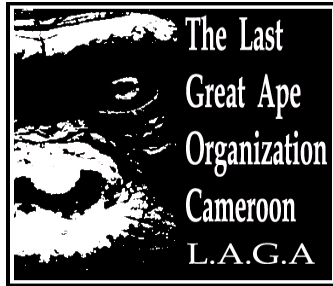


THE LAST GREAT APE ORGANIZATION, CAMEROON LAGA

FIRST SEMESTER REPORT JANUARY– DECEMBER 2024



Executive Summary

Achievements were recorded in LAGA’s collaboration with the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) despite several challenges posed over this period. 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 in apes. The EAGLE Central Coordination Unit collaborated very closely with the investigations ensuring vital support that enabled the arrest of 16 traffickers.

The early part of the year was very challenging but improvements were made during the second half of the year and 16 traffickers, mostly ivory traffickers, were arrested. 69% of those arrested stayed behind bars from the early stages of the prosecution process. A majority of those arrested were trafficking in elephant tusks. 10 ivory traffickers were charged the cases are in court. 2 ape traffickers who were arrested in April “escaped” from gendarmerie custody and the investigations are still ongoing to get them rearrested. In another matter, 3 traffickers, including a military sub-officer, who were arrested in November 2024 were presented at the military tribunal and the matter sent back to the gendarmerie for further investigations. 5 traffickers were found guilty and 3 traffickers given prison sentences and ordered to pay fines and or damages. A mandrill trafficker was given 4 months’ jail term and an ivory trafficker was also sentenced to 4 months in prison in December. Both punishments were very weak and disappointing. In total, the courts ordered the payment of damages totalling 8,240,000 FCFA (about \$16,480\$) to MINFOF. Media exposure was at a rate of a media piece for every 2 days.

The EAGLE network achieved substantial results as 90 traffickers were arrested across 7 countries.

The work of LAGA was supported by Wildcat Foundation, OAK Foundation, The Dutch Gorilla Foundation, ProWildlife, Wildcat, Olsen Animal Trust, Future for Elephants and the Rufford Foundation,

LAST GREAT APE ORGANISATION, CAMEROON (LAGA)
ANNUAL REPORT
January - December 2024

OVERVIEW

Investigations

- A total of 155 investigation missions (of varying lengths) were carried out in 8 regions.
- Two new investigators were tested and trained during the most part of the year.

Operations

- The year was marked by the arrest of 16 traffickers; mostly ivory traffickers.
- Operations were carried out in 4 regions arresting 2 ape traffickers, a notorious ivory trafficker who had been on the run and 13 ivory traffickers, including a military sub-officer, a church pastor, a wildlife official, a forestry engineer and an electromechanical engineer, among others
- Gorilla heads and limbs were seized from two traffickers:

Legal

- 10 new cases were brought to court. Two traffickers escaped from gendarmerie custody before the charges could be filed against them. A search for the fugitives is on.
- The case against the military sub-officer and two other traffickers was sent to the military tribunal much against the legal procedure.
- 3 traffickers were found guilty and handed prison sentences and or fines and damages. Damages amounted to some 8,240,000 FCFA (about \$16,480\$), to be paid to MINFOF.
- 6 court rulings were passed during the year.

Media

- A total of 180 media pieces were produced in national media (radio, written press and internet) achieved at a rate one for every three days.
- The media department fell low below it expected and usual output or result but plans were immediately hatched to improve on the situation.

Management

- The annual report of 2023 was made available online.
- Focus was on maintaining high standards in every department and on improving recruitment for investigators.
- Specific emphasises were made on improving on the first part of the year that had very few (3) traffickers arrested.

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

- The operational focus over this period was ivory trafficking.
- The strategic focus was on selecting, testing and recruiting good investigators, training and recycling old investigators and improving investigative techniques to improve on the results which were not so good during the first part of the year.
- Improving the human resources of the organisation was also an important step to improving general performances of the organisation. In this regard, a new accountant and legal adviser joined the team.
- The CCU evaluated and provided strategic assistance to management, operational and organisational functioning.

EAGLE Activities

- A total of 50 traffickers were arrested across 7 countries of the network during this semester.
- Uganda, after undergoing a long period of restructuring, had its first operation with the arrest of a trafficker with 3 lion skins.

