could be explained by the low number of arrest operation, few cases being processed at the court and the challenge faced by the media head to cover some activities due to a flailing health.

The various subjects focused on wildlife law enforcement including: The Nkoteng arrest of 2 traffickers with 47kg of giant pangolin scales, the arrest of three traffickers with a chimp and a

mandrill in Ebolowa, the dismantling of an international ivory ring in Gabon, the arrest of three traffickers with 91kg of pangolin scales in Ntui. the court hearing of 3 traffickers arrested with 78kg of pangolin scales in Makenene and the arrest of a city council worker with a drill

Quotes or interviews used in the various news stories and articles were from the Wildaid Central Africa Director, Ofir Drori EAGLE founder, Luc Mathot, the Director of AALF Gabon and Eric Tah, the Deputy Director of LAGA,

The distribution of Wildlife Justice Magazine continued. Wildlife Justice is a thematic journal that focuses on wildlife law enforcement and conservation issues.

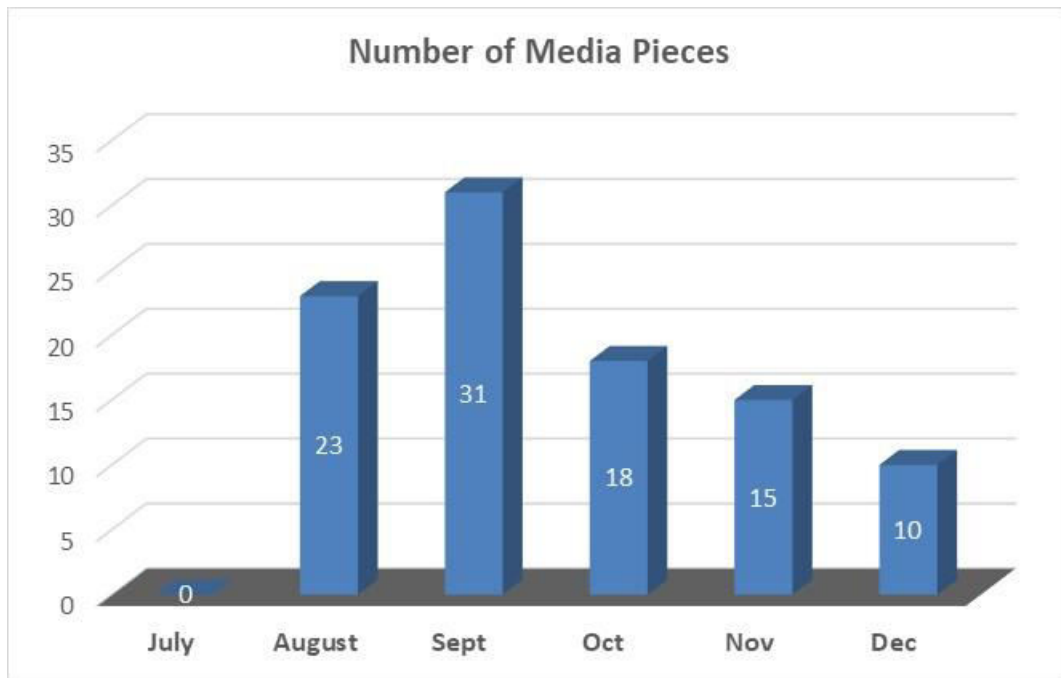


Figure 5: Number of Media Pieces Produced and Published

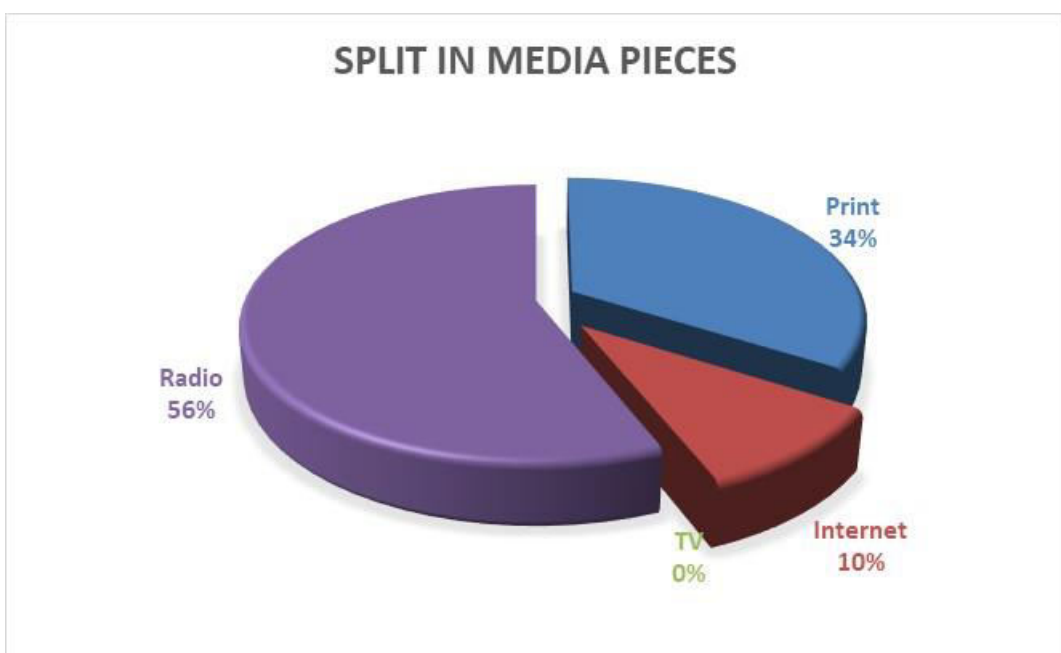


Figure 6: Split in Media Pieces

5. Management

Despite difficulties in ensuring adequate resources for the organisation, all the departments worked hard to improving on the results of the semester. The first semester report of 2022 was uploaded online. The electronic versions are available online on the LAGA website www.laga-enforcement.org. This is a result of teamwork involving all the departments in LAGA – Investigations, Legal, Media, Operations and Management.

Two regions of the country that are facing security problems continue to pose a challenge but plans have been put in place to quickly cover the regions once the situation on the ground improves.

Recruitment for the investigations department continued with one volunteer tested and released for lack of quality performances. Recruitment was also intensified in the media department and a volunteer tested and released. A legal adviser started their testing period.

