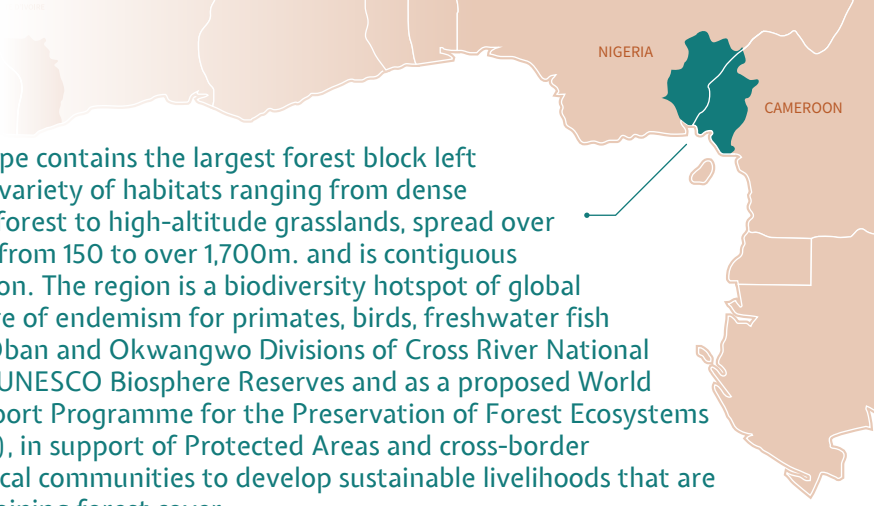


CROSS RIVER



The Cross River landscape contains the largest forest block left in Nigeria, with a wide variety of habitats ranging from dense rainforest to montane forest to high-altitude grasslands, spread over an altitudinal gradient from 150 to over 1,700m. and is contiguous with forests in Cameroon. The region is a biodiversity hotspot of global significance and a centre of endemism for primates, birds, freshwater fish and amphibians. The Oban and Okwangwo Divisions of Cross River National Park are recognised as UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and as a proposed World Heritage Site. The Support Programme for the Preservation of Forest Ecosystems in West Africa (PAPFor), in support of Protected Areas and cross-border collaboration, helped local communities to develop sustainable livelihoods that are compatible with maintaining forest cover.



Legend

- Water stream
 - Major road
 - International border
 - Administrative boundary
 - Agricultural concessions
- Conservation areas**
- Cross river PAPFor Landscape
 - National Park
 - National Park (proposed)
 - Forest Reserve/Wildlife Sanctuary
 - Community forest

Protected areas

NIG	Cross River National Park	National Park	3,640 km ²
NIG	Mbe Mountains	National Park	100 km ²
NIG	Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary	Wildlife Sanctuary	100 km ²
NIG	Afi River Forest Reserve	Forest Reserve	380 km ²
NIG	Cross River South Forest Reserve	Forest Reserve	350 km ²

Main habitats

- Lowland Guinean forest
- Sub-montane forest
- Montane forest
- High altitude grassland

Main threats

- Agricultural encroachment
- Hunting for the bushmeat trade
- Logging
- Road development

Protection targets

- 19 species of primates including Cross River gorilla, Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee, drill, Preuss's red colobus and Preuss's monkey.
- Forest elephants in Oban and Okwangwo.
- More than 470 bird species, including at least 10 globally threatened species: the yellow-casqued hornbill, mountain saw-wing, Cameroon montane greenbul, grey-headed greenbul, green-breasted bush-shrike, Mount Kupe bush-shrike, Crossley's ground thrush, white-throated mountain babbler, Bannerman's weaver, and grey-necked rock fowl
- Sub-montane and montane forests. In Okwangwo there is an unbroken altitudinal gradient from 150m to over 1,700m. Such forests are important local watersheds.



PAPFor Programme

Project starting date: December 2019

Project end date: March 2024

Initiative of the WAEMU and ECOWAS Commissions funded by the 11th European Development Fund for support to conservation landscapes in West Africa.

Implementation

The PAPFor programme in Cross River State was implemented by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in collaboration with the National Park Service and Cross River State Government.

Partners

Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning

Federal Ministry of Environment, specifically the National Park Service and the Federal Department of Forestry and Wildlife

Cross River State Government including Cross River State Forestry Commission, Ministry of International Development Cooperation

Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria

Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

SOME CONSERVATION TARGETS



The sub-montane and montane forests of Cross River National Park

The region bounded by the Cross River in Nigeria and the Sanaga River in Cameroon is considered an important center of plant diversity due to its speculated isolation during the Pleistocene era. The ecotone of unbroken and little-disturbed forest from 150m to 1,700m is rare in Africa and an important feature of the Okwangwo Division of Cross River National Park. Protection of these forests on the slopes of Cross River National Park is essential to maintain a continuous flow of safe and sustainable water supplies for local communities.

Forest elephants

Over the past century, forest elephants *Loxodonta cyclotis* have declined across most of their range and were recently classified by IUCN as “critically endangered”. As a result of hunting and habitat loss, only a few small groups of forest elephants survive in Nigeria today. Cross River National Park contains two important forest elephant populations in Oban and Okwangwo (contiguous with Takamanda National Park in Cameroon). Forest elephants are highly frugivorous and are instrumental in dispersing many tree species.

