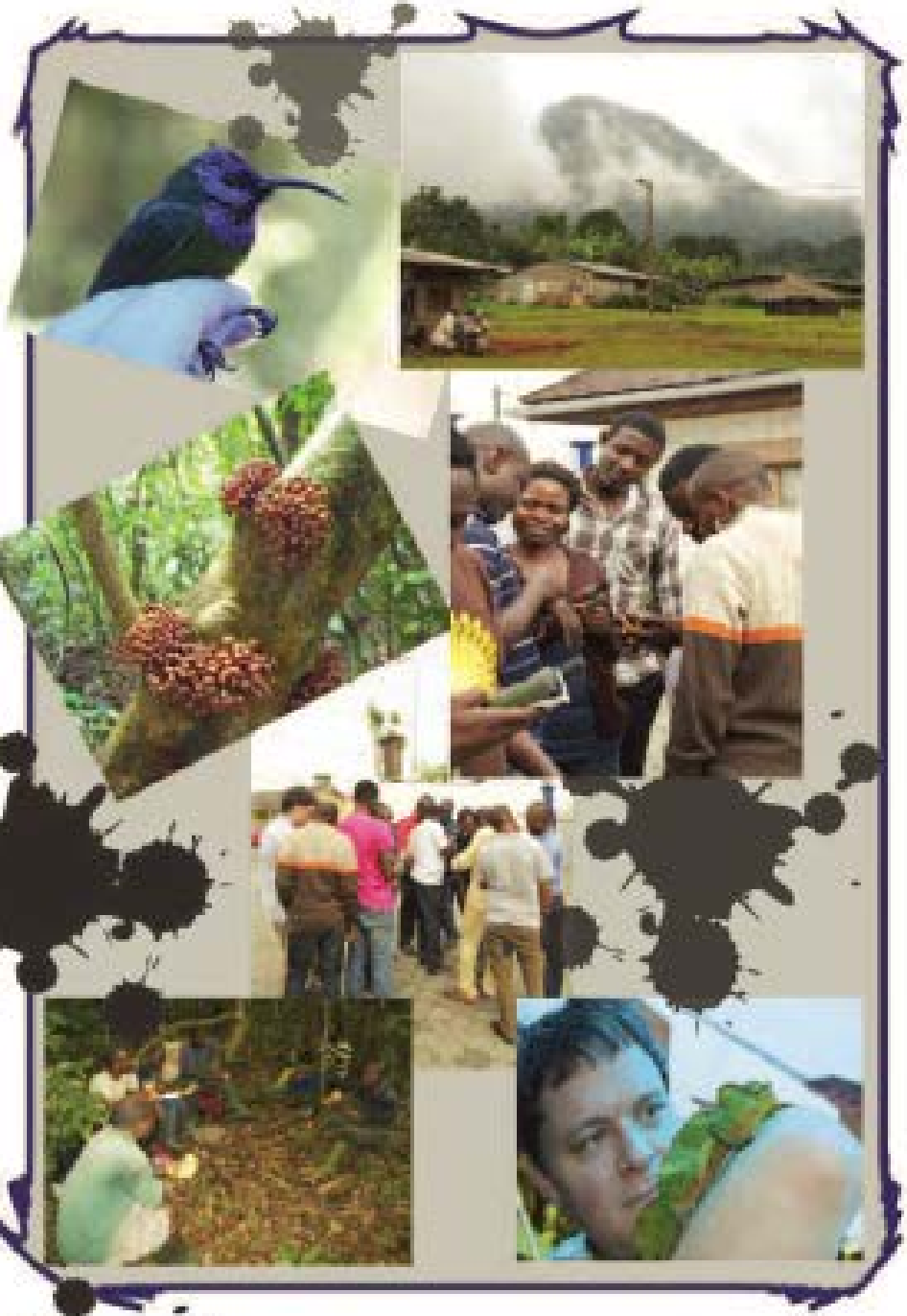
April 2015 Newsletter

TroPEG



Biodiversity at the interface with informatics is the most modern indispensable tool for research development

