

The Last Great Ape Organization – LAGA

March 2011 Report



Highlights

- **The biggest wildlife exporter in Cameroon arrested** following the establishing of a court case against him.
- **2 dealers sentenced to 10 months imprisonment** in Abong – Mbang, East Region for killing and dealing in elephant products.
- **PALF Investigator from the Republic of Congo** arrived for training in LAGA.

General

This month was marked by the arrest of the biggest wildlife exporter in Cameroon and the sentencing of 2 main dealers in Abong – Mbang.

In December 2007, an operation targeted the biggest wildlife exporter, and uncovered issues of complicity and corruption within the Ministry trying to export 720 parrots to Bahrain, an illegal destination. This again validated information we had before about the organized chain of complicity in the parrot trade and how white-collar criminals thrive on this complicity gaining a legitimate cover and eliminating the risk factor. The parrots' cases uncovered corruption at a very high level; insisting to tackle it got us many new enemies, threats, and warnings that we are "stepping on the wrong toes" and that it will send us on "a one way ticket out of Cameroon".

In a special corruption report LAGA submitted to the Minister we highlighted our evidence for the role played by a highly placed ministry official in collaborating with the offenders, issuing false declarations on CITES permits, and attempting to block our cases. The operation quickly intensified the backlash to our anti-corruption work alienating the ministry official in question and most of the involved officials in one side and LAGA and the Minister on the other. With the involvement of the British High Commissioner and other members of the diplomatic community the ministry official was removed. This in did not stop the wildlife trafficker in question and through more corruption and bribery, he succeeded to make the case file against him disappear and later in court, he claimed that no case was ever opened against him. This case file was re-built by LAGA, a warrant gotten for his arrest. He was arrested in Yaounde – Center and transferred to Douala – Littoral where the case against him was started following his arrest in 2007.

It should be noted that in 2009, LAGA received a strong letter of support from 7 Ambassadors as LAGA faced threats in line of their work in wildlife law enforcement and the fight against corruption. LAGA deals regularly with many threats – physical, political and legal. Basically this biggest wildlife dealer in Cameroon seems to have been trying to influence the court through corruption to put the LAGA Director behind bars as revenge and to escape justice after his arrest in 2007. But the debate that opened in court seemed to have little to do with reason or with law. The dealer lied under oath at least three times. Both the State Counsel and the Judge were unexplainably hostile. Nevertheless, the international community took quick and unprecedented action to stand by LAGA and the LAGA Director as no fewer than seven ambassadors signed a strong letter of support sent to the Minister of Forest, Minister of Justice and the Prime Minister. Afterwards, the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife wrote a strong letter of support himself. The Ambassadors stated in their letter that they have supported the Director and LAGA's work for a number of years and see the success in fighting wildlife trafficking as one of Cameroon's anti-corruption success stories.

A very good prosecution was obtained this month. The court of First Instance of Abong-Mbang sentenced 2 dealers to **10 months of prison term** and to pay \$2500 as damages each. They were arrested in Somalomo - East for killing and trading in elephant products. In another case, the Court of First Instance of Bangangte - West sentenced a dealer to 1 year of prison suspended sentence during three years and to pay **\$250 as damages**. He was arrested in Bangangte for detaining of 1 baby chimp and trying to trade in it.

Investigations

- **22 investigations** of varying lengths were carried out in **6 Regions** of Cameroon- West, South West, South, East, Littoral and Center.
- PALF Investigator from the Republic of Congo arrived to be trained in LAGA in the program for the exchange of Investigators in regional enforcement. Others are doing the necessary paperwork and the acquisition of traveling documents.
- Investigations led to a successful operation after targeting a main dealer in Yaounde – Center.
- Training of Investigators on operations procedure continued this month so that they could start to actively assist and help in controlling some operations in the field.
- Field tests continued with 1 new candidate as the department is experiencing a shortage in effective investigators.

Operations

1 operation was carried out this month against the biggest wildlife exporter in Cameroon.

