

REPORT ON A JOINT MINFOF-CIRMAD TOUR OF THE TUBAH UPLAND FOREST, MARCH 2012

INTRODUCTION/RATIONALE

In the preface to the Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of the Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes ellioti*), Cameroon's then Minister of Forestry and Wildlife underlined that *"The plan identifies priority areas where targeted conservation efforts can improve the survival prospects of chimpanzee populations, and lists the actions that are needed to secure these populations for posterity"* and the authors of the plan also lament that *"... the fundamental lack of sufficiently protected areas and NGO partners to work with government to implement conservation activities in the region is an overriding concern for the continued survival of the chimpanzees."*

Even though in the said Action Plan the Tubah is clustered with Awing and ranked among the chimp habitats of the North West Region Chimpanzee Conservation Planning Unit for which further surveys are required in order to determine the chimp population, the Tubah Upland Forest (TUF), unlike the others has already had quite some conservation actions, with relative success.

The Tubah Upland Forest (TUF) measures 40km² and located about 10km east of Bamenda metropolis. It is host to some six (6) of the *Pan troglodytes ellioti*, according to a local volunteer monitor.

Answering the call the Regional Action Plan, the Centre for Indigenous Resources and Development (CIRMAD) has also initiated and undertaken some actions for the *in situ* conservation of the chimps in the Tubah Upland Forest, viz:

1. Mr. Achomuchi David, the Head Monitor of the defunct Chimpanzee Monitoring Programme of John DeMarco and Family, was encouraged and he joined CIRMAD as a member on 17/12/2011 so that we can work together as he continues as an unsponsored, volunteer monitor, making recordings as in the defunct programme.
2. We have since February submitted a chimp conservation project proposal to two potential donors titled: ***Enhancing the protection of the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee in the Tubah Upland Forest zone through a participatory approach that fosters government commitment and local community involvement***, as a project under CIRMAD's Participatory Project for the Protection of Chimpanzees (PAPPro-Chimps)
3. On the 27th March 2012 we undertook a joint MINFOF-CIRMAD mission with the Chief of Forestry and Wildlife Post – Tubah to the Tubah Upland Forest (after an official request).

This report is of that joint trip of local MINFOF and CIRMAD officials.



At a marked TUF boundary tree



Tubah Upland Forest in its galour



Deep inside TUF

TEAM CONSTITUTION

- 1) Madam Akweck Regina Che (MINFOF-CFWP-Tubah)
- 2) Mr. Liyong Emmanuel Sama (CIRMAD-Coordinator/Organizer)
- 3) Mr. Kahdzefee Jude-Thaddeus Nsai (CIRMAD-S.G/Rapporteur)
- 4) Mr. Achomochi David (CIRMAD- Member/Field Guide)

NB: Two members of the Moslem Youths Environmental Protection Club whose leader is a founding member of CIRMAD, were to be in the team but they were late to the meeting venue (3 Corners Bambui).

REPORT PROPER

After joining the Chief of Forestry and Wildlife Post – Tubah at the Bambui 3 Corners we headed together for Finge-Bambui and met Mr. Achomochi David, our field guide. Upon advice we paid a courtesy call on the Chief of Finge before setting off for the chimp habitat. After 2 hours of trekking, with a stop at the Finge catchment tank, we came to the boundary of the Tubah Upland forest below the area known locally as Ndong-lfu above which was a scenic waterfall.



Note taking during a rest



A scenic waterfall



Another feature of TUF

CONCRETE SIGNS OF CHIMP PRESENCE

Despite the above cited threat to the important wildlife habitat, we found satisfactory evidence of the presence of the endangered great apes, viz:

- 2 chimpanzee nests of 2 weeks old (as our guide/chimp monitor could determine)
- Clean chimpanzee trails in 2 different locations
- Feeding signs of the chimp under pear trees
- 3 more chimp nests of about 1 month old.



A nest of the P. t. ellioti



A chimpanzee trail

ECOTOURISM POTENTIAL

The Tubah Upland forest has all it takes to be a protected area because in the more forested areas we found scenic bird nests, pristine dead logs and majestic, tall trees, besides the “Machete Blade” Cave renown for being a big habitat of bats.

Due to time constraints and poor camera batteries we couldn't visit it during this first trip. It shall be our first destination in the next rip in the second quarter of 2012.



TUF is rich in birdlife and other ecotourism potentials

A THREATENED CHIMP HABITAT

Besides some hunter's trails we encountered other threats later in the day when we came across a vast grassland portion of the forest where fallen logs were smoldering in an area of about a hectare, almost all covered with a carpet of ash after a fresh bushfire.



MINFOF Chief in fire-damaged zone



The remains of a reptile



Monitoring the effects of bushfire?

CONSTRAINTS

Our main constraint was the lack of a GPS unit for recording coordinates of features and sightings during the trip, as we are yet to acquire one.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES

While awaiting feedback from donor organizations already approached, we shall continue our PAPPro-Chimps activities with:

1. A curtsey visit to the Traditional Council of Kedjom Keku (Big Babanki) which has a new shrine and other developments in their zone of TUF, for community collaboration.
2. A second trip to Ndong-Ifu and other areas of the Tubah Upland Forest to record new chimp nests reported by our monitor and to assess the ecotourism potential of the “Machete Blade” Cave of bats. We wish to do the trip preferably with some staff of the Divisional Delegation of Forestry and Wildlife for Mezam.

3. Voluntary awareness raising on the endangered *Pan troglodytes ellioti* in the North West Region.

CONCLUSION

- ❖ Our goal of confirming the known presence of the *P. t. ellioti* in the Tubah Upland Forest was attained because henceforth we will be using the picture of a chimpanzee nest we took ourselves in the habitat.
- ❖ The joint MINFOF-CIRMAD trip was a moral booster to the voluntary chimp monitor, considering that a few months after he joined CIRMAD we were able to accompany him in the field.
- ❖ The trip was also a demonstration of to the local people that, despite the end of the DeMarco Family's Chimpanzee Monitoring Programme, which was remarkable for its scholarship to science students, there was still institutional conservation concern for the endangered great apes.

The field trip was the first of planned quarterly trips to the chimp habitat until the chimpanzee conservation project proposals which we have tabled to some donor bodies materialize and enable us to be active on the ground, together with local MINFOF. In this way we of CIRMAD hope to be a steadfast local partner in the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of the Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes ellioti*).



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