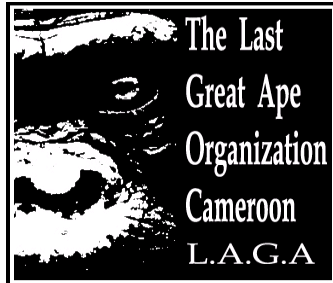


# **THE LAST GREAT APE ORGANIZATION, CAMEROON LAGA**

## **SECOND SEMESTER REPORT JULY – DECEMBER 2024**



### **Executive Summary**

Many achievements were recorded in LAGA's collaboration with the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) despite several challenges posed during the period July to December 2024. These achievements were obtained in the fields of investigation, arrest, prosecution, media exposure, government relations and international activities. Focus was on the fight against the illegal wildlife trade; principally trafficking in elephant tusks. The EAGLE network's Central Coordination Unit (CCU) continued to provide vital technical and organisation support that facilitated several operations resulting in the of arrests 13 traffickers.

13 major traffickers were arrested at a rate of one for every two weeks and 69% stayed behind bars from the day of arrest. 10 new cases were brought to the courts. 3 traffickers were found guilty and handed either prison sentences or fines and damages during 2 court judgements passed. Damages amounted to some 1,200, 000 FCFA (about \$2400). awarded to Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF).

The EAGLE network achieved some good results as 40 traffickers were arrested across 4 countries during the 6-month period. In order to provide a deterrent effect across the Network, 720 media pieces were published in national media.

**The work of LAGA was supported by Wildcat Foundation, OAK Foundation, Dutch Gorilla Foundation, Rufford Foundation, Prowildlife, Olsen Animal Trust, Future for Elephant**

**LAST GREAT APE ORGANISATION, CAMEROON (LAGA)**  
**SECOND SEMESTER REPORT**  
July – December 2024

**OVERVIEW**

**Investigations**

- A total of 88 investigation missions (of varying lengths) were carried out in 7 regions.

**Operations**

- Operations were carried out in 2 regions arresting 13 major traffickers, at a rate of one every two weeks, resulting in 10 court cases,
- Operations were entirely on ivory trafficking with 15 elephant tusks seized.
- The rate of imprisonment of arrested offender stood at 69%.

**Legal**

- 10 new cases were brought to court. Many of the cases began during the period have not yet reached the prosecution stage but procedures are ongoing.
- 2 court rulings were passed within this period; 3 traffickers were found guilty but only one trafficker given an imprisonment term.

**Media**

- A total of 120 media pieces were produced in national media (radio, written press and internet) achieved at a rate of one media piece every two days.

**Management**

- The first semester report of 2024 was made available online.
- Recruitment was intensified with candidates selected and some interviewed.
- Focus was on maintaining high standards in every department and on improving recruitment for investigators.

**External Relations and Policy**

- Several meetings were held with MINFOF officials, the diplomatic community, national and international NGOs to discuss issues on collaboration, governance, wildlife law enforcement among others.

**Strategic Highlights**

- Operations were focused on ivory trafficking.
- The strategic focus was ensuring investigations and operations were smoothly carried out despite challenges of diverse nature that were posed.
- Two types of investigators were targeted for recruitment, the new generation investigators with specific skills and competences and the ordinary investigators.
- The CCU evaluated and provided strategic assistance to management for better organisation and functioning.

**EAGLE Activities**

A total of 40 traffickers were arrested across 4 countries of the network during the semester. In order to provide a deterrent effect, 780 media pieces were published in national media across the network.

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## Also available:

1. Annual Financial Statement 2023
2. First Semester Report 2024
3. Media archive – Excel database linked to recorded media pieces
4. Photo archive for media use

For copies contact email; [eric@laga-enforcement.org](mailto:eric@laga-enforcement.org)

# **NARRATIVE REPORT**

This report covers the period July to December 2024 and focuses on progress in the activities of each department, notably, investigations, operations, legal, media and management. It also includes a strategic overview and an analysis of the impact of operations on wildlife crime in Cameroon, relations with the Cameroonian government, non-governmental bodies and collaboration with international partners and non-enforcement initiatives that LAGA undertook.