A hotspot of primate diversity

Despite continued hunting pressure the primate fauna in particular is remarkably diverse, with 19 species present: Cross River gorilla, chimpanzee, drill, red colobus monkey, putty-nosed guenon, mona guenon, red-capped mangabey, red-eared guenon, crowned guenon, Preuss’s guenon, Talbot’s needle-clawed galago, Allen’s galago, Demidoff’s galago, Thomas’s dwarf galago, potto, angwantibo, vervet monkey, patas monkey and olive baboon. Four of these species are endemic to the region and seven others are represented by endemic subspecies.

The PAPFOR programme in Cross River State, implemented by the Wildlife Conservation Society, worked closely with the National Park Service and Cross River State Government. It also collaborated with the USAID-funded project Watershed Protection for Safe and Sustainable Water Supply and various civil society organisations.



THE CHALLENGES

Approximately 120 000 people live within the landscape. Their traditional livelihoods are largely dependent on subsistence farming, hunting and the gathering of non-timber forest products. Levels of poverty are relatively high.

Challenge 1: Agricultural encroachment

The deforestation rate in Cross River is one of the highest anywhere in the world, mainly driven by subsistence agriculture and the practice of shifting cultivation, whereby smallholder farmers clear small plots of forest each year to plant crops such as cassava, banana, plantain, and cocoa. Large scale conversion of forest for commercial agricultural plantations (notably palm oil, rubber, and pineapple) has also significantly impacted the region. Although some of the state's forest reserves have been heavily degraded, Cross River National Park has remained relatively intact due to legal protection provided by the federal government. However, fragmentation of the landscape threatens important habitat corridors essential for the conservation of elephants, gorillas, and other large mammals.



Challenge 2: Hunting for the bushmeat trade

Hunting to supply the commercial bushmeat trade is widespread and wildlife populations across much of Cross River State have been largely extirpated outside of the national park and other protected areas. Bushmeat is a highly valued commodity in Nigeria and the bushmeat trade has already decimated populations of large mammals in the forests of Cross River State. Most hunting occurs to supply the commercial bushmeat trade, rather than for subsistence use, and most species sold are rodents and duikers (indicating depletion of larger game species). Unfortunately, there is little or no control of the bushmeat trade and even species that are supposed to be fully protected by law, such as elephant and chimpanzee, may be sold as bushmeat.

Challenge 3: Logging and Forest Loss

Although a state-wide ban on logging was introduced in 2009 it has been largely ineffective, and logging is widespread across Cross River State. Such levels of exploitation are clearly unsustainable, and continued forest loss threatens local watersheds and livelihoods – through reduced water security, soil stabilization, and reduced resiliency to climate change – further exacerbating levels of rural poverty.



KEY RESULTS

Protected Area Management

The PAPFor programme enabled the Wildlife Conservation Society to support patrols of Cross River National Park by rangers from Nigeria's National Parks Service. Over two years, the project supported 321 anti-poaching patrols park, leading to the arrest of 177 offenders for illegal logging and hunting. Over the course of the programme, 16 poachers were put behind bars. More importantly, the rate at which patrols encountered metal traps was reduced by over 87%, from 0.85/km in 2021 to 0.11/km in 2023.



Environmental education

The programme expanded its network of conservation clubs in schools surrounding Cross River National Park in Nigeria from 72 to 172. Awareness-raising activities, including school visits, film screenings and teacher training, were stepped up. As a result, the clubs now have more than 12 000 enthusiastic schoolchildren, who are passionate about wildlife conservation and are developing a sense of environmental responsibility.

Community governance and livelihoods

The bush mango (*Irvingia spp*), known in Nigeria as 'ogbono', is a prized food for wildlife and humans and is an important source of income for women in forest communities in the Cross River region. Over 90% of the bush mangoes consumed and sold in the Cross River region currently come from the forest, with only a small proportion harvested on plantations. Unfortunately, unsustainable harvesting methods contribute to deforestation and reduce food sources for wild animals such as forest elephants and Cross River gorillas. The programme trained 1,700 women in Cross River State in the sustainable cultivation and harvesting of wild mango, which provides them with a sizeable income. Since 2018, WCS has distributed 11,045 bush mango seedlings to women for planting on farmlands. In addition, 60 women's groups, 23 of which have been formally registered as cooperatives with the Corporate Affairs Commission, were established with WCS support to collectively grow mangoes in a more sustainable way.



Meanwhile, cocoa, the main source of income for local farmers in the landscape, is also one of the main causes of deforestation. This degrades watersheds and threatens the viability of essential wooded corridors for Cross River gorillas and forest elephants. Over 2 years, the PAPFor project created 32 new nurseries in communities surrounding the park to raise 195 732 improved cocoa plants. In exchange for the seedlings and a support programme from WCS, each farmer signed a 'conservation contract' and agreed to limit the expansion of cocoa into forest areas. Close monitoring of cocoa plantations to ensure traceability is an important part of WCS's work in the landscape.

www.papfor.org/-Cross-River-



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