

Project Update: September 2015

Project Overview

My team and I were privileged to receive support from The Rufford Small Grants to embark on the project: 'Conservation of the Atewa dotted border butterfly (*Mylothris atewa*) in Ghana'. The Atewa Forest Reserve which is the project's location is part of the Upper Guinea forest ecosystem that is ranked among the world's top priority regions for biodiversity conservation. The Atewa dotted border butterfly which is endemic to this forest is predicted to occur at elevations above 600 m a.s.l., in the reserve. But current anthropogenic activities such as habitat degradation through small scale mining and illegal chainsaw activities are predicted to affect the abundance of the species. To conserve this species, this project is aimed at monitoring their abundance response to these habitat modifications and also explore the second upland forest in Ghana, Tano-Offin for possible occurrence of the species. Also, the project aims at educating people and engaging forest-fringe communities in forest protection.

Project Output 1: Stakeholder Education

Our project was well received by the local communities. We have met with the Assemblyman and the Chief of Atewa and Tano-Offin, who reiterated the importance of protecting the forest. A key issue that were on the table for discussion was small scale mining activities that is destroying the buffer around the reserve at Atewa. Through our discussion, we found forest protection committee exist but their activities is somehow lukewarm. They suggested the committee needs more incentive from local government and NGOs to assist their activities of helping to stop illegalities in and around the reserve. At Tano-Offin, some people have volunteered to be part of a forest protection task force. With the assistance of these people, we have been able to embark on community education and sensitisation programme with participants receiving project t-Shirts.

Project Output 2: Survey for *Mylothris atewa*:

So far, we've embarked on two field trips at each of the Forest Reserves. We are still yet to record *Mylothris atewa*. Out of the seven *Mylothris* species occurring at Atewa, we have recorded four of them but *Mylothris atewa* is missing from our species list. We have sampled at elevation as high as 800 m a.s.l., which should have given us a better chance of locating it. We realised it was very difficult chasing them to sweep from air. So we are relying more on photography from instances we are not able to sweep so to identify from taken photos. A photo of the common border butterfly (*Mylothris rhodope*) a forest butterfly that considerable withstand forest degradation was taking while feeding has been annexed to this interim report. At Tano-Offin, we have sample nearly 30 species from our baited traps and standard walks.

Project Challenges and mitigation:

One major challenge that delayed the start of the project was the acquisition of needed field equipment. We applied for support from Idea Wild which was approved. They donated a field guide and tents and sweep nets. Unfortunately this took considerably longer time for some of the equipment to arrive. Some are still yet to arrive like the tents. This affected the start of the project. As a result, the project will extend far beyond the 1-year schedule (4 months extension anticipated) in order to thoroughly complete our assessment of the

butterfly fauna at Tano Offin and also to assess other parts of Atewa which we are yet to cover.

Initially, we realised through our community video shows that the people were generally bored when watching documentaries about butterflies or insects and most decided to leave. We changed our approach from the narrow focus on butterflies to include a more general approach that centred on biodiversity conservation. This yielded considerable results as the interest in our community activities generally increased and people stayed to the end of the program especially when it was on mammals.

Looking ahead in the next months:

In the coming months, more field work on baiting will be carried out at Tano-Offin for a complete survey of the butterfly fauna being hosted. At Atewa, we plan to go beyond 800 m a.s.l to survey for the species.



a). The common dotted border (male) conspicuously present in our data at Atewa



b). Team member inspecting a baited trap.