

REGIONAL NEWS

Regional coordination to update data on around fifty protected areas

In collaboration with the Observatory for Biodiversity and Protected Areas in West Africa (OBAPAO), the Regional Coordination is launching a campaign to collect information on protected areas across all landscapes covered by the programme, from Senegal to Nigeria.

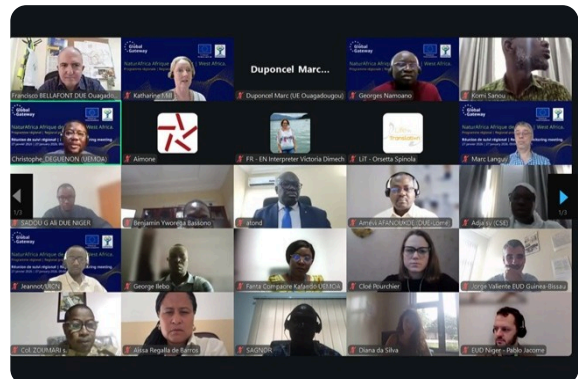
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Community forests: study under way to assess the situation in West Africa

When well-implemented, community forests offer states the opportunity to achieve conservation goals while providing direct and indirect income to local populations in ways that other types of protected areas often find more difficult to deliver. (Image: Mbe Mountains. © WCS)

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First NaturAfrica West Africa regional monitoring meeting

Nearly 60 people took part in the programme monitoring meeting on 27 January. Organised by the WAEMU Commission, the virtual meeting enabled national ministries and agencies responsible for protected areas, EU delegations, landscape operators and other stakeholders to discuss the programme's progress.

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Assessment of valuable natural resources available around Niokolo Koba National Park, Senegal

NaturAfrica project partner, Nébédjay, an NGO, worked with local communities to identify and locate the natural resources available on their territories, as well as the threats and opportunities for their development, with the aim of drawing up an inventory of the natural resources available around Niokolo Koba National Park. Plus, news on conservation and governance activities in this landscape.

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Tai – Grebo-Krahn – Sapo: two meetings advance discussions on a future cross-border memorandum of understanding

The eighth meeting of the bilateral steering committee for cross-border cooperation in the Tai – Grebo–Krahn – Sapo (TGKS) forest complex between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia was followed at the end of 2025 by a meeting of the Transboundary Law Enforcement Technical Committee (TLETC, pictured right).

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Cross River, Nigeria: supporting community conservation and local governance in Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary

WCS is extending a community conservation model already successfully applied in the Mbe Mountains – where poaching has declined and Cross River gorillas are thriving – to the adjacent Afi Mountain Nature Reserve.

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In W and Pendjari parks in Benin, cooperatives have received a boost to their production capacity

In the second half of 2025, two major achievements benefited local communities: the donation of agri-food processing equipment to five cooperatives (for processing paddy rice into parboiled rice and soybeans into soy cheese) and the rehabilitation of 13 manual boreholes.



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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Pangolins in West Africa

What do you know about pangolins – and how many species can be found in our region?

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REGIONAL NEWS

The regional coordination team is updating data on some 50 protected areas in West Africa



Although protected areas form an important part of the NaturAfrica West Africa programme, it should be noted that many of them are still poorly documented, particularly in global reference sources such as the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA) and the Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness (GDPAME).

To this end, the NaturAfrica West Africa Regional Coordination team is working closely with the Observatory for Biodiversity and Protected Areas in West Africa (OBAPAO) to better document the status of protected areas, in partnership with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC).

Within this framework, our team is setting up a campaign to collect information on protected areas across all the NaturAfrica West Africa programme landscapes, from Senegal to Nigeria, between February 2026 and February 2027. This represents around 50 protected areas. Beyond the objective of supporting states and the WCMC in updating the global database, the aim is to contribute to a future document on the status of protected areas in West Africa. This contribution will take the form of technical data sheets on protected areas that can be published online and shared in digital format, or even printed in some cases.

National administrations, operators and other stakeholders will be invited to collaborate on this initiative starting in March 2026. We will keep you informed of the progress of this initiative in our upcoming newsletters!

