



Pandrillus Cameroon

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Email: info@limbewildlife.org | Website: www.limbewildlife.org

P.O. Box 878, Limbe, Republic of Cameroon

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LIMBE WILDLIFE CENTRE INAUGURATES THE FIRST SOFT-RELEASE OF ENDANGERED AFRICAN GREY PARROT IN CAMEROON'S HISTORY

GIVING FREEDOM TO REHABILITATED AFRICAN GREY PARROTS

On Friday 31st of July, the Limbe Wildlife Centre will release the first flock of endangered African Grey parrots, all rescued and confiscated by authorities and LWC throughout 2019. This will be the first successful release in Cameroon's history.

With this milestone, the MINFOF and Pandrillus Cameroon - partners on this programme as well as management and financing of the LWC - are launching the national rescue, rehabilitation and release programme. Not only will this pave the way to improving the protection of Cameroon's iconic African Grey, but the nurturing of biodiversity across the national territory.

This momentous event is a strong message to the International Community that Cameroon is willing to further bridge the gap between animal welfare and conservation actions. Indeed MINFOF and Pandrillus' pioneering programme constitutes the first national reintroduction programme of an endangered species.

This achievement is the result of more than 10 months of hard work at the LWC. This work not only increased the centre's capacity but implemented innovative, top-standard rehabilitation procedures. Ultimately this has allowed us to improve the chances of survival of all the victims of poaching and trafficking.

Several components were improved: quarantine period, veterinary care, rehabilitation facilities and monitoring and enrichment protocols. The LWC is now the only institution in Cameroon with the capacity to rehabilitate the African grey parrot to such a high standard.

Happily, this period has seen the attainment of the best results ever as regards survival and recovery rate. Less than 25% of the rescued individuals died (as compared to 30% elsewhere). More saliently, 90% of our birds survived after 1 month.

Limbe's New Rehabilitation Aviary

LWC currently has more than 200 birds in the large rehabilitation aviary, built in late 2019 with the goal to translocate them in flocks of 25 individuals into various protected areas in the country. Through the pilot phase that has been initiated in the Limbe Botanical Garden, the methodology for the soft release protocol will be tested, improved and standardized for validation and replication in other areas.

The manager of the LWC, Ms. Motsch, is grateful to all supporters who have helped Pandrillus to raise the necessary funds to assist the MINFOF in the programme:

“Many individuals donors throughout the world donated to help us achieve that goal. We are also especially thankful to Parrot Wildlife Foundation, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Los Angeles Zoo, Pro Wildlife, Born Free Foundation, Givskud Zoo, Vogel Park Marlow, LUSHUK, the Programme for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and many others. We hope to get more support to keep going, especially during the pandemic that has greatly impacted on our finance. Such success on this time is refreshing.”

Several other components of the national programme have been initiated, but still require development. Firstly, GPS tracking of released birds aims to improve our knowledge of the species' ecology, allowing us to prioritize conservation actions. Secondly, a mass education campaign has been created to inform, inspire and engage Cameroonians to support and steward the programme.

The conservator of the LWC, Mr Rim, is also highly satisfied and proud of the fruitful 27-year-long collaboration at the LWC, and the hard work and dedication of the staff over the past month. He emphasizes: *“Without these daily efforts and the commitment of all the teams to provide the best care to each animal, we would not have achieved these results. All the individuals working for the LWC strive towards the same ultimate goal – to give animals the chance to survive and thrive in the wild. Such a strong commitment to this goal is why the LWC has received awards at the Cop of the CITES 2019. More importantly, it is this dedication that has put us in a position to develop and implement a national management plan to safeguard the victims of the trade, and to follow the recommendation of the CITES and IUCN. This programme is a tool that must serve to further our efforts combatting wildlife crimes in Cameroon.”*

As in 2017, the international conservation status of the African Grey Parrot has changed. The international and national restrictions on the species have increased, with the African Grey now considered endangered. It is therefore strictly protected by Cameroonian law, prohibiting capture, sale or detainment without official special authorization.

In the next few months, the Limbe Wildlife Centre will replicate the same protocol with other partners, each lasting 6 to 8 weeks. While this is exciting, of equal import is the education to accompany this release. As with all long-term conservation efforts, it is crucial to inform the population of Limbe that all these birds belong to Cameroon. Each person must protect these birds wherever possible.

“We hope to develop further partnerships with different protected areas. If we can replicate this methodology, developing conservation education programmes and engaging the public and private sectors, we can unify and strengthen conservation efforts at a national level”, insists Ms Motsch.

Conservation is not an agenda followed by companies, corporations or interested parties alone. Conservation is a People's matter. Everyone has a role to play, not only with

explicit conservatory work, but by the condemnation and refusal of illegal activities that impede the survival of wildlife in Cameroon.

“For today, we are immensely proud to give freedom back to the African Greys, a crucial and cherished part of the heritage of Cameroon's biodiversity” concludes the Conservator.

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