## **1. Investigations**

LAGA’s investigation unit carried out 88 investigation missions in 7 regions of the country during the second half of the year. The focus was on targeting ivory trafficker networks. This was strictly supervised at the level of management and at the Central Coordination Unit (CCU). As has been the case over the last years, the collaboration with the Central Coordination Unit provided vital investigation support and guidance. Investigators continued to sharpen and broaden their skills through meetings and learning processes carried out within the department. Collaboration with other countries was effective and the department provided investigative support to some of them.

The recruitment was intensified with a good number of candidates interviewed but none was retained. Nevertheless, two candidates continued their test and training period. The recruitment process for next generation investigators continued and several visits at strategic position to search for such investigators were carried out.

The Head of Department met with some administrative, wildlife, customs and law enforcement officials at divisional levels to strengthen collaboration in the fight against wildlife law enforcement.

### **Number of Missions**



**Figure 1: Number of Investigations Missions per Month**

## **2. Operations**

LAGA and the Government of Cameroon carried out operations in 2 regions against 13 individuals resulting in 10 court cases at a rate of one every 2 weeks. Investigations were carried out in the trafficking of several specie but all operations were on ivory trafficking during the semester. Below are operations carried according to the various months.

4 traffickers were arrested in Ebolowa, South Region with 4 elephant tusks. One of them is a forestry engineer working in a logging company and another is an electromechanical engineer working at a regional delegation in Ebolowa. The three traffickers were arrested with the tusks concealed in a rice sack. They attempted to sell the elephant tusks. A swift and effective interrogation led to the arrest of the 4<sup>th</sup> who was hiding around waiting in safety for the money from the transaction. A government secondary school teacher is also among the arrested traffickers. The tusks were transported from Ambam, the base of the traffickers to Ebolowa where they attempted to sell.

In August, 4 traffickers were arrested in Yaounde, Centre Region with 2 elephant tusks. A retired Colonel of the Ministry Forestry and Wildlife that had also been in charge of several National Parks was among them. The Colonel was charged and the case is presently with an examining judge. The traffickers concealed the elephant tusks in the boot of a car. They refused to open the boot in an attempt to foil the arrest operation. Two of the traffickers are computer engineers. The traffickers are prosecuted under the new wildlife law that that was signed in July, by the President of the Republic.

In November, 3 traffickers were arrested with 3 and a half elephant tusks in Yaounde, Centre Region. A warrant officer and a sacked army sergeant were arrested alongside a civilian. They all belong to a gang involved in trafficking wildlife and other illegal products using the cover of military personnel. One of the military officers resisted arrest violently making threats to the arresting force as he struggled.

Finally, in December, 3 traffickers arrested with 6 elephant tusks in Yaounde, Centre Region. 3 ivory traffickers, including a pastor, were arrested with 6 tusks. The Born Again Church pastor was the mastermind of the ring and got the tusks from a magistrate. They used a Yango taxi to arrive at the scene of transaction with the tusks concealed in a flour sack. The traffickers are linked to an ivory trafficking network that operated from the South Region. They were quickly arrested and marched off to the wildlife office for interrogation and further investigations.

***Operations Table***

<b><i>Number of Operations</i></b>	<b><i>Number of Traffickers</i></b>	<b><i>Contraband</i></b>
4	14	<i>4 elephant tusks, 2 elephant tusks. 3 and a half elephant tusks, 6 elephant tusks</i>