- **01/03/11** – The biggest wildlife exporter arrested in Yaounde – Center and transferred to Douala after the case against him was rebuilt and a warrant issued for his arrest. He was first arrested in 2007 and this uncovered issues of complicity and corruption within the Ministry trying to export 720 parrots to Bahrain, an illegal destination. This again validated information we had before about the organized chain of complicity in the parrot trade and how white-collar criminals thrive on this complicity gaining a legitimate cover and eliminating the risk factor. The parrots' cases uncovered corruption at a very high level; insisting to tackle it got us many new enemies, threats, and warnings that we are “stepping on the wrong toes” and that it will send us on “a one way ticket out of Cameroon”. In a special corruption report LAGA submitted to the Minister we highlighted our evidence for the role played by a highly placed ministry official in collaborating with the offenders, issuing false declarations on CITES permits, and attempting to block our cases. The operation quickly intensified the backlash to our anti-corruption work alienating the ministry official in question and most of the involved officials in one side and LAGA and the Minister on the other. With the involvement of the British High Commissioner and other members of the diplomatic community the ministry official was removed. This in did not stop the wildlife trafficker in question and through more corruption and bribery, he succeeded to make the case file against him disappear and later in court, he claimed that no case was ever opened against him.

Legal

- LAGA Legal Department carried out **28 missions** out of Yaounde- Centre Region: 8 in Douala (Littoral), 2 in Edea (Littoral), 1 in Buea (South West), 1 in Limbe (South West), 2 in Abong-Mbang (East), 1 in Bertoua (East), 2 in Kribi (South), 1 in Ebolowa (South), 2 in Sangmelima (South), 1 in Bafoussam (West), 1 in Dschang (West), 1 in Bafang (West), 1 in Bandja (West), 1 in Foumban (West), 1 in Bangangte (West) and 2 in Bamenda (North West).
- Legal Department is following up cases in Abong Mbang – East against a network of 6 ivory dealers was busted in Bertoua – East. They were arrested for trying to trade in 20

elephant tusks, hiding the tusks amongst bags containing cocoa being transported from Bertoua to Douala – Littoral and the tusks were destined for Nigeria according to the arrested dealers. The operation was initiated by WWF. The dealers attempted to bribe the Ecoguards who arrested them with a sum of 2 million Frs. CFA (about \$4000. The operations comes after a presentations and meetings with LAGA Director on corruption, wildlife crime and the need for WWF to undertake more responsibilities on wildlife law enforcement based on the LAGA Model to Country Directors and some Project Managers of WWF CARPO in 2010. Emphases were also laid on the disconnection between the core values of WWF and the realities in the field. The Head of LAGA Legal Department had also done a presentation on “NGO-Government collaboration on wildlife law enforcement: Lessons for a better involvement of WWF in Central Africa”. WWF involvement in the replication process was also highlighted with various results and challenges, as well as orientations on what they can practically do in future with existing replication projects and in countries targeted for replication.

- There are **13 dealers behind bars during this month**: 7 in the East Region, 2 in the South West Region, 2 in South Region and 2 in the littoral Region.
- **31 cases** were followed up by the Legal Department this month.
- **29 cases** are scheduled and being trailed in the court this month.
- **Prosecutions**: 3 dealers were sentenced this month.
 - 08/03/2011: The court of First Instance of Abong-Mbang sentenced NTINA Victorien and Ambol Guy to **10 months** of prison and to pay **\$2500 as damages**. They were arrested in Somalomo for killing and trading in elephant products.
 - 29/03/2011: The Court of First Instance of Bangangte sentenced NJAFA Njamen Gislain to 1 year of prison suspended sentence during three years and to pay **\$250 as damages**. He was arrested in Bangangte for detaining of 1 baby chimp and trying to trade in it.
- 1 appeal was registered this month against the ruling given by the court of first instance of Bangangte in the matter of MINFOF Vs NJAFA Njamen Gislain.

Media front

- **10 media pieces** were produced and pushed through to radio and written press including: 7 written press materials (2 in English and 5 in French), 2 talk shows (1 in English and 1 in French) and 1 news flash in French. This low number of media pieces is due mainly to low operations.
- Guests include: Minister of Forestry and Wildlife, LAGA Legal Head of Department, and Coordinator of the Great Ape Project of USFWS.
- Subjects focused on wildlife law enforcement including; leopard skin dealers in Douala, baby chimp trafficker arrested in Bangangte, traditional ruler assist in wildlife law enforcement, Internet chimp trader arrest Buea and upcoming wildlife cases in court against wildlife defaulters.
- 3 media pieces in English, 7 in French making a percentage of 30% in English and 70% in French.

