



Limbe Wildlife Centre

A collaborative effort between Pandrillus Foundation and the Government of Cameroon, Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, MINFOF

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Should Cameroon do more to support its natural treasures?

At a time usually reserved for festivities, Christmas Eve 2019 was instead marked by the rescue of another flock of 275 endangered African grey parrots by the Limbe Wildlife Centre. Customs seized the trafficked parrots in the Littoral Region, placing them in the specialized care of the Limbe Wildlife Centre (LWC) for rehabilitation. Over the course of 2019, this internationally recognized organisation - the only government-led project in Cameroon with the capacity to provide a high standard of care to wildlife - rescued 379 African grey parrots from traffickers. Currently, LWC has 360 birds under its care. On average, a 6-month rehabilitation period is required before release. The minimal budget required for basic maintenance of this essential programme is 30M FCFA.

The survival of Cameroon wildlife depends on sufficient funding for all aspects of care, rehabilitation and release. Stakeholders engaged in wildlife conservation must share this fundamental responsibility in Cameroon, it should not be placed solely on the shoulders of a single NGO.

Pandrillus Country Director, Guillaume Le Flohic, reports that this amount "represents an increase of 15% to LWC's total budget, including the subsidies from the Government of Cameroon. This figure also represents 25-30% of the funds raised each year by Pandrillus Cameroon. Without additional support, our capacity to offer the best standard of care to the birds and to maintain all the 200 primates (inc. 15 gorillas, 43 chimpanzees and 74 drills) and other mammals and reptiles under our protection, is seriously challenged".

Le Flohic acknowledges the recent operation led by Customs within the framework of 'Operation Halt Illicit Trade', (codenamed Operation Halcomi III): "I would like to congratulate the Cameroonian Customs, and in particular Commandant Philemon Raymond Amougou Owona, for this work well-done."

Customs oversaw the seizure of 275 parrots, along with 600kg of pangolin scales, marking a record seizure. In November 2019, 84 endangered African grey parrots (along with a large bag filled with over 100 kilograms of pangolin scales) were seized by military forces (BIR) in Bakassi before they could be shipped to Nigeria. With any hope, they can serve as the basis for further investigations, arrests, and has the potential to benefit the state treasury in the form of fines collected. The successful prosecution of traffickers would benefit both the ecological health of the nation and its economy.

However, repeated confiscations show the recurrent scourge of wildlife crime in Cameroon. Despite new international regulations, nothing has changed. The reality is that traffickers are well-



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organised and disregard laws and ethics because they do not face major challenges or consequences to their illegal activities. It is rare, in a country plagued by systemic corruption, for the 'big fish' to be accosted especially when resources, expertise and support of wildlife crime investigation are also often lacking. The perpetrators in illegal operations are rarely identified and brought to justice, essentially they are given free reign to do as they please. The lack of punishment may attract others into the trade of illegal trafficking.

There is an urgent need for strong political will and community support to help save natural ecosystems. To ensure their survival, including all the species they house, they need to be properly maintained. It is only then that they can sustainably benefit local communities. Only by their preservation can they fulfil their role in the economy, serving as the entire basis of the ecotourism sector. The role the local ecosystems play in ensuring wealth and prosperity to communities should not be underestimated. They create opportunities for local biological and conservation jobs, therefore creating a ripe area of interest and a key area for channelling professional curriculums in universities. Last, but not least, our ecosystems provide a long-term source of taxes and income for the country.

How much does Cameroon value its natural treasures? Its importance should be remembered when considering upcoming prosecution and judiciary processes. Neither can we afford to forget its crucial economic role when the Government of Cameroon allocates its emergency funding. Thus far, support from the Government has proven instrumental in all LWC's successful projects. But to date, Pandrillus alone has funded the new rehabilitation aviary (15.7M FCFA) and the totality of drugs, food and care provided to the entire bird population (3.9M FCFA) of the Limbe Wildlife Centre/Limbe Zoological Garden. Without significant support from the Government, saving these 360 magnificent endangered birds and releasing them back to the wild, where they belong, will be a major challenge.

Anyone who wishes to donate and contribute to the preservation of the African grey parrot can do so at www.limbewildlife.org/donate

