

Newsletter, June 2026**REGIONAL NEWS****Work in progress: improving the quality of data about West Africa's protected areas in the global reference database**

The Regional Coordination is currently overseeing a study to carry out a comprehensive update of the global database.

[Read more](#)

The Sinoe River in Sapo National Park, Liberia

**Workshop on methodology and practice for three socio-economic indicators**

A training workshop was organised for our landscape project implementing partners on three programme indicators that must be completed through surveys of local communities: the food security index; participatory governance; and the human well-being index.

[Read more](#)**Community forests: update on the ongoing study**

For over two months, the Regional Coordination team has been managing a study on the status of community forests in West Africa. The work is still ongoing, but so far it has enabled us to organise online interviews with various stakeholders from the countries concerned.

[Read more](#)**SPECIES SPOTLIGHT**

The African wild dog

What do you know about African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) – and where can they be found in West Africa?

[Read more](#)



LANDSCAPE NEWS

Tai – Grebo-Krahn – Sapo: biodiversity is being strengthened through ecotourism and the green economy



In the Tai-Grebo-Krahn-Sapo landscape, the months of March, April and May 2026 confirm a consistent approach: protecting forest areas, improving wildlife monitoring, welcoming visitors and supporting green livelihoods in local communities.

[Read more](#)

Niokolo Badiar Dulombi Boé: activities are in full swing following the official launch of the project

The Integrated Programme for Conservation, Economic Development and Cross-Border Resilience of the Niokolo Badiar Dulombi Boé landscape (PICVERT) was officially launched on 28 April 2026 during a ceremony held in Simenti, in the heart of Niokolo Koba National Park.

[Read more](#)



WAP – Benin landscape: working alongside communities around the Pendjari and W-Benin parks

The European Union is supporting the efforts of African Parks and the Government of Benin to make conservation a genuine driver of local development.

[Read more](#)

Cross River landscape: strengthening sustainable food production and forest governance

Recent initiatives in Nigeria include strengthening law enforcement; improving the sustainability of 'wild mango' and honey harvesting; and training forest management committees.

[Read more](#)

REGIONAL NEWS

Work in progress: improving the quality of data on West Africa's protected areas in the global reference database

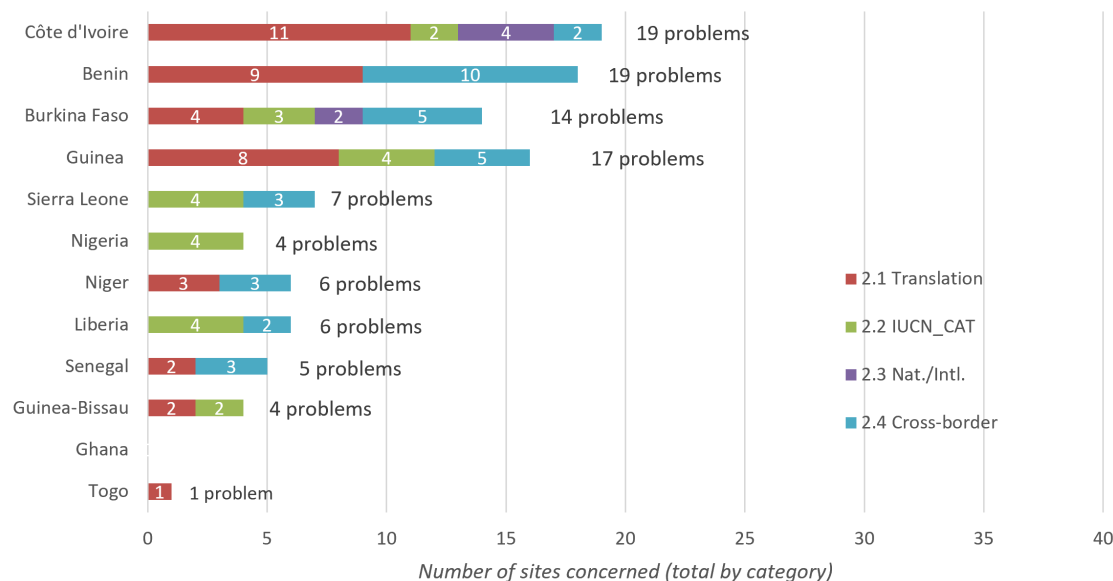


As announced in our previous newsletter, the Regional Coordination team has launched a study aimed at better documenting the status of protected areas in West Africa and, in particular, at carrying out a comprehensive update of the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA) managed by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC). This study will also lead to the production of 45 factsheets on protected areas within the NaturAfrica landscapes in West Africa. To date, the work has produced an initial assessment of the quality of information on West African protected areas in the WDPCA database. This has revealed a staggering number of missing or incorrect attributes: more than 180.