Community forests: a study underway will provide an overview of their situation in West Africa



The creation of protected areas such as national parks or wildlife sanctuaries is becoming increasingly difficult against a backdrop of declining and even disappearing natural areas in favour of other development activities, and community empowerment as part of decentralisation policies. However, as states have committed to protecting larger parts of their territories (in line with the 30x30 target of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework), the creation of community forests offers them opportunities to achieve conservation goals while better responding to the aspirations of their populations. When effectively implemented, community forests guarantee direct and indirect forms of income that other types of protected areas can find more difficult to offer.

Community forestry or community forests involve local communities in the sustainable management of their forests and in sharing the benefits of forest resources. Through a participatory approach, communities identify areas that will be dedicated to different uses, which are recorded in a management plan.

Community forests are often integrated into the landscape, with specific functions: forest corridor, buffer zone, or natural resource reserve to reduce pressure on protected area resources. Although they vary greatly in size from one country to another, they are of great importance to the conservation and natural resource governance objectives that are at the heart of the NaturAfrica programme.

As part of NaturAfrica West Africa, a study is being conducted on the status of initiatives to establish community forests in nine countries where the programme is active. Among other things, it aims to compare the legal and institutional frameworks of the countries; identify established community forests, the support programmes dedicated to community forests and any evaluations; and identify the main obstacles to setting them up or improving their management in West Africa. During their work, the consultants undertaking the study will liaise with resource persons in the nine countries and collect legal and regulatory texts, as well as studies, with a view to achieving the objectives of the short-term technical assistance mission.

(Image: a meeting with Gaura community, which manages a community forest in the NaturAfrica Gola-Foya landscape, Sierra Leone.)

First regional monitoring meeting of the NaturAfrica West Africa programme



Nearly 60 people attended the first monitoring meeting of the NaturAfrica West Africa regional programme on 27 January last. Convened by the WAEMU Commission, the half-day virtual meeting provided an opportunity for national ministries or protected area agencies, EU Delegations, landscape operators and other stakeholders to discuss progress of the programme, which began in late 2023. Christophe Deguenon, for the WAEMU Commission, and Marc Duponcel, for the EU Delegation in Burkina Faso, co-hosted the meeting.

A **technical progress report** up to 31 December 2025 was shared in advance and formed the basis for the meeting sessions, which covered progress to date and future plans of the NaturAfrica regional programme, whose phase 1 is due to be followed by phase 2 from 2027.

In phase 1, the **8 landscape projects in West Africa** are Niokolo-Koba-Badiar-Boé (Senegal, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau); Gola – Foya (Liberia and Sierra Leone); Monts Nimba (Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia); Tai – Grebo Krahn – Sapu (Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia); PoMoCo (including PoNaSi) (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire); W – Arly – Pendjari in Bénin; Gadabedji (Niger); and Cross River (Nigeria). With five contracts already in place, the remaining 3 should commence by June 2026.

Three regional studies were undertaken in 2025 by the Regional Coordination: (1) a comparative analysis of collaborative and cross-border management approaches in the West Africa landscapes; (2) the compilation of a database on European Union-funded regional programmes in West Africa; and (3) an assessment and analysis of the political, legal, institutional and administrative framework for the management of the national parks Niokolo Koba in Senegal, Badiar in Guinea, and Boé in Guinea-Bissau.

Initiatives planned for 2026 include:

- an analysis of the 'community forests' approach in West Africa;
- the collection of information on main protected areas in the landscapes (phases 1 and 2) to update the global database on protected and conserved Areas (WDPCA);
- a comparison and harmonisation of biomonitoring methods (forest and savannah ecosystems); and
- support to implementing partners on collecting data through field surveys of local communities.

It was explained that **performance of the regional programme** is measured by a framework established by the WAEMU Commission. This will be a key reference tool for future regional monitoring meetings.

The **meeting outcomes** included a call on EU Delegations to renew efforts to finalise phase 1 contracts by June 2026; for national protected area authorities and ministries, EU delegations and landscape operators to maintain open communication channels and share project documents; and for operators to attend to core indicators including providing for the costs needed to cover the associated activities.