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Also available:

1. Annual Financial Statement 2024
2. Annual Second 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

NARRATIVE REPORT

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

1. Investigations

LAGA's investigation unit carried out 155 investigation missions in 7 regions of the country during the year. Investigations were particularly difficult during the early part of the year, but some changes were made in investigation strategies during the second part of the year to address the situation and this yielded good results. Traffickers have developed sophisticated and complicated modus operandi. Focus have been on the strict respect of basic investigative procedures and techniques while devising and implementing new complementary techniques. Investigation as a whole take more time to come to fruition as compared to a couple of years ago. As has been the case over the last years, the collaboration with the Central Coordination Unit (CCU) 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, under the supervision of the CCU.

Recruitment was intensified with a good number of candidates interviewed and three retained for testing. One of them was later removed for failing to meet up with the ethical standards the organisation has set. 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.

A new head of department was appointed following the departure of Serge Boris Ania who held the positions for close to 10 years. Gilbert Njuana Atem was formerly the assistant head of the investigations department.

A long serving investigator was promoted to the position of chief investigator; a position that had been vacant for a long time.

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.

He was part of the operation team during all operations carried out during the year and this greatly boosted the operation capacity of the whole team.

The country continues to face a challenging security situation in some parts and investigations were not carried out in these regions. Plans put in place to fully cover these areas were partially activated for the South West Region as the security situation slowly improved.



Figure 1: Number of Investigations Missions per Month

2. Operations

LAGA and the Government of Cameroon carried out operations in 3 regions against 16 individuals resulting in 10 court cases at a rate of one every 3 weeks. Investigations carried out concerned all species but most of the operations were on ivory trafficking during the year. Below are the operations ;

In April, 2 traffickers were arrested in Doume, East Region with parts of 2 killed gorillas. The parts that included heads and limbs had blood still dripping indicating the gorillas were recently killed. The two were specialised in poaching and trafficking in great apes. The two disappeared from the Gendarmerie cell where they were remanded in custody with strong links to corruption. They were reported to have “escaped”. The hunt is ongoing and the corruption incident is under investigations. They operated mainly from Lomie and were specialized in trafficking parts of great apes – chimps and gorillas. They had strong connections around their base

In June, a trafficker was arrested in Kye Ossi, South Region in connection with the trafficking of several hundreds of kg of ivory and double identity. Using corruption, he negotiated his release from police custody in Nigeria. He was arrested by Nigeria customs in February at a border town with a handgun and 200 kg of ivory tusks he trafficked from Cameroon. He was also under investigations for his connection to the seizure of 132 elephant tusks in August last year and the arrest of 9 traffickers in Gabon. The ivory tusks were hidden deep inside a truck that was on the way to Nigeria via Cameroon. The truck had to be pulled open and parts removed to find the ivory. He had earlier been arrested in October 2020 in Cameroon, sentenced and served a jail term of only 4 months. He was found guilty of illegal possession of 626kg of elephant tusks that were seized by Cameroon customs at a border town close to Gabon. The elephant tusks were trafficked from Gabon. He is part of a transnational criminal syndicate that uses corruption to facilitate the smuggling of ivory tusks across the sub region and beyond. He was found to have a fake identity and made a set of new identification documents with the fake identity.

4 traffickers were arrested in July, 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 4th 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

<i>Number of Operations</i>	<i>Number of Traffickers</i>	<i>Contraband</i>
6	16	<i>2 gorilla heads, 4 chimpanzee limbs, and 4 fresh gorilla limbs, 4 elephant tusks, 2 elephant tusks. 3 and a half elephant tusks, 6 elephant tusks</i>

Figure 2: Operation Table

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. Meanwhile old cases were scheduled in court and follow up by the legal team. 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.

5 traffickers were convicted and only 3 received prison sentences buttressing the fact that the courts are giving weaker and weaker sentences. Too many times, the sentences do not look commensurate

to the crimes committed. A mandrill trafficker was given a 4-month jail term and an ivory trafficker was equally given a 4-month imprisonment term but both penalties were not satisfying and appeals were lodged against them. The stipulates that anyone found guilty could face one to three years in jail. Damages awarded to MINFOF amounted to some 8,240,000 FCFA (about \$16,480\$). Most of the cases initiated within this period have not yet reached the judgement stage and the rate of keeping the accused behind bars at the onset of the procedure stood at with 69%.

