



Agency for Conservation and Development

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Conservation Concerns in South Sudan

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Agency: Agency for Conservation and Development (ACD)

Head office at Old Fangak town

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Jonglei State

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1. Introduction

Agency for Conservation and Development (ADC) has been in engagement with community members, wildlife poachers, cattle keepers, and travelers in the five counties of Akobo, Ayod, Akobo, Fangak, Nyirol, Pochala, Pibor, and Ulang since November 2021 regarding the locations and reports of wild animal movements due to displacement by floods along the Sudd Swamp. Interviews and hearsay reports suggested movements of the big five (elephants, Lions, Giraffes, Buffaloes) from Ayod and Fangak (Sudd swamp) towards North-East of Jonglei State's counties of Akobo, Nyirol, Ulang and Pochala. To avoid human settlements, the animals followed the marshes of Khorflus, and Chuil towards Kuotkeak (Nasir County), towards Mok-Boor of Alali payam (at the border with Pochala County). It was not evident that Rhinos were in these treks. Reports had it that a few (less than five) were spotted between Nyirol and Ulang counties in August 2018. Since then, poachers have killed over fifty herds of elephants and over one hundred Giraffes. Lions were killed out of fear and their number is sufficient in the wild of the eight counties. The continued monetary support by Save Giraffes Now (SGN) and Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) motivated the exhibition team with hope of larger future operations throughout Jonglei. The findings were overwhelming.

2. The Mission teams

ACD's Community Wildlife Ambassadors led the exhibition in fewer number and by following poachers. In November 2021, Ayod and Fangak team ended their mission around Nyandior and Khorflus due to floods and thickness of the marshes. There was lesser success in finding and taking pictures of elephants and Buffaloes that were reported to have passed the areas. Two Giraffes were reported killed in Kuorwai village that month. The team conducted perception workshops to inform the community of importance of the wild animals and that their being near should not be taken as threat to their living. The team conducted two 5-day training sessions with 37 (12F, 25M) participants from seven villages around Kuorwai and Khorflus. This became Community Wildlife Advocates. Two of them (1F, 1M) accepted to be called Community Peace Advocate, and acts as mediators should conflict arise among community members over wild animals and among community members and the wild animals, in search of space.

The traditional leader of Kuorwai, Chief Kuol Gany Jal, 67, accepted to lead any initiative aimed at protecting and conserving the environment. He reported being a champion of peace and has been against bush burning and killing of wild animals especially elephants which he tied to his clan's belief as "god".

In Akobo and Pochala, five Wildlife Community Ambassadors (3-Akobo, 2-Pochala) after communicating through cell phone networks (Zain/Akobo, MTN/Pochala) agreed to meet at Mok-Boor, a known wildlife habitat along Nile river at the border of Akobo and Pochala Counties, where rumors had it that poachers had gone there.

3. Equipment during the survey

The community Wildlife Ambassadors were armed with cameras, cell phones and notebooks to record activities. Operationally, they were supported with the following,

1. -Tents, mosquito nets, backpacks, utensils
2. -Food
3. -Medicines

4. Findings

Akobo and Pchala Team met at Nyibol villages at the Pchala border with Ethiopia on May 2, 2022. Here, they engaged with village members to ascertain sightings of wild animals and their species. Reports had it that elephants had destroyed crops in the village in March 2022. There were also reports of several herds of Buffaloes, Tiang and black eared crows. Several other animals including Lions, hyenas, gazel were named. The team was also warned of many poachers roaming the forests of Nyibol, Mok-Boor, and Alali. These were reported to have come from Akobo, Nasir and Ulang. Community members mentioned presence of Murle youths but were not primarily roaming the forests because of wild animal search, rather, for cattle and children, but do also kill wild animals for food.

On May 4, 2020, the team travelled to Mok-Boor and after nine hours walk, decided to retire to a nearby pool that was in the middle of thick forests and surrounded by long coach grass. The forests were dotted with several sounds of insects, birds, small and large animals, but were difficult to spot on due to thick canopies. The next day, they continued South of Mok-Boor and after a long walk, only gazel and white eared crows could be seen at distances. The animals had developed sharp sense of smell and hearing. In most cases, only fresh footprints and stools would be found on tracks. Before night fall, they found old camps of poachers. There were several bones and animal skins scattered around a large fig tree. With limited knowledge of animal species, it was difficult to identify the species killed. Only buffalo horns and skulls were easily identified and were in large numbers. Few Giraffe skulls were also seen.

The team caught up with the poachers in Mok-Boor on May 19. Here, they found they had already killed over ten wild animals among which include a large male Giraffe, two Buffaloes (male and female), hyena, and “muon” – local Nuer name

Location: Mok-Boor village of Alali Payam, part of Akobo and Pochala counties at the border with Ethiopia. It's a four-five days work from Akobo town and about 45 minutes flight (helicopter) from Akobo town, and 25 minutes flight from Pochala town.

The picture below show pictures of animals found killed by poachers at Mok-Boor



Fig 1: A large male Giraffe



Fig 2: Male buffalo. He was killed with his female counterpart at same place, Mok-Boor village



Fig 3: About 5–7-year-old male elephant, killed in February 2022 at same place (pictures from the hunter in pictures) – Mok-Boor village



Fig 4: Male “Muom”, found not dead at the time but was badly wounded and died later of bleeding, 11AM, May 19, 2022 – Mok-Boor village

During the expedition at Mok-Boor, the team caught up with the poachers (13) and held discussions over what and what not to do. Pieces of advice were given on negative implications of killing wild animals, not only to the country but to individual person. The team used personal conscience to communicate the need to protect and conserve the

environment and the wild animals. The following points were used to draw the poachers' attention.

- (1) Giraffes are almost deemed extinct in South Sudan. These are some of the most peaceful animals in the World and which fetch a lot of education and economic benefits to countries and individuals, of which the very team could benefit considerably owing to their knowledge of their habitats. Poachers said they found eight mature Giraffes from whom they killed one large male. There were three-five young ones with them. They had not seen many in recent months. They killed the Giraffes for its tail hair which they said cost between USD 2700-3200 depending on the higher bidder. Their main market is Juba.
- (2) Elephants are also dwindling in numbers. This indicates that they are soon extinct. The large-sized elephants are no longer available across the country. Only the rain forests black, which is a bit small is mostly available. Poachers nodded their heads in agreement.
- (3) "Muon" is becoming rare in the forests, and this tells of their extinct. Poachers agreed that they had been in the forests for close to two months. It was only that morning that they saw the two (male and female, which they sadly killed)
- (4) Lions were there but not in large numbers. Poachers would occasionally meet them but had no reason of killing.
- (5) The poachers had killed a hyena and claimed that there was a request for its eyes by a person who lived in Juba.
- (6) Several ghazal and white eared cops were killed for meat. The exhibition team could see their bones and skin littering across the area.

5. Challenges faced during the survey

- Flooding hindered the movement of the team
- Food shortages during the many days' exhibition – 49 days in total
- Scarcity of clean water for drinking
- Animals feared poachers and could run before being seen by ACD team.
- mosquito repellents
- Medical first aid kits

6. Recommendations

Now that the Fangak team has expanded to seven other locations, there is a requirement to extend similar supports in terms of

1. camera use trainings,
2. survival training,
3. Provision of food and medicines
4. Accommodations materials such as tents, mats/mattresses, torches
5. Back packs

6. Stipends (cash) to armed wildlife officers from Government department of wildlife and forestry
7. Set-up of bases and conducting visitations to villages for interactions and orientations on social cohesion and peace with wild animals.