***Figure 2: Operation Table***



**Figure 3: Case profile**

### **3. Legal**

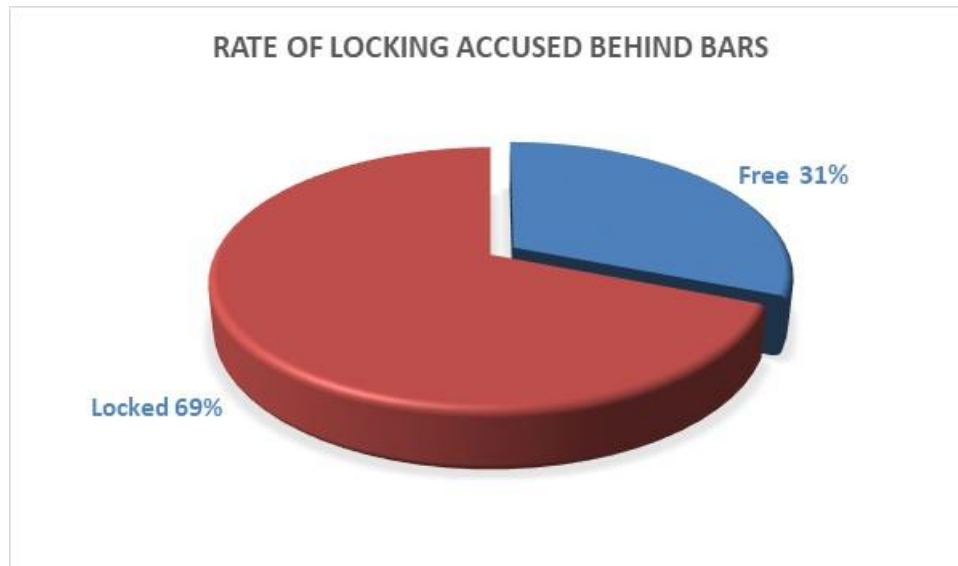
A total of 10 new cases reached the court and the cases joined old cases that were scheduled, followed-up and tried in various courts. For the case of the arrest of 3 traffickers, including a military sub-officer, it was forwarded to the military tribunal and the matter returned to the gendarmerie for further investigations. Very few court procedures came to the judgement stage and some very weak sentences were recorded amidst persistent challenges including the absence of lawyers for MINFOF during court procedures, the absence of MINFOF representatives who either do not have a letter of representation from the ministry or simply do not turn up in court and the administrative bottlenecks of renewing of the MoU with the ministry. In the light of these difficulties, only one out of 3 traffickers convicted, was given a prison sentence, a weak one for that matter. The trafficker was sentenced to 4 months in prison after having been arrested in Ambam in August 2024. The court dismissed the Ministry's claim for damages as unfounded. Damages awarded to MINFOF during a court ruling stood at 1, 200, 000 (about\$2400) FCFA The rate of keeping the accused behind bars at the onset of the procedure stood at 69%.

A total of 62 missions were carried out of the Centre Region for follow-up of old and new cases and the creation and strengthening of relations with judicial authorities. Emphasis was on all the cases against the 10 ivory traffickers arrested within the period and charged.

In November, The Ebolowa Court of First Instance found the accused EYA'AMA Charly and NKOULOU OBIANG Pierre not guilty on the grounds of lack of intent to commit a criminal offence and on the other hand, found the accused MEYA M'ELESSO Yannick and ABO'O NDONGO Fustel guilty and sentenced them to pay 200,000 (about \$400) each as fine and 1,200,000 FCFA (about \$2400) jointly as damages. They were arrested in Ebolowa in July for the illegal possession of 4 ivory tusks. An appeal was filed against the ruling in the South Court of Appeal.

In December, the Ambam Court of High Instance found the accused DEUDJUI TCHOKOUALI Alain Fabrice guilty and sentenced him to 4 months in prison and to pay 200,000 FCFA (about \$400) as fines. The court dismissed the Ministry's claim for damages

as unfounded. He was arrested in Ambam in August. An appeal was lodged against the judgement in the South Court of Appeal.