Proposals for corrections have been made for most of these, and discussions with the WCMC and OBAPAO have led to an agreement on the division of tasks to validate the improvements by the end of the year, whilst ensuring ownership by the national authorities responsible for protected areas.

The next stage of drafting technical data sheets for each protected area will take place by the end of the year.

**Figure 2 — Cumulative WDPA inconsistencies by country
(Designations of the 72 targeted protected areas – April 2026)**



Example of an assessment of inconsistencies in the WDPCA in West Africa (designation section only)

A workshop in Liberia trains operators to conduct surveys for NaturAfrica's socio-economic indicators



The NaturAfrica initiative is continent-wide in scope and operates in four regions of sub-Saharan Africa. In order to measure the project's impacts across its three pillars – conservation, green economy and governance – the European Commission's DG INTPA (International Partnerships), which is responsible for overseeing the initiative, has requested that a set of 15 indicators be incorporated into the projects managed by the implementing agencies. Of these 15 indicators, three must be collected through surveys of local communities, following a specific methodology: the food security index; participatory governance; and the human well-being index.

Given the complexity of the methodology, which few operators are familiar with, the Regional Coordination launched a short-term support mission in December 2025, drawing on experience gained in Central Africa. As part of this, two webinars were organised to explain the approach and the methodology. Subsequently, a workshop was organised for programme operators from the English-speaking landscapes (Cross River, TGKS, Gola, Nimba) and Benin (English-speaking participants). The workshop took place in Zwedru (Liberia) from 22 to 28 March 2026, with 18 participants. It consisted of a classroom session (reviewing protocols according to the beneficiaries identified by each programme) and a field component (real-world testing with communities in the TGKS landscape).

John Nnebechukwu, who participated on behalf of WCS, programme operator in the Cross River landscape in Nigeria, said: **"The training was immensely educating and enlightening! It has never been more urgent for conservation initiatives to be impactful, so this training is timely. I'm going back with enhanced skill and knowledge on how to measure impact in communities where I work. Thanks to the facilitator who simplified the lessons, which were very practical."**

According to Renaud Bailleux, technical expert for forest landscape projects in the Regional Coordination: **“The workshop participants showed great enthusiasm, despite the long days. In addition to applying the indicators within the NaturAfrica framework, they expressed an interest in using survey methods to monitor activities funded by other donors.”**

A similar workshop will be organised in Senegal in November 2026 for French-speaking implementing partners.

Community forests in West Africa: ongoing study aims to provide comprehensive picture of their status



Aerial view of the Afi Mountains community forest in Nigeria

Community forests play a vital role in maintaining and enhancing forest cover and conserving biological diversity. However, their ecological importance is often downplayed and given little consideration in forest resource management policies.

Given the shortage, or even absence, of space for states to create new conservation areas, the establishment of community forests offers an alternative means of strengthening biodiversity conservation and maintaining their vegetation cover, whilst providing economic benefits to local communities.

The NaturAfrica initiative, through its West Africa programme, has been conducting a study on community forests in West Africa for over two months now. The study's objectives were outlined in our March newsletter. The study is ongoing and has so far enabled us to organise online interviews with stakeholders in the countries concerned, including civil society organisations, programmes and projects involved in supporting the management of community forests, government departments responsible for community/village forestry issues, and key informants – including, of course, the NaturAfrica programme team.

By providing a better understanding of the situation regarding community and village forests in West Africa, the study will enable the formulation of a set of recommendations to better guide efforts in future integrated conservation and development programmes.

LANDSCAPE NEWS

Niokolo–Badiar–Dulombi–Boé (NBDB) landscape

Landscape programme officially launched in Simenti, Senegal

The Integrated Programme for the Conservation, Economic Development and Cross-Border Resilience of the Niokolo–Badiar–Dulombi–Boé Landscape (PICVERT) was officially launched on 28 April 2026 during a ceremony held in Simenti, in the heart of the Niokolo-Koba National Park in Senegal. This project, funded by the European Union, aims to restore, conserve and enhance biodiversity within the Niokolo-Badiar-Dulombi-Boé landscape in order to provide goods and services sustainably, with an equitable sharing of benefits and advantages, thereby contributing to the green and social economic development of local communities. It represents a significant driver of socio-economic development.

