

Project Updates : May 2024

Context

The crowned crane is a threatened species on the IUCN Red List and an orphan species from both a scientific and conservation perspective. It is threatened by habitat loss, domestication, and illegal trade (Moussa, 2016). In Benin, the species is among the threatened bird species openly sold in wildlife markets for traditional medicine. Although it is integrally protected by National legislation it is still under a great gap of data that hampers its effective conservation. The lack of quantitative data on the distribution, hunting and commercial values of threatened species as the crowned crane makes interventions difficult. Our project has been addressing the geographical distribution, habitat diversity, abundance in each habitat, and the ethno-zoological and commercial value of the crowned crane essential for informed decision-making in Benin.

Progress report

Survey in traditional medicine markets

We dedicated the first 3 months to the data collection in the wildlife markets across Benin using Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK). We conducted in-depth surveys with 66 vendors in five markets (see below table 1) using individual interviews approach to gather detailed information on the items sold, the number of specimens per item, the source countries and forest habitats, the purchase price and selling/item, the diversity of clients, ethno-zoology and vendors' perceptions on the abundance of the crowned crane in their natural habitats in Benin. Our surveys indicated the presence of *Balearica pavonina* in markets, with active trade despite its legal protected status. Only the head of the crowned crane was observed in the markets. The average selling prices of organs ranges from 18,182 to 23,333 FCFA, giving an overview of the commercial value of the species in different regions of the country. Our surveys in wildlife markets revealed inter-country trade including countries such as Benin and Burkina Faso. In addition, traditional healer and Vodoun Chiefs were the clients who buy commonly the crowned crane in the wildlife markets.

Table 1 presents the markets studied.

| N° | Traditional medicine markets surveyed | Number of participants | Item recorded in the markets | Quantity |
|-----------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | DANTOKPA | 15 | head | 7 |
| 2 | AVOGBANA | 15 | head | 22 |
| 3 | AZOVE | 15 | head | 0 |
| 4 | GBEDAGBA | 15 | head | 4 |
| 5 | KPOTA | 6 | head | 1 |

Next steps

Our current ongoing activities are :

1. Survey with hunters to assess abundance and habitat diversity.
2. Mapping.

Our upcoming activities are :

3. Data analysis.
4. Developing a conservation strategy.
5. Awareness raising, education, capacity building, and communication.
6. Project evaluation, report writing, and dissemination.