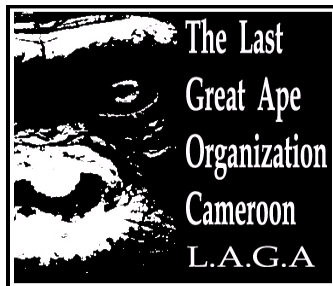


THE LAST GREAT APE ORGANIZATION, CAMEROON LAGA

FIRST SEMESTERREPORT JANUARY–JUNE 2023



Executive Summary

Many achievements were recorded in LAGA’s collaboration with the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) despite several challenges posed over this period. 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 in pangolin scales. The EAGLE network’s Central Coordination Unit (CCU) continued to provide vital technical and organisation support that facilitated several operations resulting in a number of arrests

4 traffickers were arrested and 50% stayed behind bars from the day of arrest. Accordingly, 4 new cases were brought to the courts. 10 traffickers were found guilty and 2 traffickers given prison sentences and ordered to pay fines and damages. A trafficker was given a suspended prison sentence for 3 years and 7 others were ordered to pay fines and damages. In total, the courts ordered the payment of damages totalling 86,188,000 FCFA (about \$172 768) to MINFOF. Media exposure was at a rate of 3 media pieces per week.

The EAGLE network achieved substantial results as 43 traffickers were arrested across 6 countries.

The work of LAGA was supported by Global Conservation, The Dutch Gorilla Foundation, ProWildlife, Wildcat Foundation , Marchig Trust, Lion Recovery Fund

LAST GREAT APE ORGANISATION, CAMEROON (LAGA)
SEMESTER REPORT
January - June 2023

OVERVIEW

Investigations

- A total of 46 investigation missions (of varying lengths) were carried out in 6 regions.

Operations

- Operations were carried out in 2 regions arresting 4 pangolin traffickers resulting in 4 court cases.
- The rate of imprisonment of arrested offender stood at 50%.
- 133kg of pangolins scales from all three species in the country, were seized:

Legal

- 4 new cases were brought to court. The cases began during the period have not yet reached the judgement stage but trials are ongoing.
- 10 traffickers were found guilty and handed prison sentences, fines and damages. Damages amounted to some 86,188,000 FCFA (about \$172 768). to be paid to MINFOF.
- 6 court judgements were passed during the 6-month period.

Media

- A total of 82 media pieces were produced in national media (radio, written press and internet) achieved at a rate of three every week.

Management

- The annual report of 2022 was made available online.
- An external auditing team completed a full audit of the organisation.
- 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

- The operational focus over this period was pangolin scales trafficking.
- The strategic focus was ensuring investigations and operations were smoothly carried out despite challenges of diverse that emerged early on at the start of the year.
- The CCU evaluated and provided strategic assistance to management, operational and organisational functioning.

EAGLE Activities

- A total of 43 traffickers were arrested across 6 countries of the network during this semester.

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Also available:

1. Annual Financial Statement 2022
2. Annual Activity Report 2022
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 January to June 2023 and focuses on progress in the activities of each department notably investigations, operations, legal, media and management, strategic overview of and the impact of operations on wildlife crime in Cameroon, relations with the Cameroonian government, non-governmental bodies, collaboration with international partners and non-enforcement initiatives that LAGA undertook.

1. Investigations

LAGA's investigation unit carried out 46 investigation missions in 6 regions of the country during this period. Activities were slowed down at the beginning of the semester due to several challenges that were gradually resolved. This accounts for the very low number of investigations carried out as compared to same period during the past years. Therefore, the number of operations carried out equally witnessed a significant drop. Some old strategies were revisited and adapted to suit present circumstances. Some old investigations were also revisited. Focus was nevertheless on several big and complex investigations which take a lot of time to lead to the operation stage.

Recruitment was intensified with some candidates interviewed but unfortunately, none met the required standards.

The head of the department and his deputy were all part of the operation team during all operations carried out during the first period of the year and this greatly boosted the operation capacity of the whole team.

The country continues to face a challenging security situation in some parts and investigations were not carried out in these regions. Plans have been put in place to fully cover these areas once the situation improves.