LANDSCAPE NEWS

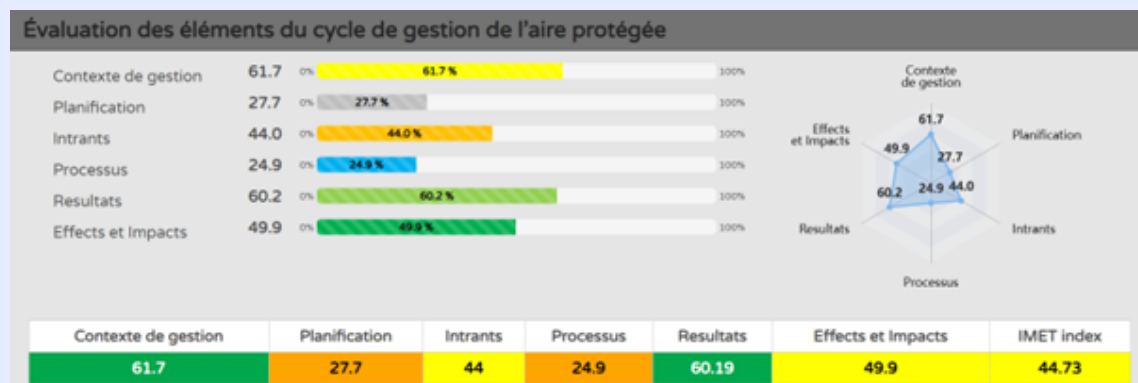
Niokolo-Koba Badiar Boé (NKBB) landscape

Conservation: Badiar National Park analyses the effectiveness of its management using the IMET tool

From 9 to 12 December 2025, a workshop was held to assess the management effectiveness of Badiar National Park (BNP) in the Koundara region of the Republic of Guinea, using the IMET (Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool). The objective of the participatory exercise led by the Guinean Office of National Parks and Wildlife Reserves was to assess the park's performance and make recommendations for improving its management.

Management effectiveness was assessed in terms of the six elements of the World Commission on Protected Areas management cycle, namely management context, planning, inputs, process, results/outputs and effects/impacts.

The assessment of the overall management effectiveness of the BNP for the 2025 financial year gave a score of 45%, significantly higher than the 23% scored in 2024.



Green economy: Launch of an assessment of valuable natural resources available around Niokolo Koba National Park

In collaboration with local communities and stakeholders, an assessment was initiated with the aim of establishing an inventory of natural resources available around Niokolo Koba National Park. This work was carried out by NGO Nebeday, a NaturAfrica project partner in the landscape working with landscape operator IUCN.



Community members in Samal village take part in the assessment. (© Nebeday)

It is based on participatory and collective intelligence tools called interactive models, in which local communities identify and locate the natural resources available in their territories, as well as the threats and opportunities for their development. During this assessment, valuable forest products were identified. At this stage, 27 villages have already been covered in the Kedougou region.

Natural resources governance. Niokolo-Badiar, a transboundary biosphere reserve in the making between Guinea and Senegal, combining biodiversity and sustainable development



Meeting with municipal authorities of Koumbia (© IREG)

The Guinean Institute for Environmental Research (IREG) has carried out a wide-ranging inclusive consultation mission with the administrative, technical and local authorities of the prefectures of Gaoul and Koundara and NGOs operating in the field around the Badiar Biosphere Reserve.

The creation of a Niokolo-Badiar transboundary biosphere reserve is a strategic and innovative response, in line with the principles of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. This model aims to reconcile biodiversity conservation, sustainable socio-economic development and support for scientific research, education and environmental monitoring, within a framework of participatory governance and regional cooperation. By promoting synergy between conservation and development, the Niokolo-Badiar Transboundary Biosphere Reserve will contribute not only to the protection of a shared natural heritage, but also to the ecological, social and economic stability of the region, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the environmental commitments of both Senegal and Guinea.

With the support of the European Union, IREG, in collaboration with the Guinean Office of National Parks and Wildlife Reserves and the Senegalese National Parks Directorate, aims to continue discussions in order to compile the dossier.

Consultations initiated by IREG to this end took place in January 2026 with the aim of gathering the opinions, expectations, contributions and recommendations of stakeholders in order to strengthen cross-border coordination, identify priority issues and contribute to the development of shared management mechanisms adapted to the realities on the ground.

A total of 84 people were involved in the discussions, from the two prefectures covering two urban municipalities, eight rural municipalities and two NGOs working in the field.

