

Project Update: January 2004

Between November 6-27 we surveyed the montane forests of the Gotel Mountains, the most remote area within Gashaka-Gumti National Park. We trekked from the southern end of the mountains, north, along the Nigerian / Cameroon border and then looped south-west back to Gashaka village (the Park head quarters). This is remote country, but with a local guide the paths are good.

Our first survey was of Leinde Fadali forest, which kept up to its local reputation as 'chimpanzee headquarters'. We spotted at least 20 chimpanzee nests and frequently heard their calls. The chimps are an endemic sub-species, *Pan Troglodyte's* subspecies *vellerosus*. Other wildlife included indirect evidence of bushbuck, duiker and buffalo, and sightings of warthog. There has been a drastic reduction in wildlife since the 1970's; we saw evidence of hunters, and the wildlife round the forest was very shy. Despite being within Gashaka-Gumti rangers rarely (if ever) visit this forest.

We discovered a beautiful red flowering shrub, identified as new to science by Kew botanist K. Vollesen. It belongs to the family Acanthaceae, and genus *Metarungia*. We now need to return to Leinde Fadali to collect fruiting material so that the species can be officially described by Vollesen.

Trekking on to the plateaus of Chappal Wadi and Gangirwal (Nigeria's highest mountain at 2400 m) we were awed by the beauty of the vistas and forest, but shocked by the number of cattle grazing the grassland. On Gangirwal we came across plant poachers on the upper slopes of the massif collecting edible tubers and lichen from rocks to sell for profit, some in Cameroon and some in Nigeria. This was in stark contrast to the 1970's, when people rarely ventured into the area.

However the montane forests were still very much as they had been in the 1970's. Main threats appeared to be cattle and fire encroaching into the valuable grassland- forest ecotone, and cattle grazing into the forest.

Further along the Nigeria/Cameroon border, where few people trek, we were welcomed by the local Fulani headmen and their families. We surveyed some magnificent forest, just within Gashaka-Gumti Park and Nigeria. However, cattle graze right up to the forest edge, and we saw early burning on grassland spurs heading into the forest. As everywhere, wildlife had dramatically reduced since the 1970's.

On Chappal Delam (an enclave within the Gashaka-Gumti) the forest is much depleted. However, although extending pasture at the expense of forest, the local Fulani headman, Ardo Akale keeps hunters out of the area. Baboons were numerous and very bold! We also saw colobus monkeys.

The rest of our trek was through depleted grassland with forests confined to stream sides (the Myan Giti catchment), and then into savannah woodland. Re-entering Gashaka-Gumti National Park from the enclave of Hendu was noticeable; in the Park colobus, putty nose and vervet monkeys were vociferous in the streamside forests.

We have published a fuller report in Plant Talk: The montane Forests of eastern Nigeria.
Sessions, L & Chapman HM. (2003) Plant Talk 32: 23-27.