Figure 1: Number of Investigations Missions per Month

2. Operations

LAGA and the Government of Cameroon carried out operations in 2 regions against 4 individuals resulting in 4 court cases. Several difficulties encountered at the start of the semester accounts for the significant drop in the number of operations carried out. Pangolin scales trafficking was the prime focus during this period and all 4 traffickers arrested were found with pangolin scales.

In April, a trafficker arrested in Bertoua in the East Region with 55 kg of pangolin scales. He travelled from Diang; a locality some 41 km from Bertoua with the bag of pangolin scales strapped to his motorcycle. He was arrested when he arrived Bertoua and attempted to sell the pangolin scales. The operation came at the end of a long investigation that tracked and monitored the pangolin trafficker who is experienced in the illegal business. He activated a host of small traffickers in several villages, including Diang, Kapan, Kariol, Mbang and Molobo in the East Region, who supplied him with pangolin scales.

In May 3 traffickers were arrested in Makenene, Centre Region with 78kg of pangolin scales. They first travelled from Ndikinimeki, a nearby town, on a motorbike and arrived Makenene without the contraband. They were cautious and tried a number of tricks because they were fully aware of the illegality of the business. Two others returned to Ndikinimeki, mixed up the scales and parked it in a single bag that was transported on a motorbike. They were very knowledgeable in the illegal business and did everything they could to avoid arrest. Makenene is a popular resting spot for travellers plying the Yaounde, Bafoussam to Bamenda highway. The place is fast, intense with business littering the small town and this attracts all kinds of business including the illegal trade in wildlife species and bushmeat.

Operations Table

<i>Number of Operations</i>	<i>Number of Traffickers</i>	<i>Contraband</i>
2	4	55kg and 78kg of pangolin scales

Figure 2: Operation Table

3. Legal

A total of 4 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. A court gave sentenced a trafficker to 6 months in prison. He was arrested in April with 55 kg of pangolin scales. Damages awarded to MINFOF amounted to some 86,188,000 FCFA (about \$172 768). Most of the cases initiated within this period have not yet reached the judgement stage and the rate of keeping the accused behind bars at the onset of the procedure stood at with 50%

A total of 43 missions were carried out of the Centre Region for follow-up of new cases and the creation and strengthening of relations with judicial authorities. As a direct result of operations the missions were principally focused on the pangolin scales cases.

During the period 6 court judgements were passed with 10 traffickers found guilty and 2 of them given a prison sentence, a trafficker was given a suspended prison sentence and the remaining 7 were sanctioned to pay fines and damages.

In February, the Nanga-Eboko Court of First Instance found the accused ANDINGA NANGA Christine and OVANDANA Pierre Lafleur guilty and sentenced them to one month 10 days in prison and to pay 500,000 FCFA (about \$1000) each as fine. They were arrested in Nanga-Ebokoon the 15/12/2022 for the illegal possession of 120kg of pangolin scales.

In March, the Sangmelima Court of First Instance found the accused NDONO AFANG, EMVOUTOU, ADAMO Issah and TCHANGO Jules guilty. The court ordered NDONO AFANG Albert and ADAMO to pay 500,000 FCFA (about \$1000) jointly as fine, TCHANGO Jules and EMVOUTOU AFANG Mardoché to pay 100,000 FCFA (about \$200) jointly as fine. They were also ordered to pay 15,000,000 FCFA (about \$30,000) jointly as damages. They were arrested in Sangmelima on the 15/03/2022 for illegal possession of 5 ivory tusks.

In April, the Centre Administratif Court of First Instance found the accused BELUCHUKWU Oduche and OKALA NDENGUE Mathieu guilty and sentenced them to pay 200,000 FCFA (about \$400) as fine and 4,855,000 FCFA (about \$9710) as damages. They were arrested in Yaounde on the 15/10/2022 for the illegal possession of 66, 2kg of pangolin scales.

In May, In the MOHAMADOU Ibrahim case, the appeal court of Littoral overturned the lower court's decision with regards to the imprisonment, damages and the seized vehicle's fate. The Littoral appeal court fined him 12 months suspended sentences during 3 years, to pay the sum of 62,000,000 FCFA (about \$124,000) as damages and also ordered the confiscation of the ivory tusks seized and the vehicle used to transport them. He was arrested in Ambam on the 21/10/2020 for the illegal possession of 626kg of ivory tusks.