Those consulted emphasised the importance of inclusive governance, effective cross-sectoral coordination and the active involvement of local communities in order to ensure the ecological, social and economic sustainability of the future Niokolo-Badiar transboundary biosphere reserve. The consultation laid the foundations for a territorial consensus on the project, based on a progressive, inclusive and integrated approach that reconciles the imperatives of biodiversity conservation with socio-economic development needs.

Ultimately, the administrative, technical and local authorities and NGOs working in the field in the prefectures of Koundara and Gaoul welcomed the relevance and timeliness of the initiative in light of the environmental and socio-economic challenges facing the region. They indicated their willingness to support the various stages of implementation of the project to create a transboundary biosphere reserve between the Republic of Guinea and the Republic of Senegal.

The next step will be to consult the Senegalese authorities in the regions bordering Niokolo Koba National Park.

Tai – Grebo Krahn – Sapo landscape

8th meeting of the bilateral steering committee for transboundary forest landscape cooperation in the Tai –

Grebo-Krahn – Sapo forest complex



Members of the bilateral steering committee, including Rudolph J. Merab Sr., FDA Director General (centre)

The Taï - Grebo-Krahn - Sapo (TGKS) forest landscape spans the countries of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire and includes the Sapo National Park (SNP), the Grebo-Krahn National Park (GKNP), and the Proposed Kwa National Park (PKNP) on the Liberian side, and the Taï National Park (PNT) and Cavally Nature Reserve (CNR) on the Ivorian side. Known for its important ecological role, it is characterised by a high rate of endemism in both its fauna and flora. Unfortunately, despite its value, the landscape is threatened by various human pressures (poaching, illegal mining and farming).

The 8th meeting of the bilateral steering committee for transboundary forest landscape conservation in the Taï - Grebo-Krahn - Sapo (TGKS) forest complex was held in July 2025, funded by the European Union (EU) as part of its financial support for the NaturAfrica TGKS project being implemented by the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation (WCF). Since a key pillar of the project is 'Inclusive and transboundary governance', the meeting provided an opportunity to strengthen transboundary collaboration and exchanges, as well as for constructive discussions and efforts to improve cross-border law enforcement support.

The Ministry of the Environment, Sustainable Development and Ecological Transition (MINEDDTE) and the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) co-chaired the meeting on behalf of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, respectively.

The meeting generated a renewed momentum for consolidating transboundary cooperation between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. The discussions resulted in four key achievements:

1. Revival of the memorandum of understanding (MoU): The meeting reopened negotiations to finalise the long-pending MoU between the two countries. The FDA was tasked to review the draft MoU and the finalised and validated version of the MoU by both parties must be available no later than May 2026, during the next steering committee meeting.
1. Revision of the steering committee's composition: members agreed to revisit and finalise the committee's composition, an issue that had remained unresolved since the previous session.
2. Agreement on urgent joint actions: the meeting highlighted priority interventions, particularly addressing the massive migration of farmers from Côte d'Ivoire into Liberia and reinforcing joint surveillance of the Cavalla River, a critical transboundary ecosystem under increasing pressure.
3. Follow-up mechanism: WCF, in collaboration with the Mano River Union (MRU) & Flora & Fauna (F&F) Liberia, will ensure systematic follow-up and reporting on the implementation of the committee's recommendations.

The committee also revised the composition of its structure, designating voting and non-voting members as follows:

- **Voting members:**

- **Liberia:** Forestry Development Authority (FDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Liberia Land Authority (LLA), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice.
- **Côte d'Ivoire:** Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and Ecological Transition (MINEDDTE), Ministry of Water and Forests (MINEF), Ivorian Parks and Reserves Office (OIPR), Ministry of Interior and Security, Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.
- **Observers (non-voting members):** Mano River Union (MRU), Foundation for Parks and Reserves of Côte d'Ivoire (FPRCI), European Union (EU) Delegation, Fauna & Flora (F&F), and Wild Chimpanzee Foundation (WCF). Additional observers may be identified as needed, not to exceed 10 (5 per country).