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The Booster Grant, third award to Tropical Plant Exploration Group (TroPEG)-Cameroon

Tropical Plant Exploration Group (TroPEG) – Cameroon has taken another shuttle into biodiversity exploration. In late 2014 TroPEG requested from her precious sponsor Rufford Small Grant Foundation to undertake a study entitled: Biodiversity Patterns of Distribution, Endemism and Climate Change Effects in the Cameroon Mountains. In late January 2015, TroPEG was awarded the third grant by Rufford Small Grant Foundation in support of this study. This grant is categorised as the Booster Grant as per the policies of Rufford Small Grant Foundation.

The grant (with number 16712- B) was awarded to TroPEG via Mr. Moses Nsanyi Sainge to carry out botanical survey on the inland part of the Cameroon Mountains with focus on Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve and the Kimbi Wildlife Reserve now called Kimbi-Fungom National Park. Field work for this grant commenced in February 2015, and will run up to February 2016.

Forest Garden Organic Tea Production in Dikome Balue attains high gear: a venture promoted by TroPEG - Cameroon

The village of Dikome Balue is situated at the foot of Mount Rata and at the edge of the Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve. Socio-economic development has been the major priority of the people of Dikome Balue. But they have faced a lot of difficulties in their attempts to drive their dreams to reality.

Tea farming in Dikome Balue was introduced in the early 80s by Mr S.M. Dion (a villager now of blessed memory) who transported the tea seeds from Kenya (where he was working at that time) to this community. In the late 80s, another elite of Dikome Balue Mr Jacob Ote Abanda (also of blessed memory) a then worker for Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) also introduced tea plant to the Dikome community. In the early 90s, Mr Dominic Ngoe Nanganoa (also of blessed memory) a then worker for CDC Tea Estate in Tole, volunteered to train the villagers in tea cultivation. This effort by these persons was in view of overcoming the setback suffered by the villagers because their local climate could not support the cultivation of cocoa the main cash crop grown in the neighbouring villages. Today, the people of Dikome Balue are enormously involved in tea cultivation. This has led to the creation of the Dikome Balue Rumpi Hills Tea Farmers' Cooperative with 41 members and farm sizes ranging from 0.25 to 5ha per member. According to one of the first tea farmer in the area Pa Nestor, "my dream has always been to see that socio-cultural development is achieved by attracting the attention of the youths because they are the leaders of tomorrow". This dream has been realised. None the less, this development has not come without its challenges, some of which its challenges, some of which we have identified as marketing, processing and packaging.

In 2014, a committee of the local Tea Farmers' Cooperative of Dikome Balue reached a consensus with Tropical Plant Exploration Group (TroPEG) to support the development of the tea cultivation towards conservation based approach. Hence, Forest Garden Tea technique was introduced to the local tea farmers as the new methods that will enhance tea production, ensure economic growth and also sustainably manage the buffer zones of the Rumpi Hills which Dikome Balue lies within. This technique known as Forest Garden which was developed by the International Analog Forestry Network (IAFN) have been very successful in other parts of the world as a rural development strategy. It doesn't only ensure economic growth within the community; also it has been proven as one of the best strategy to curb climate modification (i.e. the issues of global warming). In effect, it's one of the best clean development mechanism that when tested could be proposed for a REDD+ project in Cameroon.

TroPEG and Rumpi Hills Tea Farmer Cooperative executives at Dikome Balue in 2014

TroPEG after a series of consultative meetings with tea growers in this area saw the plight of this indigenous group, and decided to direct part of her funds in 2014/2015 financial year by providing funding to the Tea sector for marketing intervention only. TroPEG educated the Dikome Balue indigenous group to adopt biodegradable packaging instead of maintaining the polybags which they have been using for packaging their product. This move was vital because TroPEG being an organisation that is involved in conservation and sustainable development could not be involved in the marketing of a product that is not environmentally friendly. In fact it was also an opportunity to show Cameroonians who are adamant to understand it is possible to respect government specification by adopting biodegradable materials for packaging.