In June, the Ngoumou Court of First Instance found the accused ANTSIABOT MPAM Sandrine guilty and sentenced her to pay 2,500,000 FCFA (about \$5000) as fines and 2,500,000 FCFA (about \$5000) as damages. She was arrested in Mbankomo on the 27/09/2022 for the illegal possession of a live mandrill.

The Bertoua Court of First Instance found the accused ALONA HANS Augustin guilty and sentenced him to 6 months in prison and to pay 500,000 FCFA (about \$1000) each as fines. He was also sentenced to pay 1, 833, 000 FCFA (about \$3,666) as damages. He was arrested in Bertoua on the 14/04/2023 for the illegal possession of 55kg of pangolin scales.

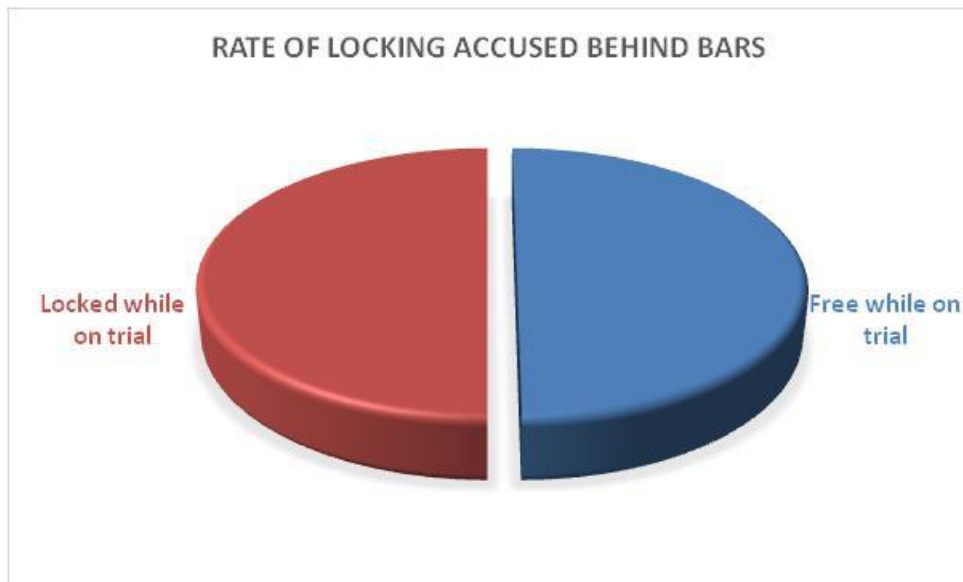


Figure 3: Rate of locking accused behind bars

4. Media

A total of 82 media pieces were produced and pushed into media including numerous articles in all media – radio, television, written press and the internet; achieved at a rate of three media piece every week. The drop in the number of media pieces could be accounted for by the low number of operations obtained during the semester. May recorded the highest number of media pieces and March the lowest

Subjects focused on wildlife law enforcement including the court hearing of three traffickers arrested with 120kg of pangolin scales in Nanga; the World Pangolin Day; the Yaounde arrest of three traffickers with 386 kg of pangolin scales; the Bertoua arrest of two traffickers with 45 kg of pangolin scales and the Makenene arrest of three traffickers with 78kg of pangolin scales.

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

No TV media pieces were published during the semester and efforts are being made to correct this discrepancy during the second part of the year.