A total of 43 missions were carried out of the Centre Region for follow-up of new cases and the creation and strengthening of relations with judicial authorities. As a direct result of operations the missions were principally focused on the pangolin scales cases.

During the period, 6 court judgements were passed 3 traffickers found guilty and 2 given sentences of 4 months in jail while one other received a light sentence of 2 months in jail.

In March, the Littoral Appeal Court reversed the judgment of the Bonanjo Court of First Instance against BOUNDOUMA Benoît and, ruling again, ordered the defendant to pay 3,040,000 CFA F (about 6\$) as damages. He was arrested in Douala in August 2020 for the illegal possession of one rhinoceros horn.

In June, the Littoral Appeal Court reversed the judgment of the Bonanjo Court of First Instance against BOUNDOUMA Benoît and, ruling again, ordered the defendant to pay 3,040 FCFA (about 600\$) as court fees.

In June, the Ebolowa Court of First Instance found the accused SOUA 2 Ulrich guilty and sentenced him to 4 months in prison and to pay 300,000 FCFA (about 600\$) as fine and 3,000,000 FCFA (about 6000\$) as damages. He was arrested in Ebolowa in August 2023 for the illegal possession of live mandrill.

In June, the Ebolowa Court of First Instance found the accused Louck John guilty and sentenced him to 2 months in prison and to pay 300,000 FCFA (about 600\$) as fine and 1,000,000 FCFA (about 2000\$) as damages. He was arrested in Ebolowa in August 2023 for the illegal possession of live chimpanzee.

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.

4. Media

A total of 180 media pieces were produced and pushed into media including numerous articles in all media – radio, television, written press and the internet; achieved at a rate of a media piece every two days. This is below the targeted number of media pieces and efforts are being made to ensure that next year, that media department meets its targets.

Subjects focused on wildlife law enforcement including the arrest of a city council worker with a drill in Yabassi, the court hearings of wildlife traffickers including 4 traffickers arrested in Akonolinga with 28 African grey parrots, the Ebolowa arrest of 2 traffickers with a chimp and a mandrill, the celebration of World Pangolin Day 2024, the arrest of 30 traffickers in 4 African countries during the first quarter of the year 2024, the arrest of 2 traffickers arrested in Doume, East Region of Cameroon with gorillas’ heads and limbs, 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, the Yaounde arrest of 3 traffickers including a military officer with 3.5 elephant tusks and the Yaounde arrest of pastor and two others 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.

No TV media pieces were published during the year and new strategies have been put in place to ensure this situation does not occur during next year.

