

Central Africa Wildlife Law Enforcement Network

Monthly Regional Wildlife Law Enforcement Briefing – October 2012

Summary

This month was marked by LAGA winning The Duke of Edinburgh Conservation medal given by Prince Philip – the husband of Queen Elizabeth, traditional ruler contributing to wildlife conservation efforts in Cameroon; the start of GAPIN II in Gabon with the participation of AALF that saw the seizure of many wildlife products including worked ivory, shark fins, leopard parts etc.; and the observation of corruption following an operation on River Congo involving the driver of the President of the Republic of Congo; corruption was also witnessed with regards to the ostrich case pitting Cameroon's Ministry in charge of wildlife against an extremely influential and well known rich person (see Annex). Other arrest operations were carried out in Cameroon with the arrest of a dealer in live primates; and a dealer in crocodile skins arrested in Sibut – Central African Republic.

Last month, LAGA Director gave a presentation in Uganda on corruption during a GAPIN conference. GAPIN is the World Customs Organization's initiative for fighting wildlife crime, a "green Customs" initiative. At the end of the conference, it was agreed that concrete operations termed Operation Hope (GAPIN II) will be launched in the sub-region. This was effectively launched in Gabon and Operation Hope was carried out: Several confiscations were done including ivory (27 bracelets, 2 collars, 8 hankos, 2 combs, and 12 pendants), 6 leopard teeth, a bag of pangolin shells, 31 hippocampus and more than 40 kg of shark fins.

In Congo a dealer in chimp was arrested on River Congo on the way to Kinshasa, the captain and crew member of the boat transporting the chimp also arrested. Because of this arrest, the PALF team was threatened by the owner of the boat who tried to exploit his high level contacts in the government in order to corrupt and influence the legal proceedings. He claims to be the driver of the President of Congo; drove to the court supposedly with a vehicle from the Presidency, and tried to set the suspects free, an act that was combated by the PALF team and the forces of law and order. He went to the Presidency to request that the dossier be removed from court; the Presidency requested a meeting with PALF to clarify the details of the case and refused to throw out the case. The case is still on trial.

The convention of LAGA with the Government was renewed and signed by the ne Minister of Forestry and Wildlife. Also, a PALF investigator was trained in Yaounde under the regional exchange program.

CAMEROON – LAGA

- LAGA wins another award – The Duke of Edinburgh Conservation medal given by Prince Philip – the husband of Queen Elizabeth. It is the sixth in connection to LAGA's work thereby giving more credibility to and acceptance of LAGA's message and help in its long term quest to affect conservation in a meaningful way – activism, the fight against corruption, focus on big dealers as opposed to small poachers etc. The award was received by the LAGA Director and given the media coverage including BBC; he used it to pass the need of wildlife law enforcement message across and the total engagement of the LAGA family in this fight.
- The traditional ruler of Nsem in Bafut Subdivision of the North West Region, His Royal Highness Chief Mbonifor I has handed over a live baboon to wildlife officials of the North West Regional Delegation of Forestry and Wildlife as his contribution to the conservation efforts.

- A major dealer was arrested with a live primate while attempting to trade in it in Ebolowa - South. He has been keeping this one for almost a year and had sold many others before claiming that he has made a lot of money from trade in wildlife species.

CONGO – PALF

- The captain of a commercial boat and one of his crew members were arrested on the Congo River, at Brazzaville, for having allowed a chimpanzee to be trafficked. The trafficker of the chimp was also apprehended. Acts of traffic of influenced and corruption were observed whereby the owner of the boat with connections to the Presidency of the Republic of Congo tried to stop the case from reaching the courts, this was combated by the PALF team in the field.
- For further improvement and more operations in regional enforcement, training sessions continue to be held in Yaounde – Cameroon. An investigator arrived from PALF – Republic of Congo 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.

Action needed:

- Letter of Congratulations to wildlife authorities and forces of law and order for the arrest operations on the River Congo.

GABON – AALF

- Hope operation (GAPIN-II) was carried out at the airport with the customs and MEF with the technical and logistics support of Conservation Justice. Six MEF agents and two legal advisers were working permanently from 9-00 to 23-00 at the airport at three control posts: passenger airport, fret, postal office. Several confiscations were done including ivory (27 bracelets, 2 collars, 8 hankos, 2 combs, and 12 pendants), 6 leopard teeth, a bag of pangolin shells, 31 hippocampus and more than 40 kg of shark fins.
- AALF participated in a training session organized by French Gendarmes in Libreville. OPJ and magistrates were trained on legal procedures with regards to law enforcement.
- Following of a new case initiated by gendarmerie in Mekambo. Rifles have been confiscated from ivory poachers and dealers, who have been sent to the Makokou prison for a future court audience.
- Good collaboration was established with the public prosecutor of Oyem who has received from AALF interesting information. 10 rifles have been confiscated by MEF and the public prosecutor has ordered MEF agents to follow the judicial process which has been sent to the Oyem tribunal (with several problems and “mistakes”). Investigations confirmed complicity of three ecoguards.
- Training of ecoguards and MEF agents was carried out in Tchibanga on the penal processes, PV writing, wildlife law etc.