Eight ambassadors from European Union Member States took part in this regional ceremony alongside national and local authorities, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the project's implementing partners. The plenary discussions, participants' contributions and field visits highlighted the urgent need for action in light of the challenges facing the landscape, notably poaching, various pressures on natural resources, the socio-economic vulnerability of local populations, the maintenance of ecological connectivity and the safeguarding of protected areas.

Whilst commending the project's regional scope and landscape-based approach, participants emphasised the need for coordinated, inclusive and sustainable actions centred on NaturAfrica's pillars: conservation, participatory governance and the development of economic opportunities for local communities.

Niokolo-Koba National Park Development and Management Plan adopted for a decade of action



The Senegalese National Parks Directorate, in collaboration with its technical and financial partners, organised a national workshop to validate the Development and Management Plan (DMP) for the Niokolo-Koba National Park (PNNK) on 21 May 2026. The meeting was attended by heads of technical departments, local authorities, researchers, economic operators, civil society and private sector stakeholders, and the park's technical and financial partners.

The vision set out in this plan is to make the PNNK, by 2050, a representative example of an ecosystem for biodiversity conservation in Senegal and West Africa, ensuring the preservation of its Outstanding Universal Value, whilst contributing to the sustainable development of neighbouring communities and promoting its ecotourism, scientific and cultural potential. This plan is structured around 99 operational objectives established to meet five long-term objectives. These operational objectives are primarily aimed at maintaining the park's management and regulating human activities in the surrounding areas. This highly strategic document will now serve as a compass to guide all actions in support of the park and local communities over the next 10 years (2026-2035).

Boosting community participation: mayors of municipalities around Niokolo-Koba organise to protect the World Heritage site

Senegal's National Parks Authority celebrated International Biodiversity Day in Tambacounda on Friday 22 May 2026. On the sidelines of this commemoration, a workshop was held to establish a network of mayors from the municipalities surrounding Niokolo-Koba National Park. This consultative framework provides a platform for collaboration and inclusion of this group of key stakeholders involved in the park and its surrounding areas. It will now help to strengthen and revitalise community participation. Seventeen mayors took part in the meeting, at the conclusion of which a pilot good governance charter drawn up for the municipality of Linkéring was presented and signed by the administrative and local authorities. An executive committee was subsequently set up to ensure the network's smooth running.

WAP landscape – Benin component

Preserving the parks, building the future: the European Union stands alongside the communities of Pendjari and W-Benin

For many families living near Pendjari and W-Benin National Parks, nature is not just a heritage to be preserved; it also represents a source of hope, opportunities and a future. Aware of this reality, the European Union is supporting the efforts of African Parks and the Government of Benin to make conservation a genuine driver of local development.

Improved stoves that change lives

In the villages on the outskirts of Pendjari and W-Benin National Parks, food is traditionally cooked on rudimentary three-stone stoves. This widely used method leads to excessive wood consumption. This intensive use of firewood poses a major challenge to the conservation of natural resources.

In response, the management teams of Pendjari and W-Bénin National Parks, in collaboration with the Laboratory of Applied Ecology (LEA) at the University of Abomey-Calavi and with funding from the European Union, have launched a project to build improved stoves for the benefit of communities living near the parks.

In Pendjari, the initiative involves 330 households and 20 state primary schools across 22 villages in the local municipalities of Tanguiéta, Banikoara, Kérou, Kouandé and Matéri. In W-Bénin, 80 households and 14 state primary schools in the municipalities of Kandi, Banikoara and Malanville will benefit.

For these families, this innovation represents much more than just a piece of equipment: it helps reduce firewood consumption, cut energy costs and provide a healthier home environment, particularly for the women who do the daily cooking.

“The improved stoves mean less fatigue for the children and staff at Kani public primary school. Before this stove was built, pupils had to collect large quantities of firewood to help cook their school canteen meals. With this improved stove, a small amount of wood can last for several weeks,” said Barthélémy Ahouandji, headteacher of Kani State Primary School in the municipality of Tanguiéta.