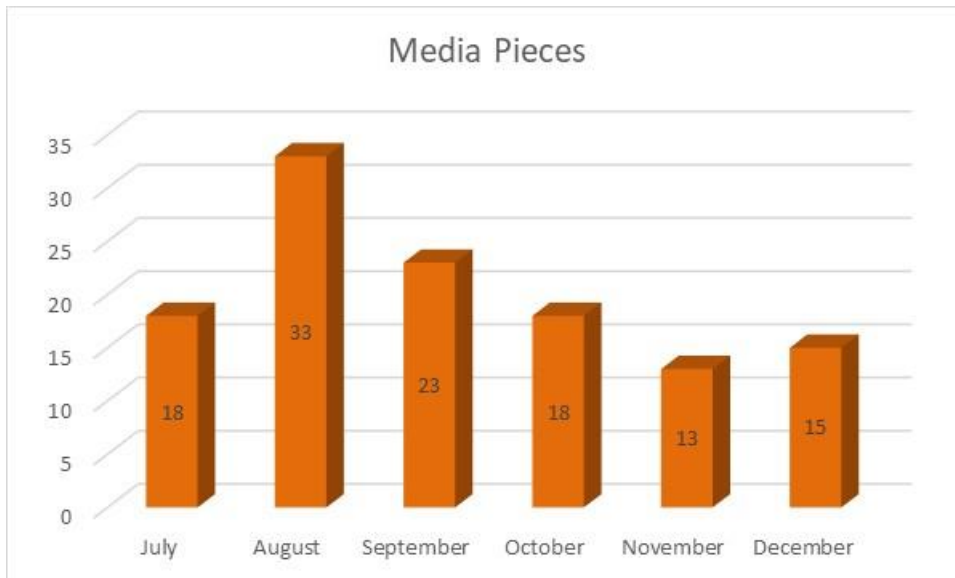
**Figure 4: Rate of locking accused behind bars**

#### **4. Media**

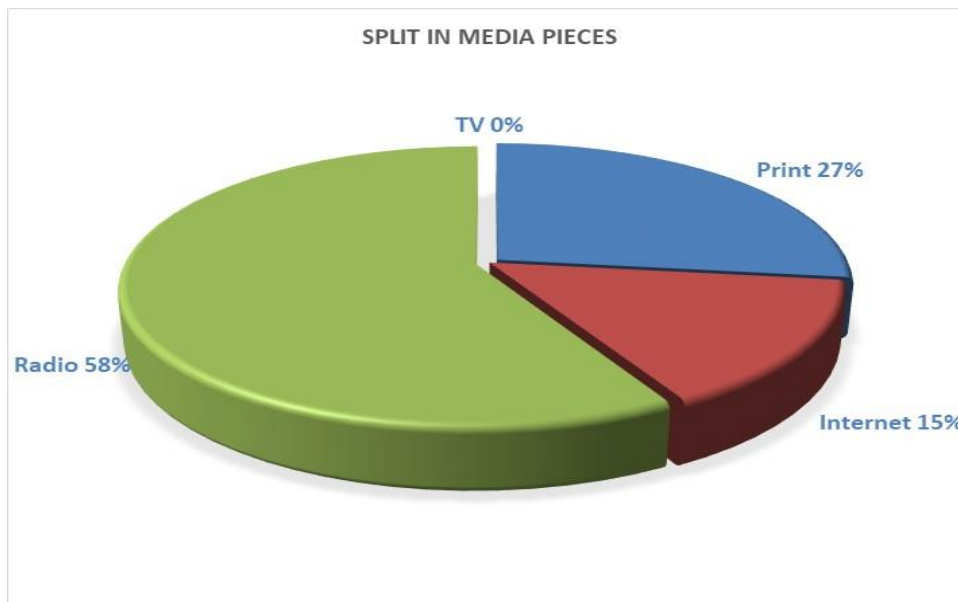
A total of 120 media pieces were produced and pushed into media including numerous articles in the media including radio, written press and the internet; achieved at a rate of 2 media pieces every 3 days. The media pieces were fairly distributed over the period as operations were carried out in 4 of the 6 months. Nevertheless, the target was never achieved and efforts are being made to ensure next year, that media department reaches its targets.

The various subjects focused on wildlife law enforcement including: The Ebolowa court hearing of 3 traffickers arrested with 91kg of pangolin scales, the Ebolowa arrest of 4 traffickers with 4 elephant tusks as well as their court hearing. the 2024 new wildlife law, the Yaounde arrest of 3 traffickers with 2 elephant tusks in, the Yaounde arrest of 3 traffickers including a military officer with 3.5 elephant tusks, and the Yaounde arrest of pastor with 6 elephant tusks. An interview was conducted with the Head of the Legal Department,

The distribution of Wildlife Justice Magazine continued. Wildlife Justice is a thematic journal that focuses on wildlife law enforcement and conservation issues.