TroPEG and Rumpi Hills Tea Farmer Cooperative executives at Dikome Balue in 2015

Meeting with tea farmers 2014

In this regards we are pleased to announce in this edition that Dikome Balue Rumpi Hills Tea is in the shelves of many supermarkets and stores around the Southwest region and we are working hard together with the indigenous community to extend to other regions of Cameroon and why not Africa and the World. When you drink this tea, you're promoting the rich biodiversity of the Rumpi Hills forest area. Joint us to realize this dream. Enjoy Natural tea from the Rumpi Hills!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Old Dikome Balue Tea Package Non-Biogradable

New Dikome Balue Tea Package, Bio-degradable (Respecting Standard)

Biodiversity Informatics Training Curriculum (BITC) in Uganda

The outbreak of Ebola fever in West Africa that causes the Confederation of African Football to change the venue from Morocco to Equatorial Guinea did not only end with football. The suppose BITC that was schedule for Benin in September 2014 was also postpone and venue change to Uganda for fear of Ebola Fever being contracted by participants. The training finally took place in January 2015 at Entebbe, Uganda with all selected participants attending including Mr. Moses Nsanyi Sainge, the Research Director of Tropical Plant Exploration Group (TroPEG) – Cameroon.

Unlike previous editions, the training was geared toward aspects of biodiversity informatics titled: National biodiversity diagnostics.

Participants at BITC training, Uganda

Sainge Research Director at TroPEG at BITC training Uganda

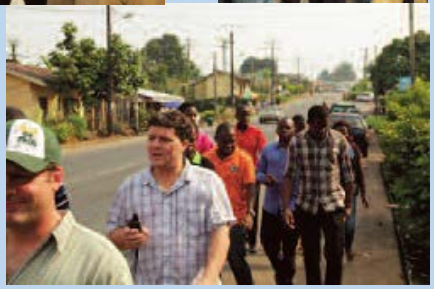
BIODIVERSITY INFORMATICS TRAINING CURRICULUM (BITC) IN CAMEROON (BUEA AND KORUP NATIONAL PARK)

Finally, dreams have been transformed into reality. Biodiversity Informatics Training Curriculum (BITC) was hosted for the first time in Central Africa by Tropical Plant Exploration Group (TroPEG): a local Conservation Organisation in Cameroon that is bent in fostering biodiversity research. Biodiversity Informatics (or for short Bioinformatics) simply refers to biodiversity studies (database) into the computer world (informatics) and making it available and accessible for everyone. In a broader scope this means 'the application of informatics techniques to biodiversity information for improved capture, cleaning, management, improvement, analysis and interpretation' (Townsend, BITC training 2015, Buea).

Cameroon wouldn't have been left out from this spectacular modern approach to Biodiversity training because the little triangular nation known as 'Africa in Miniature' has Divine Favour and so will always reap from every good thing blowing in Africa. We got it clearly from the Director's lips (A. Townsend Peterson) that Cameroon was never part of the countries to benefit from hosting this course. Thus, this project coordinated by Prof. A. Townsend Peterson with funds from JRS Biodiversity Foundation, started in Africa in 2013 and Cameroon was included on the list in 2014 through the influence of the research Director of TroPEG (Mr. Moses Nsanyi Sainge). This is considered a victory for Cameroonians who were privilege to benefit from this course and to the nation as a whole. Hence we used this opportunity to thank the Government Authorities for granting the permission for this high profile training to be conducted in Cameroon.

During this training researchers and participants were drawn from Africa (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Ghana, Kenya), and the United States of America. A welcome speech was presented by Mr. Moses Nsanyi Sainge (TroPEG), Dr George Mafany (Regional Delegation of Scientific Research and Innovation, Southwest Region), and Dr. Fokam Eric (University of Buea). Presenters were researchers in the field of Ornithology (Town and Mark), Herpetology (Dave and Rafe) and Plant Taxonomy/Ecology (Sainge and Tchouto). Dr Fokam Eric gave a special talk on the commitment of the Department of Zoology, University of Buea.