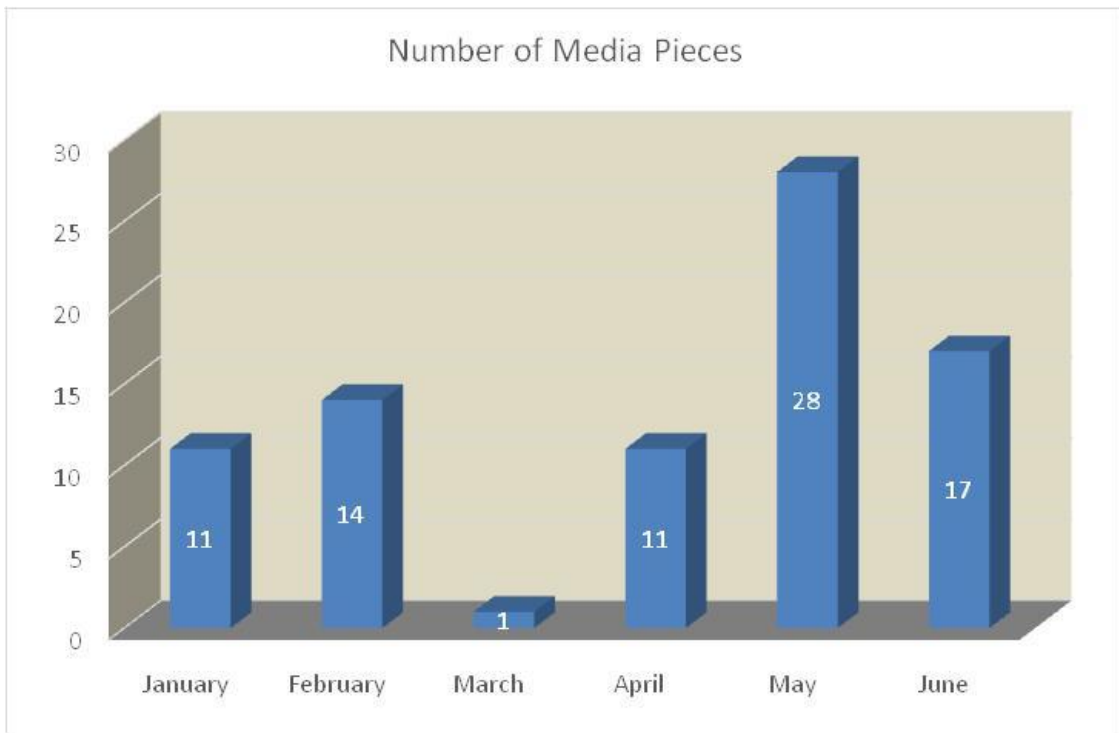


Figure 4: Number of Media Pieces Produced and Published

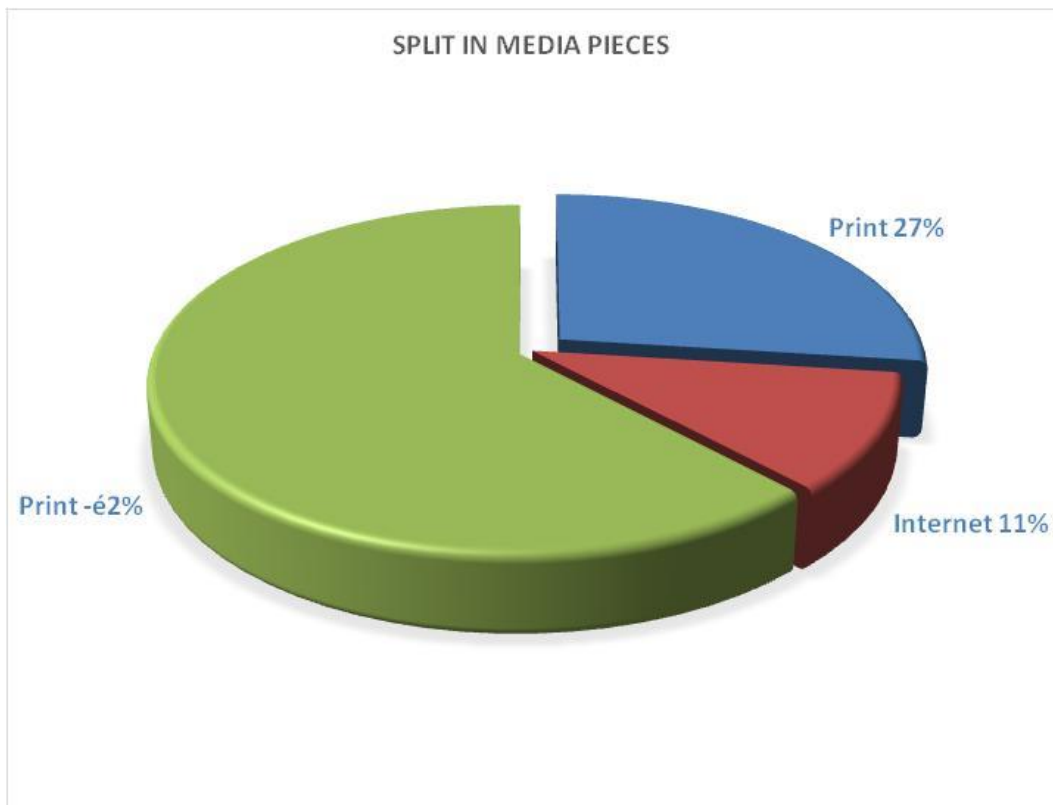


Figure 5: Split in Media Pieces

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 annual report of 2021 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 other regions of the country that are seared by 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.