Action needed:

- Letter of Congratulations to the Customs for their participation and arrest operations in Libreville Airport during the HOPE operations (GAPIN II).

C.A.R – RALF

- A dealer in crocodile skins was arrested at Sibut, about 200km from Bangui with crocodile skins. This comes after a long period of no arrest operations and hopefully, more concrete actions will continue.
- A working session was held with the Head of Program WWF – CAR and a Customs Head of Mobile Brigade on collaboration and surveillance at the frontiers.

- RALF also participated in a working session on the re-writing of the code of protection of wildlife in CAR.

Action Needed

- The Project encouraged to continue with the focus on arrests and prosecutions.

CHAD

- LAGA continues to work with administrative and wildlife authorities, other NGOs and individuals to push for information on wildlife dealers and a general strategy to combat poaching and other wildlife crimes in Chad.

Action needed

- Letter of Recommendation to the Minister in charge of wildlife in Chad on immediate start of the replication of LAGA activities in that country so as to directly tackle problems there.

Guinea - Conakry

- GALF Coordinator was evacuated due to medical reason; normal activities will continue after her health is fully restored.

The Central Africa Wildlife Law Enforcement Network

The Central Africa Wildlife Law Enforcement Network is a collaboration created by the first wildlife law enforcement NGO in Africa and its replications in the region, fighting corruption to get the wildlife law applied.

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Annex I

A case involving trafficking of Ostriches by the establishment of Baba Ahmadou Danpoulo has become a real test for Cameroon's justice system to stand against corruption and traffic of influence. The MINFOF Minister has played a courageous positive role in this affair that till recently has been a great success story demonstrating change in the judiciary. Unfortunately an unprocedural ruling by the Supreme Court reversed the situation, in violation of national legislation as well as the CITES convention.

On May 16, 2012, two people were caught in Mamfe a small town at the border between Cameroon and Nigeria transporting eight ostriches from Nigeria. They didn't produce any document justifying such detention and transportation, that is a certificate of origin, and CITES export permit amongst others thus making such detention, circulation and importation completely illegal according to national and international wildlife laws. The ostriches were seized by the wildlife administration (MINFOF) accompanied by Customs and the people transporting them were arrested, auditioned on PVs and the case was brought to court in Mamfe where it is still pending. On May 19, 2012, the MINFOF Regional delegate ordered that the ostriches be kept in Limbe Zoo; they were finally transferred later on to Mvog Betsi zoo in Yaounde.

The people arrested are reported to be agents of Baba Ahmadou Danpoulo one of the wealthiest individuals in the country and a very influential person. He started using traffic of influence by contacting high level authorities of the South west region including the Governor in order to sabotage the procedure in Mamfe as well as the transfer of animals to Limbe. He introduced two court cases against the Regional delegate and Conservator of Zoo respectively in Buea and Limbe coupled by threatening them. Both cases were thrown out of court in a victory for justice. Throughout, the Minister stood firm withstanding many high level attempts to influence him.

On July 4, 2012, Danpoulo introduced a request at the Administrative Bench of the Supreme Court asking for the decision of the Regional delegate transferring the ostriches to Limbe not to be executed. The Supreme Court surprisingly ruled on his favor although the decision was already executed to months before and the judgment, irregularly, not citing any legal ground for the ruling. The ruling clearly contravenes the CITES UN convention for which Cameroon is a signatory.

The Minister of Forestry and Wildlife probably because of these irregularities stood firm and refused to execute the decision of the Supreme Court despite all the pressure put on him by Danpoulo through media and other means.

The MINFOF Minister could use the support of the international community strengthening his hands and letters are needed to be sent to the Minister of Justice seeking explanations concerning this ruling, vis-à-vis Cameroon's international obligations.

I ask you to both show the MINFOF that the international community appreciates his strong stand for complying with Cameroon's obligation towards an international convention as well as write to the Minister of Justice asking for more information about the case and its implications to the CITES UN convention.