A revised urgent action matrix was agreed, with 4 action points identified as follows:

- **Finalisation of the Memorandum of Understanding:** It was decided to update the existing draft agreement to reflect current realities, with the goal of having a final, validated version by May 2026, facilitated by the WCF, Fauna & Flora, and MRU.
- **Establishment of a technical law enforcement committee:** In response to problems related to illegal gold mining and migration on the Cavalla River, this transboundary committee, composed of 10 members from each country, will be responsible for proposing a surveillance plan and an agreement on law enforcement.
- **Development of activities:** A working group will be established to review development activities to improve local communities' awareness of existing projects. Another exchange programme will be set up between OIPR and FDA agents to strengthen capacity and knowledge sharing.
- **Conduct regular capacity building:** Implementation of exchange programmes (workshops and/or field activities) between agents of the OIPR and of the FDA as part of regular capacity building.

The next steering committee meeting is planned for May 2026, which should accelerate joint efforts to strengthen Cavalla River surveillance and overall transboundary management.

Additionally, the official launch ceremony of the EU-funded NaturAfrica TGKS project took place at the end of Day 1 of the Bilateral Steering Committee meeting. It was attended by Conservateur Général Adama Tondossama, General Director of the OIPR, Hon. Rudolph J. Merab Sr., Managing Director of the FDA of Liberia, as well as other members of the Bilateral Steering Committee, high-level representatives from Liberian government institutions, and invited dignitaries from both sides of the border.



8th TGKS Steering Committee Meeting in progress

Transboundary law enforcement technical committee

Following meetings in 2018 and 2019, the Transboundary Law Enforcement Technical Committee (TLETC) met on 15 and 16 December 2025 to discuss the Taï-Grebo-Krahn-Sapo transboundary landscape (TGKS) between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. The meeting was facilitated by the Wild

Chimpanzee Foundation (WCF), the NaturAfrica programme's implementing partner in this landscape.

In the face of intensifying migration flows related to cocoa farming, the rise of illegal gold panning and various environmental trafficking that accelerates deforestation, strengthening law enforcement in the TGKS area has become a top priority.

To this end, the meeting made it possible to define the axes of a future cross-border memorandum of understanding. Priority measures aim to curb the degradation of Liberian forests, regulate gold panning on the Cavalla River, and dismantle illicit trafficking networks

Pending the signing of the protocol, the meeting made it possible to measure the challenges and opportunities for the implementation of a transboundary agreement in the other NaturAfrica landscapes.



Participants at the TLETC, Abidjan, in December 2025

Cross River landscape, Nigeria

Strengthening community conservation and local governance of Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary



Meeting with forest management committees in Buanchor community

Based on its work in the Mbe Mountains in Cross River State, southern Nigeria, since 2001, landscape operator the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has developed a successful model of community conservation that recognises local rights and ownership. The Conservation Association of the Mbe Mountains was established in 2007 to represent the nine communities surrounding the mountains. Since its creation, levels of poaching have declined, and Cross River gorillas are

thriving. With support from the EU NaturAfrica initiative, WCS is extending this community conservation model to the adjacent Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary.

Communities surrounding Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary are playing an increasingly central role in natural resource governance. Recent efforts have focused on building structured, community-led systems to improve land-use management, curb illegal logging and hunting for wild animals, and strengthen stewardship of critical forest and watershed habitats.

Designed as a locally governed platform for conservation decision-making, the communities have formed an association known as the Conservation Association of Afi Mountain (CAAFIM). This association brings together 16 forest-edge communities around Afi and provides a formal structure through which they can coordinate conservation actions, resolve land-use challenges, and engage government and conservation partners more effectively.

The CAAFIM formation process includes the participatory drafting of a constitution, democratic elections for an interim management committee. To formalize its mandate, the association is undergoing registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission and the Cross River State Forestry Commission – a step that strengthens its legal standing and operational legitimacy within the state’s forest governance framework.

To further strengthen governance in the protected area, several forest management committees (FMC) have been formed and inaugurated, while plans are ongoing for them to receive technical training and institutional strengthening to improve forest monitoring and enforcement capacity on:

- Sustainable forest management practices
- Community forest surveillance and reporting systems
- Anti-illegal logging enforcement collaboration
- Participatory land-use planning approaches.

Through such training, FMC members are better equipped to detect illegal timber extraction, coordinate rapid response with the forestry commission, and promote responsible resource use within their communities.

“Before now, we lacked the structure and knowledge to confront illegal logging. With our inauguration as FMC members, we now understand our roles and how to work with government to protect our forest.” – Mr Anthony Bankong, FMC Member.

These governance structures are critical to securing habitat connectivity between Afi and neighbouring Mbe Mountains, while reinforcing community ownership of conservation actions.



