

Project Update: February 2015

My team and I received funding from the Rufford Foundation to implement the project: ***Survey and Conservation of Pohle's fruit bat in the Eastern Region of Ghana***. The Upper Guinean forest of Ghana (Atewa Forest Reserve) is among the most important biodiversity hotspots in the world but has hugely been devastated through human activities such as logging, farming and mining. Bats are among the various wildlife species being threatened by these disturbing activities. Therefore, there is an urgent need to protect these unique animals. To conserve this species and other bats, this project surveys for bats with focus on this species in the Atewa Forest Reserve in the Eastern Region, engages in habitat restoration, conservation education and stakeholder dialogue.

Output 1: Meeting with stakeholders

A stakeholder consultation meeting has been held with the traditional authority including the assemblyman, chiefs and elders of Sagyimase, one of the fringe communities of Atewa forest reserve. They acknowledged key threats to bats and their habitats and also deliberated on how such threats could be halted. Some of the proposed solutions participants suggested were intensification of forest protection by government and also sanctioning of individuals who fell trees illegally within the forest.

Output 2: Community Interviews and questionnaire administration

Focus group discussion has been held with farmers and hunters in the community to ascertain their perception about bats. Again, Questionnaires were administered to some selected members of the community.



Plate 1: One of the team members interviewing a member of the community

Output 3: Community sensitization

Community sensitisation and education has been carried out in Sagyimase, a farming community around the Atewa forest reserve. The people were sensitised and educated on the importance of bats, the challenges they are facing and the need to conserve them and their habitats. The people contributed very well to the discussion. Some of the members were awarded with project t-shirts for their participation.



Plate 2: Participants in a group photograph with the Bat team.

Challenges facing the project

Since the inception of the project, the team has had a myriad of issues to deal with. Among these issues are:

1. Ebola Scare

Since February 2014, the issue of Ebola scare has become a great concern for politicians, civil society and researchers worldwide. Fruit bats are believed to be a major carrier of the virus. Since the outbreak of this deadly disease, people have been advised to take precautionary measures to stop the spread and contraction of the disease. As a result of this, the Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Health issued a statement banning individuals from handling wild animals including bats. This has affected our project by delaying our field activities since we were awarded this grant. Also, it served as a barrier for us to get individuals to volunteer on the project.

2. Delay in supply of equipment

Some of our equipment has still not gotten to us since shipping them to Ghana has become a difficulty for our partners in Germany. We expect to get them by middle of March, 2015 when they come to Ghana. We hope to receive especially our canopy netting equipment to improve our chances of finding our target species which we are yet to record from ground netting.

Next steps

Going forward, we hope to receive all our equipment before our next field visit. Due to challenges encountered, our project is likely to extend beyond the 1-year schedule which was anticipated. For the next few months ahead, the team will continue to sample the forest and also intensify our education to include video shows.