As part of the same education initiative, 155 desks and benches were donated to seven local primary schools, benefiting 310 pupils, with the aim of improving their learning conditions and providing a school environment more conducive to their success.



Cooking on one of the upgraded stoves at Kani Primary School (Aurelien Houegan / PNP)

Empowering local young people



Training for eight young people in agricultural entrepreneurship in the Pendjari area. Ina Centre in Bembéréké. (photo: Aurelien Houegan / PNP)



Honey harvest, Pendjari, April 2026 (Bertin DOKO)

To address the employability of young people who often face a lack of economic prospects, eight young people living near Pendjari National Park have successfully completed vocational training in improved poultry farming.

This qualification paves the way for them to become self-employed and start their own businesses, whilst helping to create wealth within their communities. For these young people, it is not just about learning a trade, but about regaining confidence in their ability to build their own future.

“This training has enabled us to acquire solid technical skills that will be useful for our future. We now know how to look after our poultry and how to produce our own feed to reduce the costs of buying it and boost our profitability,” said Kamirou Mama, on behalf of the beneficiaries, at the certificate presentation ceremony at the end of the training.

Strengthening community engagement and the economic resilience of local communities

Support for the local economy continues through the strengthening of community cooperatives. Fourteen cooperatives have benefited from an organisational and management assessment aimed at improving their operations and performance. In the beekeeping sector, the results are already remarkable: six cooperatives have produced 1 345 litres of honey, generating more than 3.1 million FCFA in revenue.

In the heart of the villages, awareness-raising continues to sow the seeds of change. Between January and May 2026, 9 675 local residents, including 3 987 women and over 1 400 young people, took part in 229 sessions organised in 52 villages bordering Pendjari National Park. Beyond the figures, thousands of local residents have deepened their understanding of the challenges relating to conservation, local governance and sustainable development. These forums for dialogue have enabled communities to voice their concerns, share their experiences and work together to devise solutions tailored to their circumstances.

Through these achievements, the European Union’s support goes beyond the simple framework of a financial partnership. It reflects a firm conviction: conservation can only be sustainable when it improves the lives of the people living closest to protected areas. Every woman made aware, every young person trained, every child better equipped to learn and every cooperative strengthened represents a shared victory for nature and for the communities.



W-Benin: elephants in the park; awareness-raising among communities (Marcus Westberg / African Parks)



Cross River landscape, Nigeria

Strengthening law enforcement and protection



Presentation of motorbikes and other field equipment to the Cross River State Forestry Commission

To enhance patrol effort and effectiveness, the project provides technical and equipment support to protected area authorities across the landscape, including Cross River National Park, the Cross River State Forestry Commission, and the Conservation Association of the Mbe Mountains. Specialised ranger training and essential equipment – such as motorbikes and patrol kits (including sleeping mats and other field gear) – were supplied, significantly improving patrol efficiency, coverage, and overall effectiveness in safeguarding biodiversity.

Improving the sustainability of 'bush mango' harvesting & women's livelihoods

The project has supported over 1 550 women through targeted training, provision of improved bush mango (*Irvingia spp.*) seedlings, and the formation and registration of women-led cooperatives. These efforts have strengthened women's participation in non-timber forest product value chains, enhanced market access and improved household income while linking livelihoods directly to sustainable forest governance and biodiversity conservation.



Woman processing 'bush mango' (Irvingia gabonensis) fruits, an important non-timber forest product (NTFP)

Bush mango plays a vital role in the lives of women and households in forest communities across the project landscape. As a staple food, its seeds are widely used in traditional soups and dishes, contributing to household nutrition and cultural identity. Economically, bush mango provides a critical source of income, with women leading cooperatives that harvest, process and market the product, thereby supporting school fees, healthcare, and other household needs. Beyond food and income, bush mango strengthens women's agency in community forest governance, as their participation in value chains fosters inclusion and ownership of conservation outcomes. However, unsustainable harvesting practices – such as overexploitation, premature fruit collection, and habitat degradation – pose serious risks to biodiversity, threatening forest regeneration and the survival of endangered species. Promoting sustainable harvesting, improved processing, and equitable governance ensures that bush mango continues to deliver livelihood benefits while safeguarding biodiversity in a changing climate.

