

Nigeria



Eco-tourists at the Drill Center

LAST CHANCE FOR THE DRILL MONKEY

A grant for a project combining community development and forest co-management activities has proved vital in generating support from local communities and government to conserve Afi Mountain and its endangered wildlife. The project was linked to a rehabilitation and breeding centre for the drill, Africa's most threatened primate species.

The forested Afi massif in Nigeria's Cross River state is a critical watershed for dozens of communities, and hosts many wildlife species that are nationally or some even globally endangered. Among these is the highly endangered drill, which is found almost exclusively in the south-east of Nigeria and neighbouring Cameroon. The total population is estimated to be as low as 3,000 and is declining in all areas.

Since its creation in 1991 by the NGO Pandrillus, the 'Drill Ranch' near Afi Mountain has become a very successful rehabilitation and breeding station for the drill. Starting with only five orphaned drills, today the centre has a third generation born in captivity, making it probably the world's most successful breeding programme for an endangered primate. Its current 210 drills live in natural family enclosures of up to nine hectares. Release back into the wild would, however, be pointless without simultaneously tackling the main reasons for the decline of the drill monkeys: habitat loss and illegal hunting, linked to poverty. Pandrillus has, therefore, adopted a strategy addressing those causes by a range of outreach, lobby and local development activities, aimed at conserving a larger forest area.

ACTIVITIES An IUCN NL grant funded community development activities in order to involve local people in the management of the Afi Mountain forest. The project included the employment of former hunters as forest rangers and eco-tour guides. This ranger scheme has shown remarkable results in curbing hunting. Drills from the nearby centre were used for environmental education in local schools, and in all schools conservation clubs were set up. To encourage better land management, the project initiated small-scale agroforestry development. The agroforestry nursery is still producing well and now pays for itself in sales of tree seedlings. Pandrillus



Handing out prizes at a primary school. Both photos P. Levelink & I Brandt

employed local youth to maintain the community access road and repair bridges. With the communities surrounding the reserve, a users agreement was signed in conjunction with staff of the Forest Department. This agreement brought the seventeen communities in the area together, for the first time, in viewing the mountainous forest area as a common resource.

IMPACT The success of the project has attracted government investment to the area, such as for road improvement. The state has funded construction of tourist cabins and a rain forest canopy walkway - the longest in Africa. Eco-tourism is on the rise and guest fees help support the project, with a portion of the revenues being shared with the community.

As a result of lobbying by Pandrillus and other NGOs, the government created the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary. Ten government rangers and twelve community rangers added by the NGO-partnership now work together in mixed patrols. Lease payments by Pandrillus to the community for the land used for the project have prevented the forest from being allocated to logging companies.

In 2005, the centre's success enticed the state government to permanently protect the land with a compensation package for the community equivalent to about 300 years of Pandrillus' annual lease payments. Drill Ranch has become the largest private employer in this area and provides alternative livelihoods to mostly young men who might otherwise be practicing unsustainable slash-and-burn agriculture, or illegal logging or hunting.



Photo: Lisa Gadsby

Grantee: Pandrillus

Project: 'Community-based conservation in the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary' (1997-1999)

Grant size: € 34,000

Category: Conservation

<http://members.tripod.com/~KingRhythm/id111.htm>