An external audit by Moore Stephens was initiated and satisfactorily carried out with very good results.

6. External Relations and Policy

The Deputy Director held a meeting with two TRAFFIC officials to discuss pangolin conservation and the development of the Cameroon Pangolin Working Group.

The Deputy Director participated at an event to welcome new embassy officials of the Political and Economic Section of the US Embassy in Yaounde. He held brief discussions with the US Ambassador and the Second Secretary of the Japanese Embassy in Yaounde. Discussions focused on wildlife law enforcements and the fight against wildlife crime.

Accompanied by the Heads of the Investigation Department and the Legal Department, he held a brief meeting with the Centre Regional Delegate of Forestry and Wildlife on an operation against the pangolin scales trafficker.

The Deputy Director and the Head of the Legal Department held a meeting with the newly appointed Centre Regional Chief of Wildlife to strengthen collaboration in the fight against wildlife crime.

The Deputy Director and the Interim Director held discussions with two officials of the London-based Environmental Investigations Agency who were on a working visit to the country. They focused on wildlife crime and collaboration.

The Deputy Director held a meeting with three officials of the US Department of Justice to discuss challenges to environmental law enforcement in the country and to map out some areas of interests.

He held a meeting with the three officials of the French based conservation group Noe and discussions focused on collaboration in the fight against wildlife crime in South East of the country.

He held a brief discussion with the US Ambassador on strengthening collaboration in the fight against wildlife crime during an event at the US Residence. A presentation on the Sanaga Young Chimpanzee Sanctuary was done by her Director, Sheri Speede, during the event.

