

# ITTO/IUCN International Workshop on Increasing the Effectiveness of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Tropical Forests

17-21 February 2003, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand

## Dja Wildlife Reserve: summary

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### Introduction

The Dja Wildlife reserve (DWR) was gazetted in 1950 by virtue of order N°319 signed by the then French High Commissioner. This reserve was internationally, both as a Biosphere Reserve in 1981 and a World Heritage site in 1987. It is known to be the largest protected area in Cameroon and it extends over an area of 625 000 ha.

### Background and stakes relating to the Management of the Dja reserve

Except for its eastern part, the DWR is limited by the Dja river, which constitutes a natural barrier for several species (for example *Mandrillus sphinx*), and this gives room for the assumption that lots of biological exchanges take place within the eastern part of the reserve.

Three majors types of plant formations prevail within the reserve, namely the semi-deciduous formations in the north, the Atlantic formations in the west and the Congolese formations in the south, thereby providing it with exceptional biological diversity especially as regards chimpanzees, gorillas, blue cephalopha as well as those with a dark dorsal strip. The population density of these species is known to be the highest in the Congo Basin.

It is surrounded by twelve forest management units that constitute the last virgin forest, which is currently being exposed to forest exploitation.

In its eastern part, the DWR will, in the months ahead, be the scene of an exclusive mining exploitation activity (Nickel, Cobalt) to be carried out by GEOVIC, an American consortium.

The DWR equally serves as the intersection site of all development initiatives undertaken within the South eastern area of Cameroon (construction of Lomie-Yokadouma highway, activities to open the Ngoila region, construction of the Sangmelima-Djoug-Mintom transnational highway aimed at opening up to the boundaries with the Congo and Gabon)

In addition the these points, the area is governed by thirteen administrative units and there is considerable linguistic diversity among the six communities, which inhabit the area of which four are sedentary (Badjoue, Nzime, Fang, Bulu) and two semi-nomadic (Baka and Kako)

All the development-related activities mentioned above (leading to poaching, loss of biodiversity, random migrations of the Baka-pygmyes) may have serious impact on the biodiversity of DWR, unless the resources of the area are properly managed.

### **Assessment and lessons learnt**

In order to better manage the biodiversity of the DWR, emphasis should be laid on the sustainable management of activities carried out around the reserve.

It is also important to define the statute and norms relating to the management of the corridors serving as lanes of migrations and biological exchange between conservation sites.

It is necessary as well, to develop synergies with other protected areas sharing the same multiple purposes and common biological and cultural attributes (Nki national Park, Mengame Gorilla sanctuary, Minkebe reserve)

The absence of norms and standards in the wildlife sector (management, inventories, impact, assessment etc.) impedes the establishment of a framework for collaboration and exchange between different stakeholders, aimed at a better management of the DWR.

The land tenure regime established by resources management legislation and relating to protected areas slightly contradicts with the land tenure and mining code, and both IUCN and UNESCO norms – for instance those concerning biosphere reserves.

The harmonization of both the legislations and statute regarding the staff in charge of management activities within states sharing the same forest block is very important

It is necessary to put in place a system to grant compensation/benefits likely to incite a conducive attitude amongst the population vis-à-vis conservation (notably as concerns administrative units covered by the reserves, when compared with those with forest exploitation units).

### **Conclusion**

An analysis of the different issues described above suggests the need for political support towards the review of the existing institutional and legal framework. This review should also be directed towards an ecoregional biodiversity vision, which where necessary should extend beyond national boundaries and should lead to the development of a regional conservation strategy. This strategy would require the existence of both a viable financing mechanism and a forum for dialogue and consultation between management structures of the different conservation sites involved and the local people, so that conservation eventually becomes a source of peace amongst these people.