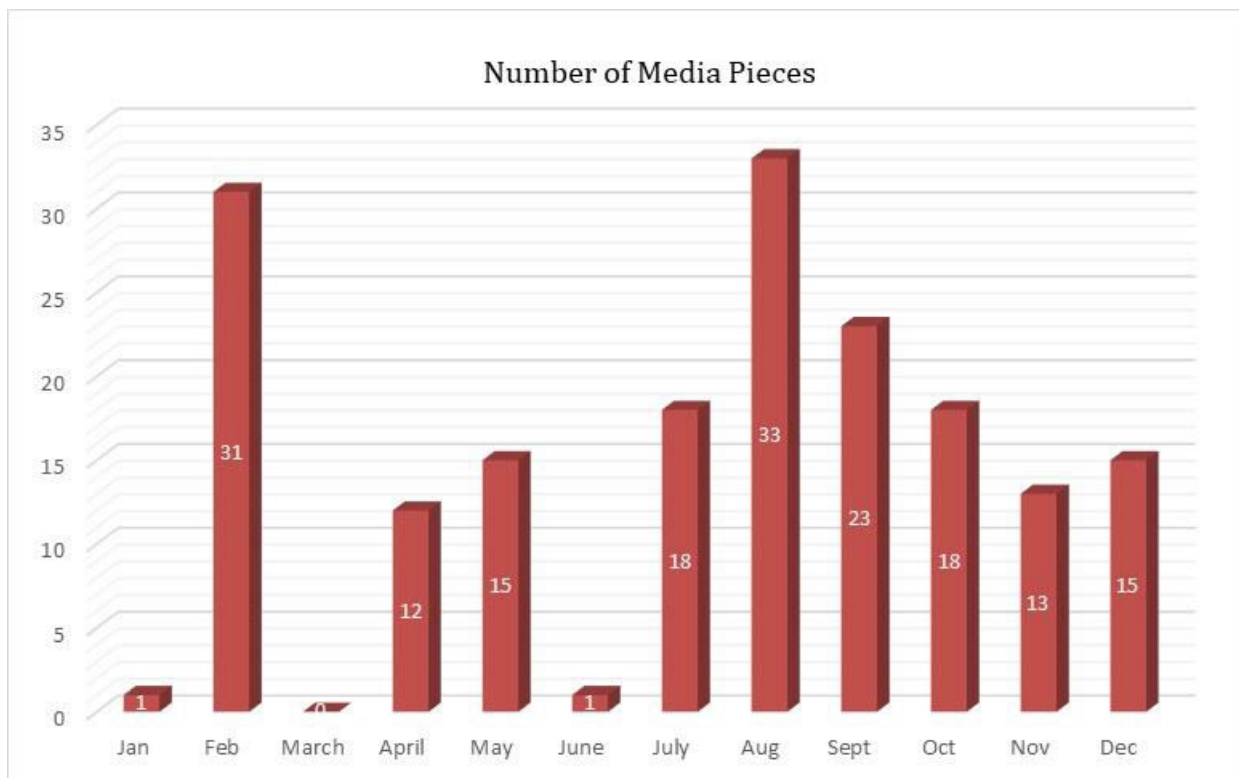


Figure 3: Number of Media Pieces Produced and Published

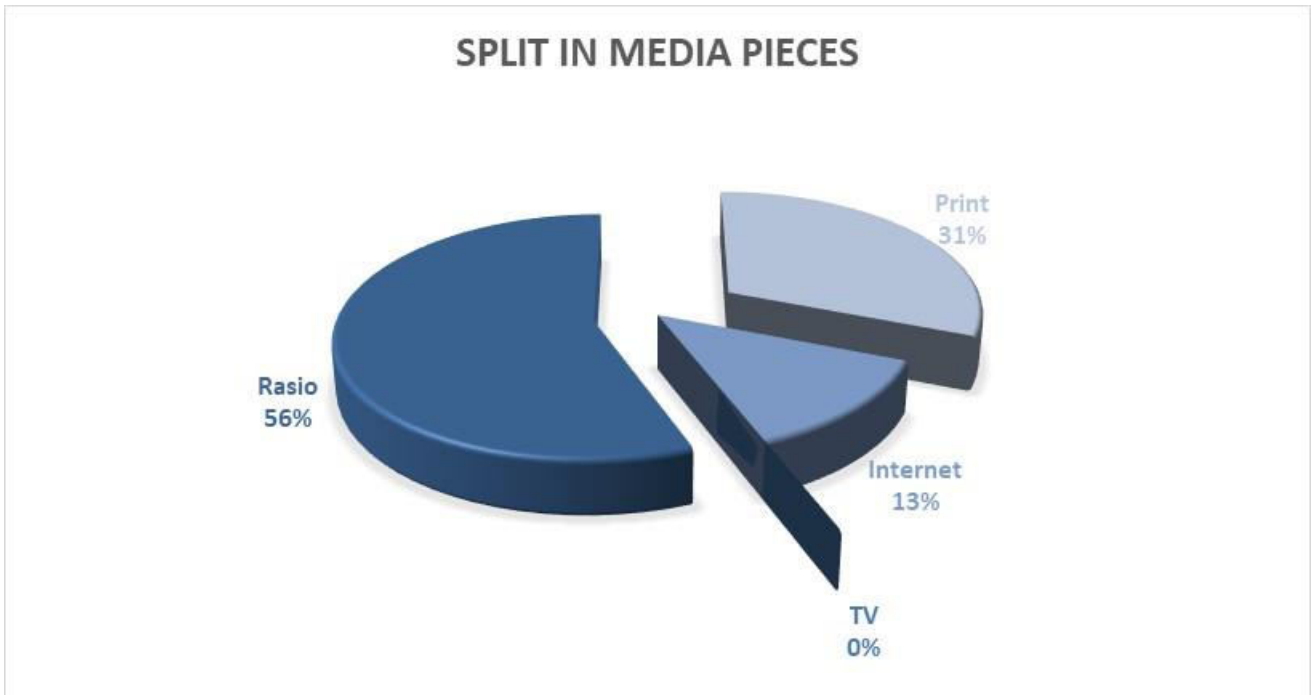


Figure 3: Split in Media Pieces

5. Management

At the start of the year, several challenges were encountered and gradually solutions were found that helped improved on the results as the year went on. The annual report of 2023 was uploaded online. The electronic versions are available online on the LAGA website www.laga-enforcement.org. This is a result of teamwork involving all the departments in LAGA – Investigations, Legal, Media, Operations and Management.