He, accompanied by the Heads of Investigations and Legal Departments, held a meeting with the Chief of Service in charge of wildlife crime at the Interpol National Central Bureau to strengthen collaboration in the fight against wildlife crime.

He participated at the event celebrating the King of England's birthday. He had brief discussions with some diplomats, the Vice President of the Senate and the Director of Customs on wildlife crime.

The Head of the Legal Department and legal advisers held several meetings with administrative, wildlife and judicial officials to strengthen collaboration and in some cases to discuss ongoing cases, build common strategies and strengthen collaboration.

7. LAGA and the EAGLE Network

LAGA's new model for NGO – Government collaboration establishing wildlife law enforcement, bringing about results with an innovative approach geared at changing the existing system and triggering a paradigm shift in the way NGOs tackle wildlife crime is being realised within the EAGLE network. The model is focusing on the prosecution of major traffickers, not the small-time poacher who is motivated by the city dwelling traffickers. This involves fighting head on the major obstacle to the application of the wildlife law in Africa – Corruption. LAGA's experience and model is currently operating within the EAGLE network that group 9 countries.

The replication of the LAGA model is also geared at taking cross section lessons outside of wildlife conservation; these include the fight against corruption, fostering activism, fight against child trafficking etc.

<http://www.laga-enforcement.org/Replication/tabid/166/Default.aspx>

The EAGLE network is now responsible for the replication activity of the LAGA model but LAGA continued assistance of young projects in the domain of investigation, operation, media and management. In this regard technical support was given to other EAGLE Network projects

8. Fostering Activism

All the activism fostering activities carried out by the LAGA family are online; this could be gotten at the LAGA website – <http://www.laga-enforcement.org/Actiwithvism/tabid/77/Default.aspx>

9. Strategic Overview of Wildlife Crime in Cameroon and Operations' Impact

Beyond the number of operations and their effectiveness, there is an even more important factor in evaluating LAGA's work – the strategic value of the operations and its impact on the illegal wildlife trade. In this regard, LAGA is choosing diversified operations, which carry an added value to expose and map the different angles of wildlife crime in Cameroon. Consequently, the LAGA-MINFOF work sheds light on the nature of illegal wildlife trade in the sub-region. The strategic focus over this period was on pangolin scales, ivory, primates and birds

9.1 Pangolin Scales

Over 138 kg of pangolin scales were seized from some 5 traffickers during the period. The illegal trade in pangolin scales is ongoing.: They represented the biggest group of traffickers arrested and

demonstrates the importance of not relenting efforts targeting pangolin scales traffickers as this is an illegal trade that can involve several kinds of traffickers. One the arrests saw only giant pangolin scales seized an indication of the increasing professionalism of the traffickers. The chain can be very long as the poor trafficker with just a few kilograms is being activated by the major traffickers handling hundreds of kilograms who are able to export or get in contact with exporters.

In July, 2 traffickers were arrested in Nkoteng, Centre Region with 47kg of giant pangolin scales. The scales were from the endangered giant pangolin that was poached around the Sanaga River where they collaborated to obtaining the scales. The traffickers took steps to avoid arrest and used a motorcycle to move around. They transported the pangolin scales in a bag and moved hesitantly, conscious of the risks of their illegal business

In September, 3 pangolin scales traffickers were arrested in Ntui in the Centre Region during two back to back arrests. 2 traffickers were arrested as they attempted to sell a bag of pangolin scales. A third trafficker was arrested immediately after he arrived in Ntui, where the arrest took place. He transported the pangolin scales on a motorbike from a nearby locality. They are well connected, at a significantly high level, to trafficking of pangolin scales in the area. They were known to some local law enforcement officials as traffickers and had links to smaller traffickers of pangolin scales.

