

Editor

Rosemary Low,
Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall,
TR27 4HB, UK

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Cover Picture

By Jamie Gilardi.

Queued for clay! A Green-winged Macaw (*Ara chloroptera*) waiting its turn at the Clay Licks in Manu, Peru.

The World Parrot Trust announces its first Expedition. Travel with Rosemary Low and Dr. Charles Munn to see the Parrots of the Bolivian Highlands and the Clay Licks of Manu, Peru, in August 2002.

For full information turn to page 13 or look on our website.

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African Grey Parrot Trade in Cameroon

Lobeke National Park

By ANASTASIA NGENYI, Volunteer Biologist,
WWF Jengi SE Forest Project, BP 6776, Yaounde, Cameroon



Anastasia Ngenyi.

The forest region of Lobeke in the Southeast corner of Cameroon has been the focus of attention over the past decade at national and international level, owing to its rich natural resource. Its outstanding conservation importance is due to its abundance of fauna and the rich variety of commercial tree species. Natural resources in the area face numerous threats due to the increased demand in resource exploitation by the local communities and commercial pressure owing to logging and poaching for the bush meat trade.

The area harbours an unusually high density of forest mammals' particularly so-called "charismatic megafauna" such as elephants, gorillas and chimpanzee.

The avifauna of the region is very rich: more than 283 species. The forest clearings attract a lot of African Grey Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) and Green Pigeons (*Treron australis*).

The richness of the forest in various commercial species has attracted many timber companies to the area. Most of the forest area in Lobeke has been logged at least thrice over the past 30 years. Currently most logging practices are unsustainable and could in the long term constitute a major threat to biodiversity and conservation of natural resources in the region.

The majority of Grey Parrots in Lobeke inhabit forest clearings in which they feed on various plants and on natural soil rich in mineral salts; they nest in trees 10-30m high. Most of the birds caught are destined for parrot trade in Europe and to some extent South Africa and Asia. Eighty percent come from the Lobeke forest. Two forest clearings in Lobeke, Bolou and Djangui harbour significant populations of Grey Parrots. More than 15,000 birds are taken out from these two clearings each year with half dying due to poor handling.

Lobeke National Park

The Lobeke National Park, LNP, covers an area of 2,125Km and is situated in the Boumba and Ngoko Division, southeast Cameroon.

Lobeke is a dense semi-deciduous forest, characterised by a patchwork of high forest, secondary forest and low-lying swamp interwoven with a mosaic of *maranthaceae* forest, mono-dominant stands and forest clearings. The vegetation is described in detail by Gartlan (1989) although summarised as being swamp / transitional closed forest, part of the evergreen Cameroon-Congolese forest types. Whilst much of the habitat is natural, logging over the past 30 years has contributed to the opening of the canopy in several areas of the forest. This patchwork of the forest types promotes a high diversity and an abundance of mammals in the region.

The large marshy forest clearings that characterised Lobeke forest eco-system are locally known as "bais". They include saline soils and / or riparian vegetation associated with marsh or dry grassland habitat, notably the *Cyperaceae*. Owing to their rich saline soils, the bais attract a lot of forest fauna.

Eco-tourism potential

These forest clearings are of great potential in terms of eco-tourism if they are properly managed. They

could generate enormous revenue that most likely would surpass present income from illegal trade in parrots. In addition, a booming local eco-tourism industry involving the local communities should guarantee long-term support of these communities to conservation initiatives. Present trade in parrots does not benefit the local communities as it is disorganised and carried out clandestinely.

Forest clearings (bais)

The "bais" are characterised by grasses (*Cyperaceae*) associated with marshy and riparian vegetation. Their occurrence is naturally caused by geological and hydrological factors, although the habitat is maintained by intense mammal activity. Lobeke has several forest clearings; four are prominent due to their year round access. There is already minimum infrastructure to support research work through ecological monitoring studies. These bais were highly frequented by poachers and safari sport hunters for big game hunting prior to the creation of a national park. Many bais in the region are still frequented, principally for parrot trapping, fishing and elephant hunting. This has seriously contributed to the decline in animal abundance. Current management efforts are geared towards protection of these bais, with anti-poaching patrols and effective presence of monitoring teams in the areas.

Two bais are of great importance to this study, the Bolou and Djangue. These two bais are special, due to their vegetation and rich mineral soil composition. They are also special because they are the only two bais in the entire region highly frequented by parrots and in which parrot capture is intense. It is estimated that more than 12,000 birds are captured each year from these bais for export trade. Green Pigeons although also widely captured are consumed locally and are found in almost all bais in the region.



Lobeke is said to be one of the highest parrot trapping zones, with 80% of the Grey Parrots from Cameroon harvested from this area.



More than 15,000 birds are taken out from these two clearings each year with half dying due to poor handling.

A large number of Grey Parrots are attracted by the natural soils of Djangue bai. Green Pigeons were seen in thousands, mostly in the mornings and evenings. Parrot trapping was noted to be highest during the dry season of December and January, and September that represents the late wet season in the region.

The Bolou bai situated on the southern edge of LNP is characterised by marshes and swamps. This probably accounts for the high abundance of *sitatunga* compared to other species, especially during the peak rainy period of October.

A great number of Grey Parrots and Green Pigeons were also observed to frequent this bai especially in the mornings. Parrot trappers were seen in both bays during the studies.

During the preliminary studies in Djangue and Bolou bays, it was noticed that Grey Parrots focused their activities in selected areas (dead palms, swampy areas etc). They concentrated their foraging activity to feed on mineral soils and several plant species such as *Oldenlandia lanciflora*. The areas selected are not too swampy or too dry.

The activities of parrot trappers negatively affect feeding habits of the birds and, more significantly, populations and distribution in the region. Given the intensity of capture, especially during the dry season periods, these birds usually "fly without landing" notably at preferred habitat sites like the bays. Parrot trappers also indulge in hunting partly to subsidise for food and also for the bush meat trade.

Local trade

Parrot trade at the local level is organised by middlemen known as "Détenteurs", who possess official permits issued for the trade. Détenteurs live mostly in Kika and Moloundou where there is relatively good access to public transport to easily



evacuate the birds once the parrot trappers are out from the forest. Some do hire vehicles if there are large quantities of birds caught. Transportation of these birds by détenteurs is

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All proceeds go directly towards our African Grey Conservation Fund.



The Grey Parrots are put into small cases of about 1.5 x 2m, 100 to 150 in each, to be transported.

mostly done in the night to avoid wildlife law enforcement officers.

Lobeke is said to be one of the highest parrot trapping zones, with 80% of the Grey Parrots from Cameroon harvested from this area and particularly from the two clearings mentioned. Of every 10 Grey Parrots exported from Cameroon, at least 7 are from the Lobeke region and SE forest region. The Grey Parrots are put into small cases of about 1.5 x 2m, 100 to 150 in each, to be transported to Yaounde (distance of about 680m).

Once in Yaounde, they are put inside what is known as "quarantine", which can take up to 1,000 parrots.

On 18th September last year, the Minister of Environment and Forest, MINEF, signed a decree attributing quotas of Grey Parrots to nineteen individuals. In total, 11,950 Grey Parrots had been attributed as quota for the 2001 fiscal year. Two bidders were disqualified in the process for lack of "quarantine" and failure to pay the required fee.

Quotas always exceeded

In 1997, CITES suspended all export of Grey Parrot from Cameroon because the country exceeded its 1996 export quota (then 11,000 birds) by almost double. Trade in Grey Parrots has been for the past years a lucrative business in Cameroon with almost every sector trying to get its own share of the cake. Although this trade was prohibited in Cameroon in 1997, trappers nevertheless continued to trap. Since then, the situation has not changed in Cameroon.

The annual quota for Cameroon is 12,000 Grey Parrots, but each year more than 15,000 are exported. It is therefore important to re-established legislation to control and regulate this trade. This will lead to a sustainable management of this very important bird species and a limitation of parrot laundering through other countries.

Cameroon accounted for 50% of the total specimens exported from all countries in 1995 and is still one of the highest exporters of African Grey Parrots today. Perhaps there should be a call for an alternative solution to the current commercial exploitation. This alternative should be either biological or economical; to help in one way or the other to reduce Grey Parrot exploitation and provide a strategic solution to economically support the parrot trappers. Eco-tourism seems a good idea to fit this profile (economically) and continuing studies of African Grey Parrots should help in future to evaluate the biological trend of Grey Parrots and their reproductive aspects.

Living in the wild, Grey Parrots do not quickly adapt to ordinary food like maize, due to their habit of feeding on mineral soil and special vegetation, consequently they die from starvation and stress once taken out of their habitat of origin. Transportation over-night of Grey Parrots to avoid security checks results in poor handling and negligence of the parrots. All the trappers care about is reaching their destination without being caught when transporting extra Grey Parrots.

Research continues

The present study is on-going and will attempt to address issues related to:

- * Quantities of birds harvested in the region and, more importantly, two bays of LNP,
- * Trading routes and local networks,
- * Identification of other capture sites,
- * Legislative aspects and law enforcement,
- * Local participation in a collaborative approach in protection of bays and possibilities in development and management of a benefit-sharing scheme,
- * Development of a long-term programme for monitoring of species,
- * Reproductive ecology with identification of nesting sites within LNP,
- * Education campaigns to educate and inform parrot trappers (to be conducted possibly by project game guards).



The majority of Grey Parrots in Lobeke inhabit forest clearings in which they feed on various plants and on natural soil rich in mineral salts. Photo: Diana May