“Before, I had no savings... we used to sleep in the forest for days. Today, things are different. Through our cooperative, I can save money and contribute to our group’s capital. It has given me confidence, security, and hope for the future.” – Madam Z, Cooperative Member.

Strengthening forest governance through community forest management committees

Governance is being strengthened at the grassroots level through forest management committees (FMC). The image shows trained FMC members in Esikwe community, successfully managing and stopping a bush fire from spreading through the community forest into the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary.



Members of the forest management committee in Esikwe community working to extinguish a bush fire near the Afi Mountain community forest



A session on social safeguards training for rangers in Cross River National Park

Boosting social safeguards

To prevent unintended negative impacts in target communities, the project has established a grievance redress mechanism across all communities surrounding the protected areas. This system ensures that community concerns are heard, addressed promptly and integrated into project implementation, reinforcing accountability and trust.

Tai – Grebo-Krahn – Sapo landscape

Tai: ecotourism underpinned by conservation



The Tai Ecotourism teams, active in the field and certified in first aid.

The ecotourism project welcomed 86 tourists from March to May 2026 and generated over 9 million FCFA in entrance fees, distributed amongst the partners of the tripartite agreement. The visitor numbers confirm the growing interest in nature-based tourism linked to the protection of forest heritage.

Ecological monitoring continued: mangabeys were observed daily and chimpanzee surveys were carried out on an average of 24 days per month. By the end of May, direct sightings had increased with the fruiting of the Dialium tree.

Beekeeping: green income for local villages

Beekeeping training focused on honey harvesting in five target villages: Daobly, Keibly, Zaïpobly, Paule-Oula and Port-Gentil. This builds on previous sessions devoted to the construction, installation and maintenance of beehives.

In total, 17 hives were operated – 11 made of concrete and 6 of wood – yielding a total production of over 235 kg of honey. The wooden hives produced 132 kg, compared with 103 kg from the concrete hives, which had been colonised more recently.



Honey harvest: beekeeping gives tangible substance to the local green economy.

(Source: TGKS document)

An encouraging outcome

These advances confirm a positive outcome: the NaturAfrica programme within the TGKS landscape is strengthening conservation, cross-border cooperation, technical assessment, ecological monitoring, ecotourism and the green economy, whilst providing sustainable support to local communities within a balanced and inclusive territorial model.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

A single viable population in West Africa: why NaturAfrica is helping to conserve the African wild dog



Image from a camera trap in Niokolo Koba National Park in Senegal (IUCN)

A highly social species, the African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) is a carnivorous mammal of the Canidae family. It is found mainly in sub-Saharan, southern, central and western Africa, in open habitats such as savannahs and arid areas, as these provide suitable environments for hunting in packs. However, a population has also been recorded living in forest, notably in Ethiopia.

In West Africa, the only remaining viable population is found in Niokolo-Koba National Park, in Senegal. A study carried out by the Senegal National Parks Directorate and the NGO Panthera, which monitored the population using camera traps and analyses based on spatially explicit capture-recapture (SECR) models for the species, estimated the park's wild dog population at 31 individuals in 2023. According to the same study, the species occupies at least 23 per cent of the national park's total area, i.e. 1 925 km².

Feeding mainly on prey hunted alive, African wild dogs hunt in packs; the species helps to regulate the populations of its prey.

A distinctive feature of the species is that it lives in large packs (groups) and gives birth to many pups. However, it remains critically endangered. It is classified as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List.

The main threats to the species include: habitat fragmentation (averaging over 1 000 km² per pack), diseases carried by domestic dogs, global warming, human-wildlife conflict and poaching.

Measures for the conservation of the African wild dog include: stepping up the fight against poaching, reducing conflicts, reintroducing the species into viable habitats, and organising vaccination campaigns against diseases affecting domestic dogs (as carried out by the NGO Zoological Society of London (ZSL) in villages bordering the Niokolo Koba National Park).

The NaturAfrica West Africa programme, through the PICVERT landscape project implemented by the IUCN, is working in the Niokolo-Badiar-Dulombi-Boé landscape to enhance the viability of this threatened species.



Legal Notice

NaturAfrica West Africa regional coordination | Hotel Ricardo | Ouagadougou
WhatsApp +226 66 21 66 35 | katharine.mill@agrecob.be | Project web page on [capacity4dev](#)

SUBSCRIBE

[Legal Notice](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)