9.2 Primates

Rescued primates are generally malnourishment, diseased and stressed. They arrive sanctuaries in very bad state and generally require fast measures to save them from death. The country is home to the mandrill and the drill, among other important primate species. The drill is rarely seen in trafficking circles in the country but once in a while a trafficker is arrested trying to sell lone. This is an indication of how very few drills may be remaining in the wild. A council worker was arrested attempting to sell one and the animal was rescued and taken to the Limbe Wildlife Centre that has special skills to taking care of drills,

An ape trafficker was arrested, a chimpanzee rescued and 2 more primate traffickers arrested with a mandrill in August, in Ebolowa, South Region. The ape trafficker was arrested while attempting to sell the chimpanzee. The animal had been chained and caged alongside a dog in the home of the trafficker. The little female was frail and aggressive and looked like she had suffered from trauma. The trafficker talked about trying to sell the chimp to a governor. The mandrill was spotted in the street by the arresting team. The trafficker was arrested as he tried to escape and a second detained at the police station when he showed up after police requested for his presence.

In November, a primate trafficker was arrested and young drill rescued in Yabassi, Littoral Region. The very young drill, an endangered primate, stressed and agitated, was tied with a rope in the waist. He kept the animal at his residence in a Yabassi. The trafficker, who works for the local city council, transported the cage with the drill on his bike. He was waiting for another supply of a baby primate that was killed when local poachers shot dead its mother.

10. Corruption and Wildlife Crime

LAGA has been an experiment field for methods of fighting corruption within a law enforcement and application process. All bribing attempts are documented into our case tracking systems. LAGA is not an observer of corruption; it was created to fight corruption, redirecting the positive pressures existing within the system, usually wasted in large conferences, to specific corruption attempts and the field realities that form corruption. These bribery attempts are vigorously fought against and

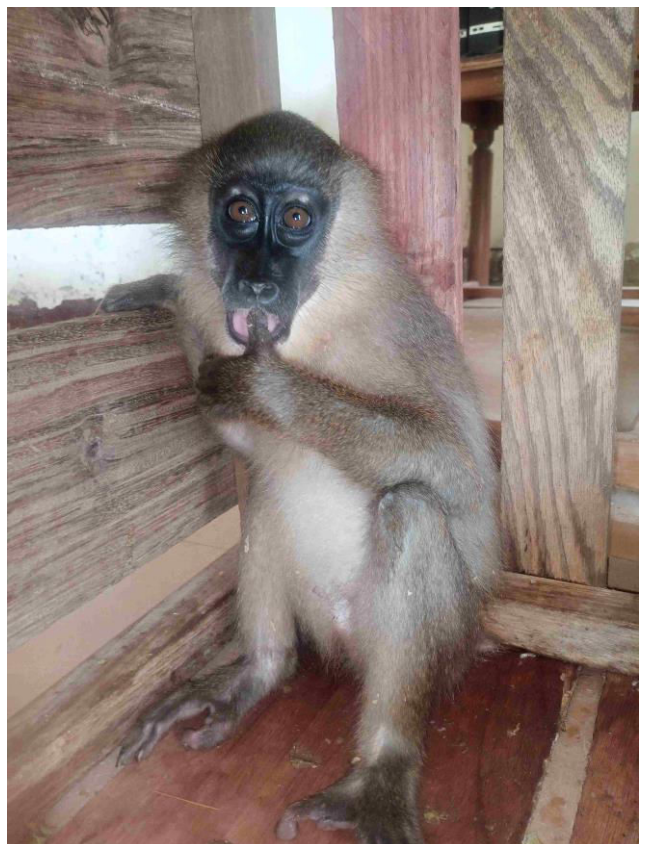
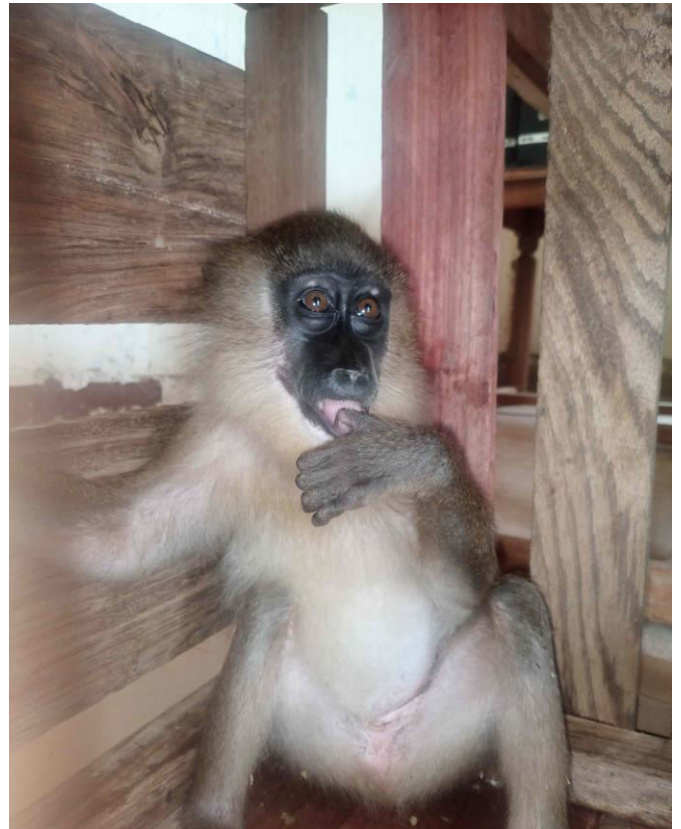
vehemently condemned by LAGA. LAGA is not a watchdog group and not created as an observer, it fights directly whenever corrupt practices or bribery attempts have been observed.