**Figure 5: Number of Media Pieces Produced and Published**



**Figure 6: Split in Media Pieces**

## **5. Management**

Despite several challenges, all the departments were fully functional and worked hard in ensuring some good results were obtained. The first semester report of 2024 was uploaded online. The electronic versions are available online on the LAGA website [www.laga-enforcement.org](http://www.laga-enforcement.org). This is a result of teamwork involving all the departments in LAGA – Investigations, Legal, Media, Operations and Management.

Two regions of the country that are facing security problems continue to pose a challenge but plans that were put in place to quickly cover the regions were activated and investigations were carried out in the South West Region for first time in several years.

Recruitment for the investigations department continued with two volunteers tested and more were interviewed.



The Deputy Director travelled to Cote d'Ivoire to provide management assistance to the EAGLE Cote d'Ivoire Team following the departure of their Coordinator.

## **6. External Relations and Policy**

The Deputy Director presented on wildlife crime in Central Africa during a meeting in Lagos, organized by United for Wildlife in Nigeria to launch its West African Chapter. The meeting brought together several wildlife experts from Europe and Africa, Nigerian law enforcement and government officials.

He participated at a training on financial investigations and the fight against wildlife crime. Participants were drawn from several government ministries and institutions including the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife.

He held a meeting with an official from RUSI, an international NGO, on financial investigations and the strengthening of collaboration.

He held a meeting with Mentor Bat fellows programme of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

He held a meeting with the Central Africa Director of Global Conservation to discuss collaboration in the fight against wildlife Crime.

The Head of the Legal Department held a meeting with the Head of General Research Directorate Unit in Douala and the Chief of Customs of the Nsimalen Airport to strengthen collaboration in the fight against Wildlife Crime.

They held a meeting with the Customs Chief of the South West Region to strengthen collaboration in fighting wildlife crime in the region that borders Nigeria and is a hotspot for smuggling of wildlife contraband.

The Head of the Legal Department held a meeting with the Chief of Customs for the East Section to strengthen collaboration in the fight against wildlife crime. Discussions also focused on the Memorandum of Understand with the Customs Department.

The Head of the Legal Department and legal advisers held several meetings with administrative, wildlife and judicial officials to strengthen collaboration and in some cases to discuss ongoing cases, build common strategies and strengthen collaboration.

## **7. LAGA and the EAGLE Network**

LAGA's new model for NGO – Government collaboration establishing wildlife law enforcement, bringing about results with an innovative approach geared at changing the existing system and triggering a paradigm shift in the way NGOs tackle wildlife crime is being realised within the EAGLE network. The model is focusing on the prosecution of major traffickers, not the small-time poacher who is motivated by the city dwelling traffickers. This involves fighting head on the major obstacle to the application of the wildlife law in Africa – Corruption. LAGA's experience and model is currently operating within the EAGLE network that group 8 countries.

The replication of the LAGA model is also geared at taking cross section lessons outside of wildlife conservation; these include the fight against corruption, fostering activism, fight against child trafficking etc.

<http://www.laga-enforcement.org/Replication/tabid/166/Default.aspx>

The EAGLE network is now responsible for the replication activity of the LAGA model but LAGA continued assistance of young projects in the domain of investigation, operation, media and management. In this regard technical support was given to other EAGLE Network projects

## **8. Fostering Activism**

All the activism fostering activities carried out by the LAGA family are online; this could be gotten at the LAGA website – <http://www.laga-enforcement.org/Activism/tabid/77/Default.aspx>

## **9. Strategic Overview of Wildlife Crime in Cameroon and Operations' Impact**

Beyond the number of operations and their effectiveness, there is an even more important factor in evaluating LAGA's work – the strategic value of the operations and its impact on the illegal wildlife trade. In this regard, LAGA is choosing diversified operations, which carry an added value to expose and map the different angles of wildlife crime in Cameroon. Consequently, the LAGA-MINFOF work sheds light on the nature of illegal wildlife trade in the sub-region. The strategic focus over this period was on ivory trafficking, tackling those who keep the illegal trade running.

