

Chapter 8

A rapid survey of the mammals of Boké Préfecture, northwestern Guinea

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SUMMARY

We surveyed three sites in the Boké Préfecture from April 22 to 10 May 2005 to assess the biological diversity of mammals in the region. Using tracks, sound and visual observations, and camera phototraps we confirmed the presence of 11, 12 and 16 mammals in Sites 1, 2 and 3 of Boké Préfecture, respectively. In total, we confirmed the existence of 18 mammals in these forests. The three sites are under immense pressure from slash-and-burn, and are all over-exploited for bushmeat. At Site 3, Boullère, bushfires were not uncommon. Large mammals such as pigs and duikers were only rarely directly observed. The major threat has been slash-and-burn farming, plantation agriculture (i.e. palm oil, banana) and bushmeat hunting. Our results show that Sites 1 and 2 are relatively not biologically significant for conservation of large mammals. Site 3 however has more contiguous forest and offers good opportunities for conservation of large mammals.

INTRODUCTION

Mammals play an important role within forest ecosystems. The Guinean Forest Hotspot has the highest diversity of mammals in the world with an estimated 551 species known to occur (Myers 1998, Bakarr et al. 2000). Although endemic species are low, the forest is still important to the global conservation of mammals (Sayer et al. 1992, Kingdon 1997, Mittermeier et al. 1999) and is one of the two highest priority regions in the world for primate conservation. The conservation of large mammals in Upper Guinea remains a daunting challenge and the populations of large mammal species are decreasing at an alarming rate.

In review of 26 papers, Barnett and Prangley (1997) listed 190 species of mammals for Guinea. None of the papers covered the species of the Boké Préfecture, as very little ecological information exists for this region. The majority of mammalogical field studies in Guinea have been conducted in Mount Nimba and complemented by studies in adjacent areas of Liberia and nearby Sierra Leone (Barnett and Prangley 1997). IUCN (1988) gives a partial list of mammals recorded from Mount Nimba and lists ten species as threatened for Guinea. Though large mammals such as Bongo (*Tragelaphus euryceros*) and endemic carnivores such as Johnston's civet (*Genetta johnstoni*) and Liberian mongoose (*Liberiictis kuhni*) are known from small populations in Guinea (Barnett et al. 1994b; Rosevear 1974; and Coe 1975), Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire; large mammals have not yet been systematically surveyed. In the order Artiodactyla, two threatened duikers in the genus *Cephalophus* (*C. jentinki*, and *C. zebra*) and the small Royal antelope, *Neotragus pygmaeus*, are endemic (Kingdon 1997) reinforcing the importance of the Upper Guinea "hotspot" as a conservation priority.

Some of the large mammal species are either threatened or endangered as a result of hunting for bushmeat and habitat loss (Oates 1986, Lee et al. 1988, Bakarr et al. 2001). Other important large mammals include the Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*). The forest elephants in Taï are considered to be priority baseline populations for West Africa (IUCN 1990).