The first semester was clearly very poor with insufficient results but efforts were made to improve and this saw a leap in performances during the second semester. This was made possible thanks to several strategies implemented during the second semester.

Two other regions of the country that are seared with security problems continue to pose a challenge but plans are in place to quickly cover the regions once the situation on the ground improves. This was the case during the second semester with the South West Region, as new investigations were initiated there considering the improved security situation.

The financial and activity reports of 2023 were all successfully completed. All activity reports were published online alongside the first semester report of 2024.

Recruitment for the investigations and legal departments continued and some candidates were interviewed, some put on test and one recruited at the legal department. Several interviews for the position of accountant were carried out and a new accountant recruited. A new legal adviser was also recruited following a long and stringent testing and training period.

The Deputy Director participated at the EAGLE Coordination Meeting of 2024. The meeting was held November 1 -7 and brought together 9 EAGLE managers - Coordinators from Senegal, Togo, Congo, Uganda and Cameroon, 4 Central Coordination Unit members and the EAGLE Director. A broad range of issues affecting the network were discussed during in-depth sessions, working together to improve our way of work, growth and planning. The EAGLE meeting served as a forum for reflection, analysis, problem solving and exchange of ideas on how to improve the network and the country projects.

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.

A couple of thought-provoking sessions of presentations and debates for the LAGA team were organised to foster activism and leadership skills.

6. 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. Here is a summary of some of the meetings.

The Deputy Director participated at a roundtable meeting organised by the Environmental Investigation Agency in Abuja, that brought together customs, wildlife, Interpol and financial investigation authorities from Nigeria, Cameroon and Congo Brazzaville. He did a presentation on the fight against wildlife trafficking in Cameroon.

During the missions he held several discussions with Nigerian and Congolese officials to strengthen collaboration in the fight against wildlife crime.

He participated at a ceremony organised by WWF to welcome their incoming National Director, Alain Ononino. The new country director of the organisation was formerly the Head of the Legal Department and the first ever Deputy Director of LAGA. During the meeting he had a brief discussion with the Head of the Department of Cooperation at the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife.

He held a meeting with the Chief of Service in charge of wildlife crime at the INTERPOL National Central Bureau to strengthen collaboration in the fight against wildlife crime.

He held a meeting with 3 American Embassy officials including the Head of the Political Section to discuss issues related to wildlife law enforcement in the country.

He participated at a virtual Regional INTERPOL meeting that was organised to discuss wildlife law enforcement and collaboration. He highlighted the importance of effective collaboration in wildlife law enforcement.

He participated at a workshop in Douala that wound up a two-year project of TRAFFIC on Ivory Stock Management. He did presentation on wildlife crime focusing on the causes, trends and impact. Participants included wildlife officials, the police, customs, justice and territorial administration officials.

He 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 9 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 to host training sessions in the country and in this regard, LAGA hosted a super volunteer who received training and participated in numerous field activities.

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/Actiwithvism/tabid/77/Default.aspx>

Presentation

A power point presentation was given by Loveline (Legal Adviser) in view of the celebration of the International Women’s Day (IWD) titled ‘*IWD 2024, time to accelerate*’. The presentation examined the political, social and economic achievements of women since the creation of IWD. It equally stated the need to accelerate things in order to meet up with its objectives of gender equality by 2049.

Movie Screening

A movie, ‘Bringing down a dictator’ was screened in the office as part of activities marking the commemoration of Labour Day celebration in LAGA. The movie centres on the use of peaceful or non-violent method in a protest to bring a positive change. It also outlines some qualities including determination, fighting spirit and teamwork a team should have in order to succeed in a common cause. The Otpor had all of these qualities which made it possible for them to bring down Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia.