EVENT CAPTURE (GPS EXERCISE)

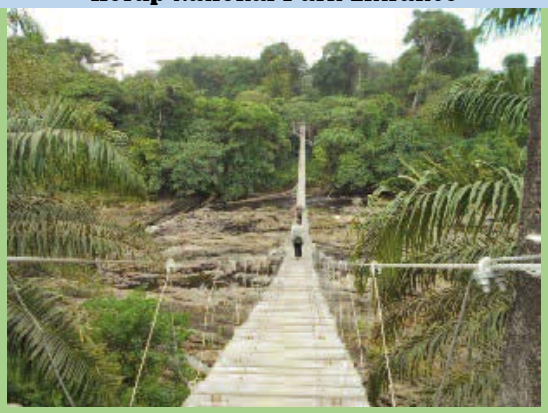


EVENT CAPTURE (AT THE HALL)

Not to over emphasise on the Divine Favour of our Darling Fatherland (Cameroon), the BITC training in Cameroon was exceptional because it was divided into two phases; the classroom phase which took place in the Legendary Hospitality town of Buea and lasted for a week and the field phase in Korup National Park equally lasted for a week. The field Phase was designed to complement the classroom phase by demonstrating inventory techniques in Birds, Plants, Reptiles and Amphibians.

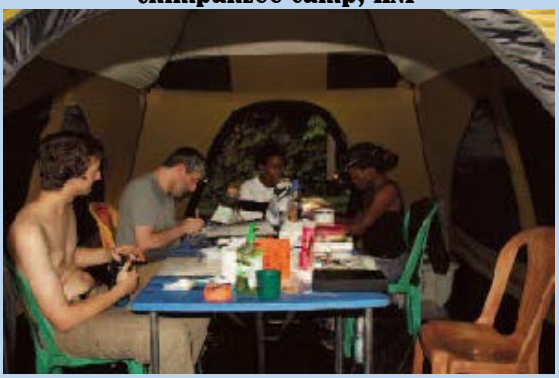
EVENT CAPTURE (FIELD EXERCISE)

Korup National Park Entrance



The Famous Mana Foot Bridge

Chimpanzee camp, KNP



Ornithology (Bird) group

Botany (Plant) group

Herpetology (Reptiles and Amphibians) group

Workshop Instructors:

A. Townsend Peterson
(University of Kansas)

Mark Robbins
(University of Kansas)

Moses Nsanyi Sainge
(Tropical Plant Exploration Group – TroPEG)

Dave Blackburn
(California Academy of Sciences)

Rafe Brown
(University of Kansas)

Kate Ingenloff
(University of Kansas)

Special Guests

Jacob Cooper
(University of Kansas)

Eric Fokam
(University of Buea)

Peguy Tchouto
(Regional Delegation of Forestry and Wildlife Southest, BUEA)

EVENT CAPTURE (LEISURE TIME)

TROPEG UNVEILED HER POTENTIAL AS A PLATFORM FOR CAMEROONIANS TO DEVELOP BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH SKILLS

Tropical Plant Exploration Group (TroPEG) has suddenly been the institution of attraction for young conservation and biodiversity scientist in Cameroon. After piloting a biodiversity study in the Mbembe Forest Reserve funded by the Rufford Small Grant, which resulted in the publication of a book (title: Biodiversity and Conservation Status of the Plants of Mbembe, NWR, Cameroon) in 2014.

March 2015 was a turning point for some young African biologists who wished to be future leaders in biodiversity and conservation science. TroPEG in collaboration with Biodiversity Informatics Training Curriculum (BITC) organised an international training on Biodiversity Inventory. Biodiversity Informatics is a relatively new field of science, with nine Cameroonians already benefiting from the training (Ngoh Michael Lyonga, Yves Nathan Mekembom, Lovett Gamua Mapong, Philip Ngafor Aningmbah, Tapondjou Paulin Walter Nkonmeneck, