

## **A COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE WORKSHOP ON “RECONCILING THE CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN GREY PARROTS AND THE COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION OF PALM OIL IN NIGERIA.”**

### **PREAMBLE**

During 2022-2023 a collaborative project led by researchers from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and the World Parrot Trust investigated how Endangered African Grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) use commercial oil palm plantations and the surrounding landscape with the aim of informing management practices and policies to mitigate the impact of industrial oil palm cultivation on biodiversity conservation. On the 24th of August 2023, a stakeholders workshop was held online to disseminate the findings of this research, and to identify opportunities and challenges for integrating “parrot-friendly” practices into sustainable palm oil production in Nigeria.

The workshop was attended by representatives of state and federal governments, private sectors and non-governmental organisations (Table 1) to interact and brainstorm on the most appropriate conservation approach for African Grey parrots while considering the need for oil palm plantation expansion in Nigeria.

### **OBJECTIVES OF WORKSHOP**

1. Present the results of recent research and consider the implications for conservation of African Grey Parrots in the context of existing and expanding commercial oil palm estates in Nigeria.
2. Explore the implications of government disposition to the implementation of African Sustainable Commodities Initiative (ASCI) with respect to expansion of oil palm estates in Nigeria.
3. Discuss various opportunities highlighted in the presentations that would enhance sustainable oil palm plantation management.

Technical presentations were made by the following:

- a. Ifeanyi Ezenwa (UNN/WPT; leader of research team) on the findings of the research project including seasonal and landscape variations of the African Grey parrot activities and behaviour in oil palm estates and adjoining forests, areas of high habitat suitability for the bird, and opportunities for integration of parrot-friendly management in oil palm plantation landscape.

- b. Stella Egbe (Nigerian Conservation Foundation) on importance of birds as indicators of biodiversity conservation.
- c. Mr Emmanuel John-Onyijen (Okomu Oil Palm Co. Plc.) on strategies for sustainable biodiversity conservation in commercial oil palm plantations.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

1. African Grey parrots are a globally endangered species threatened by habitat loss and capture for trade with declining populations in Nigeria.
2. African Grey parrots use habitats within oil palm plantations for nesting, feeding, roosting. The way in which estates are managed and designed has implications for the survival of parrots and other biodiversity within landscapes where used for the large-scale cultivation of oil palms.
3. The conversion of forest habitat for palm oil production can negatively impact wild populations of African Grey parrots and other biodiversity.
4. The Federal government of Nigeria has stated an intention to increase the production of palm oil in Nigeria to reduce dependence on imports.
5. African Grey parrots are threatened by capture in the wild and there are indications that oil palm plantations can potentially act as safe havens for African Grey parrots, providing overnight roosting sites safe from capture, as well as food and nesting sites within HCV (High Conservation Value) forest patches.
6. African Grey parrots are highly mobile and move between plantations and adjoining forest areas. Landscape-scale approaches that emphasise the protection of forest habitats alongside the design and management of plantations that protected key resources for parrots, are needed.
7. Surveys indicates that African Grey parrots rarely feed or otherwise use the cultivated oil palm fruit in plantations. Cultivated oil palms within plantations do not provide important resources for African Grey parrots. The most important areas are forest patches designated as HCVs.
8. Surveys recorded an increasing number of roosting individuals of African Grey parrots at Okomu Oil Palm Co. Plc between 464 individuals [August, 2022] and 921 individuals [May, 2023]. The reason for this pattern is not clear and it could reflect seasonal variation in behaviour and abundance or a directional trend. Previous field observations by Mr Ezenwa and colleagues suggest that African Grey parrots avoid areas of high habitat disturbance and recent illegal logging within and adjacent to

Okomu National Park may have displaced parrots and caused them to seek refuge in the plantation.

9. New GIS maps have been developed as part of the “parrots and palms project” identifying areas of habitat most important for African Grey parrots enabling government, industry, and civil society groups to identify areas where the expansion of oil palm cultivation, as well as other agricultural activities and logging would have the least impact on African Grey parrot conservation.
10. At UNFCCC CoP27 the Federal Government of Nigeria signed the expanded African Sustainable Commodities Declaration which commits Nigeria to implementing the principles of the African Sustainable Commodities Initiative (ASCI). The ASCI builds on the African Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) to work across multiple commodities to strengthen and scale positive impacts for people, nature, and climate. However, mechanisms for implementation of the ASCI are yet to be implemented in most states. Edo State Government through Edo State Oil Palm Programme Independent Implementation Office has put in place policies that regulate operation of oil palm companies within its administrative boundary by implementing (a) institutional and regulatory reforms leading to establishment of EdoGIS, Edo State Oil Palm Programme, a new Forestry Commission and a Forestry Bill to replace the 1968 Forestry law, (b) putting in place strategies achievable via Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) to protect human rights (c) integrate forest management and oil palm development by requiring that oil palm companies contribute significantly to protection and rehabilitation of degraded forest ecosystems.
11. A National Forest policy was launched in 2022, aiming to improve governance of forest sites and coordination between activities at state and federal levels.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Key resources for African Grey parrots within existing oil palm plantations, including roosting, nesting, and feeding sites, should be identified, and protected as HCVs following existing guidelines set out in HCV-HCSA Assessment Manual (2023).
2. Plantation managers or owners should adopt and ensure effective adherence to existing policies protecting biodiversity, especially within HCVs.
3. Degraded HCVs within plantations should be reforested with indigenous tree species while ensuring that the diversity reflects indigenous forests.

4. Standardised monitoring of African Grey parrots should be established within oil palm plantations and adjoining areas in collaboration with experts and research should be conducted to understand drivers of population change (for instance, are populations increasing in oil palm estates because of the threats/disturbance to neighbouring forests?)
5. Federal and State governments should work with experts to identify important areas for African Grey parrots in need of formal protection (e.g. gazetted as protected areas) and to inform the development of plans for land use and resource management in States where African Grey Parrots are endemic to ensure the protection of parrots and their habitat and other biodiversity. Such plans should be made in consultation with stakeholders including industry, investors, local communities, biologists and conservation experts.
6. State governments should adopt ASCI principles and ensure plantations adhere to RSPO (Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil) principles and criteria, drawing on lessons learned from implementation in Edo State. This should include the assessment and protection of HCVs within existing and proposed new plantations and any expansion of oil palm plantations and other agricultural commodities to be contingent on the restoration of degraded forest habitats.
7. Where feasible, efforts should be made to increase productivity/yield of existing land under cultivation for oil palm to help meet demand for palm oil while minimising the need to convert additional land for oil palm cultivation. Care should be taken to minimise the loss of conservation value of less intensive production systems.
8. Companies that source and process Oil palm fruits from outside Oil palm estates under their direct management should ensure farm owners are trained on riparian buffer zone management and that farmers' groups have an action plan to maintain and/or enhance riparian buffer zones in line with Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil Independent Smallholder Standard 2019.
9. The operators of oil palm estates should, work alongside government and other stakeholders to help protect forest habitats from logging and other destructive practices, for example the partnership between Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc, Okomu National Park, and ANI Foundation to tackle illegal logging in Okomu National Park and Okomu Forest Reserve.



Table 1: Participant list

Name	Affiliation/Organisation
DCPI Umar Yusuf Tanko	Old Oyo National Park
DCP Mathias Enaberue	Gashaka Gumti National Park
DPW Shebayan Rose Baliat	Kainji Lake National Park
DPW Gimba Alhassan Abubakar	Kamuku National Park
DPI Alege Folusho	Okomu National Park
DPW Sadiq babagana Marte	Chad Basin National Park
ACP Hauwa Jaafaru Mangga	National Park Service Headquarters Abuja
PW Dahiru Aliyu	National Park Service Headquarters Abuja
Emmanuel Basse	Wildlife Conservation Society
Nnebechukwu John	Wildlife Conservation Society
Sunday Ova	Wildlife Conservation Society
Dr Stella Egbe	Nigerian Conservation Foundation
Nacha Geoffrey	ANI Foundation
Peter Abanyam	ANI Foundation
Paul O Hameed	Wilmar International
Matthew Ahuean	Presco PLC
Festus Ighahbon	Presco PLC
Rayner Ibude	Okomu Oil Palm Company PLC
Billy Ghansah	Okomu Oil Palm Company PLC
Emmanuel John-Onyijen	Okomu Oil Palm Company PLC
Umar Idris Mukhtar	Minister of Ministry of Environment
Joe Onyike	Oil Palm Growers' Association of Nigeria
Sonigitu Ekpe	Ministry of Environment Cross River State
Omoigui Titilayo	Edo State Forestry Commission
Blessing Agbongiaruoyi	Edo State Forestry Commission
Olukanni Bosede	Federal Ministry of Environment, Federal Department of Forestry
Dr Abraham Ekperusi	Chair Policy committee, SCB African Region; Nigeria Maritime University
Dr Bibitayo Ayobami Owolabi	Osun State University Osogbo
Chinemerem Orakwelu	University of Nigeria Nsukka
Dr Chike Ebido	University of Nigeria Nsukka
Ifeanyi Ezenwa	University of Nigeria Nsukka; World Parrot Trust
Dr Rowan Martin	World Parrot Trust