The annual financial and activity reports of 2022 were successfully completed. The activity report was published online alongside the second semester report of 2022.

An audit session was carried out by Moore Stephens and management provided a professional and conducive work environment and accessibility to all necessary documents to the auditors who successfully carried out their activity.

Recruitment for the investigations department continued and some candidates were interviewed and unfortunately none of them stood up to the required standards.

A couple of thought-provoking sessions of presentations and debates for the LAGA team were organised to foster activism and leadership skills. A wide range of topics including activism were presented and debated. This initiative also aims at strengthening the capacity, unity and values of the LAGA family.

6. External Relations and Policy

The Deputy Director held a meeting with 3 officials from the US Departments of Justice and Agriculture to discuss wildlife law enforcement and illegal logging in the country.

He held a meeting with Lisa Hywood, Founding Director of Tikki Hywood Foundation, who was on a visit to Cameroon. Discussions focused on possible areas of collaboration to strengthen the fight against pangolin trafficking. The Director of Tikki Hywood Foundation – Cameroon was also in attendance.

He participated at a pangolin conservation planning workshop in Accra, Ghana, that brought together stakeholders in pangolin conservation. The workshop focused on producing a West African regional action plan for pangolin conservation to be validated and adopted by the range states and other pangolin conservation stakeholders. He was part of a panel on the role of law enforcement in pangolin conservation.

He participated at meeting at the US Embassy in Yaounde that included several conservation stakeholders. The meeting focused on presenting US Embassy environment programs to the conservation community. He had a brief discussion with the Deputy Chief of Mission during the event.

He participated at a workshop organized by TRAFFIC to train frontline wildlife officials working in several parks in the country. He did a presentation on the wildlife law enforcement process.

He participated at a celebratory event to mark the crowning of the King of England, on the invitation of the British High Commissioner.

The Deputy Director and the Head of the Legal Department held a meeting with the Advocate General Yaounde on issues related to the prosecution of wildlife traffickers and the strengthening of collaboration.

They also held a meeting with the newly appointed Regional Delegate of Forestry and Wildlife for the Centre Region to congratulate him on his appointment, discuss and lay down groundwork for a smooth collaboration and strengthen the fight against wildlife crime.

They participated at an event to raise the awareness of young people on the plight of the pangolin. They both did presentations on the pangolin and law enforcement against pangolin trafficking: The event that was organised by Wildaid brought together hundreds of students from some high schools in Douala, Littoral Region. It was part of activities to celebrate the 2023 World Pangolin Day

The Deputy Director participated at workshop to map out a collective understanding of the bushmeat sector as part of the process to developing a national bushmeat strategy. He did a presentation on the LAGA – Cameroon Government’s experience in wildlife law enforcement.

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 matters pending at courts handling wildlife cases.

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 to host training sessions in the country and in this regard, LAGA hosted a super volunteer who received training and participated in numerous field activities.

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/Activism/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, primates (chimps and a mandrill), ivory and leopard skins.

9.1 Pangolin Scales

Over 130kg of pangolin scales were seized from 4 traffickers during the period: The illegal trade has gained ground as compared to other products wildly trafficked because of the increased involvement of traffickers and law enforcements efforts have been consistently sustained against the trafficking, unveiling the extent of the trade. Pangolin trafficking has represented the biggest group of traffickers arrested during a couple of years now and demonstrates the importance of not relenting efforts targeting pangolin scales traffickers. Unlike ivory trafficking where you find highly specialised and top level traffickers dominating and controlling the trafficking, pangolin scales can bring every kind of trafficker together. The poor trafficker with just a few kilograms being activated by the major traffickers handling hundreds of kilograms as witnessed during the semester.