### ***Ivory Trafficking***

All 13 traffickers arrested during this semester were trafficking in elephant tusks. The huge illegal market sustaining this business is ongoing, perpetuated by unsuspecting people and equally efforts are being made to clamp down on the criminals. The illegal trade, because of the avidity, draws traffickers of all works of life, even those connected to conservation. This is the case of two arrest operations of the semester involving a forestry engineer and a retired colonel of the Ministry Forestry and Wildlife. The later knows even better because he had worked in parks around the country with his principal role being the protection of the very elephants.

4 traffickers were arrested with 4 elephant tusks in July. One of them is a forestry engineer working in a logging company and another is an electromechanical engineer in a government ministry. The three traffickers were arrested with the tusks concealed in a rice sack. They attempted to sell the elephant tusks. A swift and effective interrogation led to the arrest of the 4th who was hiding around waiting in safety for the money from the transaction.

3 traffickers were arrested with 2 elephant tusks in August. A retired Colonel of the Ministry of Forestry and wildlife, that has also been in charge of several National Parks was among them. The Colonel that abused his position has been charged and forwarded to court with the others.

The trend of people who are supposed to be the guardians of nature – the army is used in the country to guard some parks, continued during the semester with the arrest of a military sub-officer during a crackdown operation in Yaounde.

3 ivory traffickers including two military officers were arrested with three and a half tusks in a crackdown on corruption and complicity. One of the military officers resisted arrest violently making threats to the arresting force as he struggled. A warrant officer and a sacked army sergeant were arrested alongside a civilian. They all belong to a gang involved in trafficking wildlife and other illegal products using the cover of military personnel. One of the officers refused to let go his military bag raising suspicions as to the content of the bag, further intensifying the struggle to arrest him.

Finally, a Church Pastor, the protector of nature and respecter of the laws of the land, was arrested trafficking in elephant tusks during the last operation of the year. Ivory trafficking brings together a wide and varied set of people, who, from face value, would never be thought off as traffickers, but who use their perfect cover to carry out one of the most hideous crime against nature, the killing and trafficking of wildlife.

3 ivory traffickers, including a pastor, was arrested with 6 tusks in December. The Born Again Church pastor was the mastermind of the ring and got the tusks from a magistrate. They used a Yango taxi to arrive at the scene of transaction with the tusks concealed in a flour sack. They were quickly arrested and marched off to the wildlife office for interrogation and further investigations.

## **10. Corruption and Wildlife Crime**

LAGA has been an experiment field for methods of fighting corruption within a law enforcement and application process. All bribing attempts are documented into our case tracking systems. LAGA is not an observer of corruption; it was created to fight corruption, redirecting the positive pressures existing within the system, usually wasted in large conferences, to specific corruption attempts and the field realities that form corruption. These bribery attempts are vigorously fought against and vehemently condemned by LAGA. The organisation is not a watchdog group and not created as an observer, it fights directly whenever corrupt practices or bribery attempts have been observed. During the semester we had some corruption instances.

The family members of the 4 ivory traffickers arrested in July 2024 piled pressure on wildlife officials as they established the case files against them. Even local government officials arrived the wildlife office trying to corrupt officials in the conduct of their official law enforcement business, but they couldn't succeed as those from the wildlife office and police officers handling the case stood firm and push back the attempts.

The very problem was witnessed a month later, when 3 traffickers were arrested with elephant tusks. Family members piled pressure on wildlife officials, and one of the traffickers being a retired top wildlife official, tried to influence his junior and young colleagues handling the case but they stood their ground to do their job. Others family members tried to corrupt the wildlife officials and police handling the matter but failed. Seeing that the officials could not help, they approached the LAGA team, unfortunately for them, this too failed to produce any effect.