When a primate trafficker was arrested and as wildlife law enforcement officials were establishing the offence report at the delegation, they received calls and pressure from a mayor. He started by using traffic of influence toward the MINFOF agents to negotiate and find a way to stop the matter at their level. His attempts were simply pushed back.

Annex I - the Semester in Pictures



Two arrested with 47kg of giant pangolin scales in July



Council worker arrested for illegal possession of drill in November



Traffickers dragged to the police station following their arrest in September attempting to sell pangolin scales



Chained chimp was rescued from trafficker (left) who held the animal in very deplorable conditions at his residence in August in Ebolowa South



Arrested in August for illegal possession of a mandrill and at the wildlife office in Ebolowa waiting for the drafting of the offences

Annex II - Some media links

Several online news sites carried stories on the arrest of traffickers within the semester and here are some examples:

In September, Cameroon fact finder, a news site, published the arrest of 3 traffickers arrested with a chimp and a mandrill. Click the link below to get the full story:

<https://cameroonfactfinder.com/a-chimp-and-mandrill-rescued-from-traffickers-find-temporal-refuge-at-the-mvog-betsi-botanical-zoological-garden/>

In October, Cameroon fact finder, published the arrest of 2 traffickers with 91kg of pangolin scales in Ntui. Click the link below to get the full story:

<https://cameroonfactfinder.com/pangolin-increased-traffick-in-cameroon-puts-the-prized-anteater-at-risk/>

In November, Douala today, a news site published an article on pangolin and the trafficking of the species in Central African countries. Click the link below to get the full story:

<https://doualatoday.com/afrique-centrale-le-traffic-de-pangolin-genere-pres-de-419-milliards-de-f-cfa-par-an/>

In December, Alwihdainfo, a news site published the arrest of a city council worker with a drill in Yabassi in the littoral region. Click the link below to get the full story:

https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Cameroun-un-employe-de-mairie-arrete-en-possession-d-un-drill-a-Yabassi_a128415.html?fbclid=IwAR2ZkT2b6uWdAsrjQUxCsArb2o0BnXPvgXirr2OU9LI_IrBPLMJ5Yw8xOqE

Obituary

LAGA was hit by death in October with the passing away of one of its founding fathers, Julius Aunutenet. The LAGA family assisted in December at a solemn ceremony organised by the police in honour of the fallen hero.



The List of Cases Semester 1, 2023

The list of cases and details of specific cases are made available on demand. Please contact eric@laga-enforcement.org for further information.