10. Corruption and Wildlife Crime

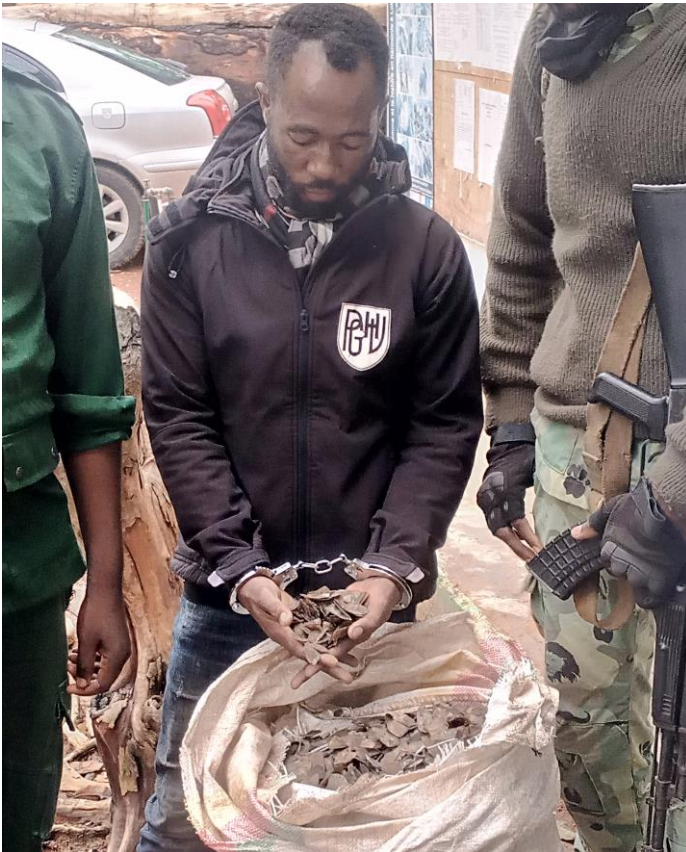
LAGA has been an experiment field for methods of fighting corruption within a law enforcement and application process. All bribing attempts are documented into our case tracking systems. LAGA is not an observer of corruption; it was created to fight corruption, redirecting the positive pressures existing 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.

This ongoing fight is directed towards issues that touch on corruption and bad governance. In May, 3 traffickers were arrested with pangolin scales and during the writing of the offence reports by the wildlife officials, they came under severe and relentless attempts of bribery to kill the prosecution and this was pushed back, paving the way for their prosecution.

Annex I – 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.

Annex II - the Semester in Pictures



Trafficker at the wildlife office ready for prosecution process to begin as officers weigh bag of pangolin scales



Traffickers pose with law enforcement shortly after the seizure of 78kg of pangolin scales at a popular bus stop town in Centre Cameroon



The Head of the Legal Department schools students on law enforcement protecting pangolins in the country at the Lycee Joss in Douala



The Deputy Director on panel discussions during West Africa regional workshop on pangolin conservation. Sitting in the middle is the Coordinator of EAGLE Cote d'Ivoire who was also present in Accra

Annex III- Some media links

Some online news sites carried stories on the trafficking and arrest, here are some examples:

January, Thampersmedia.net, an online news site published on the alarming rate of the disappearance of Cameroon's biodiversity. Illegal trade remains a major threat to the existence of totally protected species. Get more by clicking on the link below...

[Local Initiatives, NGOs Alarmed at Cameroon's Disappearing Biodiversity - Thampers Media](#)

In February, Stopblablacam, an online news site published a story highlighting the World Pangolin Day and the number of pangolins killed in 2022. The article equally underlined the need for celebrating the day. Get more by clicking on the link below...

<https://www.stopblablacam.com/societe/1702-10090-le-cameroun-sensibilise-le-public-pour-reduire-la-pression-sur-le-pangolin-menace-d-extinction>

In March the news site published the story of the arrest of three traffickers and the seizure of 78kg of pangolin scales at a popular place in the country known as Makenene. People stop there during their journey to rest and eat all kind of dishes including dishes with pangolin meat. Get more by clicking on the link below...

<https://www.stopblablacam.com/societe/2905-10600-especes-protegees-trois-personnes-interpellees-avec-78-kg-d-ecailles-de-pangolin-a-makenene>