As there were 2 alleged military personnel among the traffickers arrested in November for ivory trafficking, they couldn't be kept at the police station and were therefore sent to the gendarmerie that had the competence to lock them up. During their stay at the gendarmerie, members of their families came to meet the gendarmes to negotiate their release but failed. They were later forwarded to the military tribunal in violation of the law despite the opposition of MINFOF and further, they would be release immediately thereafter.

As wildlife law enforcement officials were establishing the offence report against the traffickers arrested with elephant tusks in December, they received pressure from one of the traffickers. He proposed to negotiate but the wildlife officials and police handling the matter stood to their grounds. After witnessing the firmness of law enforcement officials, they tried another approach, this time to negotiate for release through the LAGA team. but obviously, it couldn't work for them.

**Annex I - the Semester in Pictures**



*Military personnel under arrest for wildlife trafficking in November*



*Born again church pastor among traffickers who await prosecution process at wildlife office shortly after arrest with 6 elephant tusks in December, in Yaounde*



*3 traffickers were arrested in August, with two elephant tusks in Yaounde, Centre Region.*



*4 traffickers were arrested in July, with four elephant tusks in Ebolowa, South Region.*

## **Annex II - Some media links**

Several online news sites carried stories on the arrest of traffickers during the semester and here are some examples:

In August, News du Camer, a news site, published the arrest of 4 traffickers with 4 elephant tusks in Ebolowa. The traffickers included a forestry engineer, an electro-mechanical engineer, a government secondary school teacher and one other. Their arrest is a fruit of a crackdown operation carried out by wildlife officials of the South Regional Delegation of Forestry and Wildlife in collaboration with the South Regional Division of Judicial Police.

[Lutte contre le braconnage : Quatre suspects arrêtés pour trafic d'ivoire d'éléphant dans le Sud - News du Cameroun](#)

In September the site published the arrest of 4 traffickers with 2 elephant tusks in Yaounde. The traffickers, including two computer engineers, a retired Colonel of the Ministry in charge of Forestry and one other were charged and forwarded to court.

<https://www.newsducamer.com/ebolowa-quatre-prevenus-risquent-de-lourdes-peines-pour-traffic-divoire/>

In October, Alwihda info, a news site, published the arrest of 4 traffickers with 2 elephant tusks in Yaounde. The traffickers, including two computer engineers, a retired colonel of the Ministry in charge of Forestry and one other were charged and brought to court.

<https://www.newsducamer.com/lutte-contre-le-braconnage-quatre-suspects-devant-la-justice-pour-traffic-divoire-a-ebolowa/>

In November, the site published the arrest of 3 traffickers including a military officer with 3.5 elephant tusks in Yaounde. The traffickers, included a former army sergeant who was sacked in 2017. Click the link below to read the full story:

[https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Cameroun-un-militaire-arrete-pour-traffic-d-animaux-sauvages-menaces\\_a137190.html?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR3u9R5ge111XttZakPtxWUSpkmSgOD2BprKO0qfmvogobNMGOOrSQO2wYJs\\_aem\\_aGV5Vp8\\_aCeNChaBYz1v5Q](https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Cameroun-un-militaire-arrete-pour-traffic-d-animaux-sauvages-menaces_a137190.html?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR3u9R5ge111XttZakPtxWUSpkmSgOD2BprKO0qfmvogobNMGOOrSQO2wYJs_aem_aGV5Vp8_aCeNChaBYz1v5Q)

In December, Eco-Outlook, a news site, published the arrest of 3 traffickers including a Born Again Church pastor with 6 elephant tusks in Yaounde. The traffickers were arrested in a crackdown operation conducted by wildlife officers in collaboration with the Police and technically assisted by LAGA. Click the link below to read the full story:

<https://ecooutlooknews.com/2024/12/05/a-military-officer-arrested-for-wildlife-trafficking/>

### **The List of Cases Semester 1, 2024**

The list of cases and details of specific cases are made available on demand. Please contact [eric@laga-enforcement.org](mailto:eric@laga-enforcement.org) for further information.