Chapter 12

A rapid survey of large mammals from the Atewa Range Forest Reserve, Eastern Region, Ghana

Moses Kofi Sam, Kwaku Oduro Lokko, Emmanuel Akom and John Nyame

SUMMARY

Large mammals were surveyed at three sites in the Atewa Range Forest Reserve from 7 – 23 June 2006. Altogether, 22 species were recorded with 12, 14 and 15 species observed from Atiwiredu, Asiakwa South and Asiakwa North respectively. Of the species recorded, Pel's flying squirrel (*Anomalurus pelii*) is listed as Near Threatened, Yellow-backed duiker (*Cephalophus silvicultor*), Black duiker (*Cephalophus niger*), Bay duiker (*Cephalophus dorsalis),* Maxwell's duiker (*Cephalophus maxwellii*) and Royal antelope (*Neotragus pygmaeus)* are listed as Lower Risk/Near Threatened, and West palm squirrel (*Epixerus ebii*) is listed as Data Deficient on the IUCN Red List. In addition to these species of international conservation concern, the African civet (*Civettictis civetta*), African palm civet (*Nandinia binotata*), Long-tailed pangolin (*Uromanis tetradactyla*) and Yellow-backed duiker (*Cephalophus silvicultor*) are nationally protected in Ghana. Interviews in selected fringe communities indicated that there could possibly be four other mammal species present in the reserve while five others could be locally extinct. Many illegal activities, especially related to hunting, were recorded during our assessment. It was also noted that deforestation along trail lines being constructed for mineral exploration and occasional illegal farms could be a significant factor affecting the conservation of large mammals in Atewa.

INTRODUCTION

At a time when deforestation is accelerating across Africa, survey information is particularly important for assessing and monitoring the long-term effects of habitat changes. Research and monitoring must anticipate the changes that lie ahead so that wildlife managers can prepare themselves. The challenge for biologists is not only to preserve species and representative biological communities for posterity, but also to conserve ecosystems that are large enough to continue providing the natural products and services that are essential for human communities.

As in many other countries in West Africa, wildlife resources in Ghana have dwindled drastically over the past few decades. This has largely been attributed to the growth in human population and poor enforcement of the country's wildlife laws, which combined has resulted in a virtually uncontrolled bushmeat trade, posing a major threat to biodiversity in general and to wildlife resources in particular. Consequently, many of the country's wildlife species such as duikers (forest antelopes), porcupine, tree pangolin, bare-headed rock fowl, forest elephant and primates have become threatened. Current estimates suggest that at least 20 of the larger mammal species in the forest zone of Ghana are globally threatened (Ntiamoa-Baidu 1987).

The large mammals of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve (Atewa) make an interesting case study for several reasons. The forest reserve belongs to the Upland Evergreen Forest type which is quite restricted in Ghana, with only one other example, Tano Ofin Forest Reserve, in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The uniqueness of the terrain and micro-climatic conditions therefore predispose the reserve to many interesting fauna and flora.

During this survey, our aim was to investigate the large mammal (mammals larger than bats) population of Atewa using Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) survey methods. Measuring biodiversity is a difficult, expensive and time-consuming task (Hawksworth 1995), and