External Relations and Policy

- Series of meetings held by LAGA Director and volunteers to assist in the reorganisation of the WPE NGO after the death of its Founder.
- LAGA Director met with the Head of Follow-up Cell in the Ministry of Justice concerning the pending wildlife cases and ensuring good governance in the court

- Meeting between LAGA Director and Director of Voie Nouvelle NGO to discuss on several projects and the fight against corruption using LAGA's experience.
- World Bank meeting with LAGA Director to discuss wildlife law enforcement, replication of LAGA experience on other sectors, fighting corruption in the forest sector and beyond.
- The Director of Criminal Affairs in the Ministry of Justice had LAGA Director in audience and discussed the following: the pending wildlife enforcement cases and maintaining good governance in the court.
- LAGA Director had a meeting with volunteer on forest to discuss survey for REDD, FLEFGT and corruption in the forest sector.
- Meeting between the U.S Embassy and LAGA Director on wildlife law enforcement, anti corruption unit for forest crime.
- LAGA Director held meeting with WWF, EU, and WCS on Abong Mbang ivory court case and engaging the international community to ensure good governance in the legal system.
- Meeting between Global Witness and LAGA Director on wildlife law enforcement and anti corruption unit for forest crime.
- Meeting between CIFOR and LAGA Director on wildlife law enforcement and anti corruption unit for forest crime.
- The World Bank and LAGA Director held meeting on the project for Corruption Investigation Unit - Forest crime and wildlife law enforcement.
- LAGA Director met with WWF Netherlands to discuss on the concern of a better management of projects enforcement and the APT AID Principles of accountability and transparency.
- Meeting with Associate Analyst for Africa of Control Risks and LAGA Director concerning corruption and stability in Cameroon.

Management

- 1 Investigator arrived from PALF – Republic of Congo in the program for the exchange of Investigators in regional enforcement. Others are doing the necessary paperwork and the acquisition of traveling documents.
- LAGA experienced cash flow problems this month that slowed down the work and results of the LAGA's departments. Despite this problem, successful operations were carried out showing the commitment of LAGA staff to function with limited financial resources

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>.

Replication

During this month, LAGA helped other replication projects in the following:

- Working on the exchange of Investigators to produce the Protocol for Exchange, and communicating with other Project Coordinators to ascertain the smooth running of the program. This will continue during and after the exchange proper.
- Working on the Activity and Financial Reports of RALF, PALF and AALF, translating the reports from English to French and putting them on line.
- Website work done for PALF, RALF and AALF, page updated.
- Uploaded videos on PALF YouTube channel as a challenge for Naftali that it could be done and result gotten in just a day.
- Worked on slideshow for PALF website.

Finance

LAGA Expenditure by budget line for March 2011

1,445,950	Investigations	23 inv, 6 Regions	\$3,076.5
819,000	Operations	1 Operation against 6 subjects	\$1,742.6
2,636,385	legal	follow up 31 cases 13 locked subjects	\$5,609.3
1,145,615	Media	10 Media pieces	\$2,437.5
513,300	Policy & External Relations	Congo/CAR/Rwanda/Morocco/Holland/France/Isreal	\$1,092.1
988,900	Management	Coordination	\$2,104.0
1,188,143	Office		\$2,528.0
251,000	LAGA Family		\$534.0
8,988,293	TOTAL EXPENDITURE MARCH		\$19,124

LAGA Expenditure by donor for March 2011

AmountCFA	Donor	Amount USD
4,410,120	FWS	\$9,383.2
254,300	FWS-Replication	\$541.1
0	BornFree Foundation	\$0.0
1,657,430	Rufford Foundation	\$3,526.4
1,220,493	Neu Foundation	\$2,596.8
1,445,950	ProWildlife	\$3,076.5
8,988,293	TOTAL	\$19,124.0

THIS MONTH IN PICTURES



20 elephant tusks seized in an operation initiated by WWF in Bertoua – East Region where a network of 6 ivory dealers was busted. The dealers attempted to bribe the Ecoguards who arrested them with a sum of 2 million Frs. CFA (about \$4000). This operation follows a series of presentations and meetings with LAGA on corruption, wildlife crime and the need for WWF to undertake more responsibilities on wildlife law enforcement based on the LAGA Model. The LAGA Legal Department is following-up the cases in court.

Links of this month

- A well-known ivory trafficker of Senegalese nationality was arrested trying to illegally trade in 45 worked pieces of ivory – Congo National Television news broadcast. He was arrested in the Plateau market in Brazzaville known to be one of the main ivory supply points in West Africa with Chinese as the main customers. Trade in wildlife protected species is punishable by the wildlife laws governing the wildlife sector of Congo.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NaOuA73_hE

- A leopard skin dealer arrested in Republic of Congo, thanks to the PALF (Project charged with the Enforcement of the wildlife law, or Projet d'Appui à l'Application de la Loi Faunique) – Congo National Television news broadcast. He was arrested while trying to illegally trade in the skin.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVV5jLWkAc8>