Recent camera trap picture of Cross River gorilla on the Odoja Trail to Base Camp, Afi

Pendjari et W-Benin National Parks

Strengthened production capacity of agri-food processing cooperatives and improved access to drinking water for local communities

Through the NaturAfrica West Africa (NAAO) program, the European Union is providing support for conservation, the green economy, and landscape governance, particularly in the Pendjari and W Benin National Parks, which are managed by African Parks in partnership with the Government of Benin and local communities.

In this context, Pendjari National Park has carried out two major projects for the benefit of local communities in the second half of 2025, with funding from the European Union. These were the donation of food processing equipment to five cooperatives (three cooperatives of women who process paddy rice into parboiled rice and two cooperatives that process soybeans into soy cheese) and the rehabilitation of 13 hand-operated boreholes.



Machine for processing paddy rice into parboiled rice, for the Kporhoun Women's Cooperative

The donation of processing equipment aims to increase the production capacity of the beneficiary cooperatives, which have around 71 members and are located in the commune of Tanguiéta. These groups have received processing mills, cooking pots, containers, ladles, and improved stoves. This support was greatly appreciated by the beneficiaries: "We had a shortage of equipment for processing rice, which slowed down our production and led to a loss of income. Today, thanks to the equipment provided by Pendjari National Park, we are very happy. This support will strengthen our production capacity and increase our income," said Ms. Sahgui, president of the women's rice processing group in the village of Porhoun, in the commune of Tanguiéta.

Similarly, water, the source of life, is essential to the communities living near Pendjari National Park. Thirteen human-powered boreholes have been rehabilitated in several villages in the municipalities of Matéri and Tanguiéta.

In Kani, in the municipality of Matéri, Jacqueline Nonti, a housewife, expresses her satisfaction after the village water point was put back into service. "Our only hand-operated pump was broken and we had great difficulty getting drinking water. The pump was very hard to operate and hardly any water was coming out. Thanks to the intervention of the Pendjari National Park management, everything has been repaired. Today, the water flows easily. This is a huge relief for us, especially us women, in our daily work," she says.

For many local residents, access to drinking water still requires traveling long distances. In the dry season, the situation becomes more critical: wells dry up and water supply becomes a real challenge. The populations of the villages on the outskirts of the park are therefore expressing their desire to see more initiatives aimed at improving the availability of this resource, which is essential to their well-being.



Donation of soybean processing machine (Pendjari) (© APN Bénin)



Donation of pots and utensils to the Kporhoun Women's Cooperative (Pendjari) (© APN Bénin)

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Pangolins: among the most trafficked mammals in the world



White-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*) in Sapo National Park, Liberia. (© M. Languy)

The third Saturday in February each year (this year it was 21 February) is World Pangolin Day, created to raise awareness of the plight of these unique scaled mammals, which are considered among the most trafficked mammals in the world.

There are eight species of pangolins in the world. Four of them live in Asia and four in Africa, including three in West Africa, particularly in the Guinean forests. **The three pangolins in West Africa are the long-tailed pangolin (*Uromanis tetradactyla*), the white-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*) and the giant pangolin (*Smutsia gigantea*).** All pangolin species are threatened by habitat loss, climate change and the trafficking of their scales.

Their most unusual and well-known characteristic is that they are covered mainly in scales rather than hair, except on their stomachs. This allows them to curl up into a ball when they feel threatened and escape the jaws of their predators. They feed almost exclusively on ants and termites. They do not have teeth, but they do have an extremely long tongue, which, when extended, is as long as their body.

The long-tailed pangolin lives in areas that are difficult to access and infested with stinging ants. As it is small and shy, this arboreal species is slightly less threatened than other more terrestrial species; nevertheless, it is considered vulnerable.

The two other West African species are critically endangered due to local trade in their meat and international trade in their scales, which are sold mainly in China for traditional medicine. Several hundred thousand pangolins are killed each year in Africa.

The NaturAfrica West Africa programme supports nearly 40 protected areas, the vast majority of which are home to at least one species of pangolin. Given that hunting pressures are lower in these areas, protected areas play a vital role in the survival of West African pangolins.



Long-tailed pangolin (*Uromanis tetradactyla*) in Montserrado County, Liberia. (© M. Languy)



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