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 chimp, gorilla and ivory trafficking.

9.1 Ape Trafficking

Two ape traffickers were arrested in the south east of the country in a locality not too far from the Dja Reserve that still has some viable populations of wildlife. The traffickers were specialised in poaching and trafficking of gorillas and chimpanzee parts supplying the special parts (heads and limbs) to some officials including traditional heads. They were quickly removed from the chain that slaughters and rapidly decimates ape populations in areas where you could still find viable groups of these animals. But unfortunately they were reported as “escaped” from gendarmerie custody and little is known about their whereabouts right now although we assisted authorities in a man-hunt. They could just as well be killing more of the apes – something the operation tried to stop.

9.2 Ape Trafficking

All 13 traffickers arrested during this second 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 second 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. 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 heinous crime against nature, the killing and trafficking of wildlife.

The Born Again Church pastor was the mastermind of the ring that had two others arrested alongside. They got the tusks from the family of a retired 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. LAGA is not a watchdog group and not created as an observer, it fights directly whenever corrupt practices or bribery attempts have been observed.

This ongoing fight is directed towards issues that touch on corruption and bad governance. In April, 2 traffickers were arrested with gorilla parts and the prosecution procedure was well advanced when suddenly they were reported as “escaped” from gendarmerie custody.

In June, a notorious big time ivory trafficker was arrested in Cameroon. Using corruption, he had negotiated his release from police custody in Nigeria when he was arrested by Nigeria customs in February at a border town with a handgun and 200 kg of ivory tusks he trafficked from Cameroon.

The family members of the 4 ivory traffickers arrested in July 2024 pilled 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. We were present at the wildlife office.

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 was bound failed, obviously.

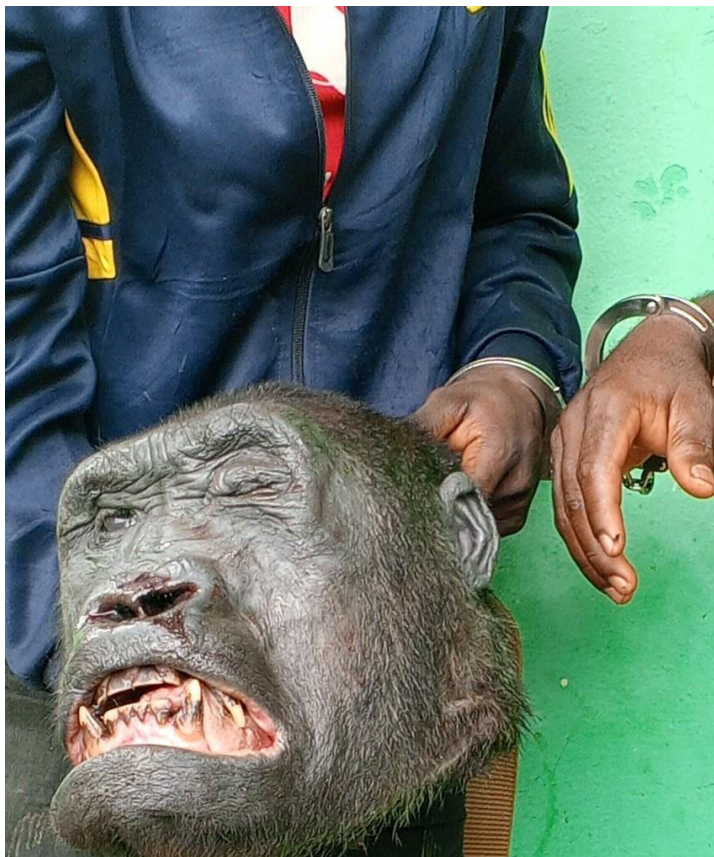
As there were 2 alleged military personnel among the traffickers arrested in November for ivory trafficking, they couldn't be kept at the police station and were therefore sent to the gendarmerie that had the competence to lock them up. During their stay at the gendarmerie, members of their families 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 ground. 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



Two traffickers arrested with gorilla limbs and heads were suddenly described as “escaped” from gendarmerie custody, the search is on.





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





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





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

Annex II- Some media links

Some online news sites carried stories on the trafficking and arrest, 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

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/>

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The List of Cases 2024

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