**Project Update: December 2022**

**Summary**

The white-bellied pangolin lives in Kenya's natural habitats. Pangolins are currently under threat as they are perceived to be signs of bad omen, therefore killed by the local communities. Local communities are clearing forests for economic purposes, which threatens the survival of pangolins. There is incomplete understanding of pangolin distribution, community perceptions, and threats, which impedes conservation efforts. We used the community's knowledge to understand species distributions patterns. This project presents an opportunity to counter prejudice and fear; and raise awareness of the important role of pangolins. The gathered information will be used to formulate appropriate conservation measures.

**Objectives:**

- To gather data on the species occurrence, conservation threats, people's awareness and their perception on pangolins.

- To raise awareness to counter prejudice, fear, and raise awareness of the vital role pangolins play in preserving ecosystems.

- To participate in the formulation of conservation strategies such as the pangolin recovery plans and strengthen national legislation to protect pangolins.

**Data collection**

We did search extensively for potential sites by field sightings. So far, we've identified signs such as burrows, footprints, and scratches, signs that will be examined to assess the habitat of species. We identified and documented human activities: fourteen human settlements to natural habitats, several forest clearances parch, and 11 charcoal kilns (Fig.1).

We engaged the community members about pangolins to identify the threats they face while disproving the purported health benefits of their scales, meat, and blood. These lessons learned can be used to effectively communicate and educate the local communities on the need and urgency of protecting pangolins, which are key indicators of the wider habitat and ecosystem health.

We deployed 10 cameras at ground level across trails in the cluttered forest and in open sections for 24 nights. The data collected will be collated to give an approximate encounter rate of signs and the detection probability of pangolin on their assumed pathway; and establish any correlation between the detection probability of pangolin with the camera traps and the distance from forest edges, and farmlands.

Training and community engagement: We participated in a workshop, to support the establishment of pangolin recovery and action plan in Kenya. The key stakeholders during the workshop were from Fauna & Flora International, Kenya Wildlife Service, National Museums of Kenya and community

conservation leaders (Fig 2).



Figure. 1. Forest clearance and charcoal burning activities at North Nandi Forest



Figure. 2 Participants during the national recovery and action plan workshop

Education and awareness raising campaigns: We carried out awareness through consultative meetings in four primary and two secondary schools.

This was aimed to train and empower local communities on best practices to minimise pangolin-oriented conflicts by exchanging knowledge and generating strategies that facilitate willingness to support pangolin conservation efforts as well as catalysing local ownership of the project.

Questionnaire survey: We surveyed 50 participants from local communities on what they knew about pangolins using custom questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered only to adults and from household to household. From our interviews, we found that most local residents were not familiar with pangolin species. Only 13 out of 50 residents have encountered pangolins once or twice in the forest and on farmland. Most of them are unaware of the value of pangolins, while a few know pangolins are kept in museums for studies. One resident confesses that he and his friends killed a pangolin they spotted on the farm because they feared it was a bad omen. The specimen was deposited in the University of Eastern Africa Baraton Museum for preservation.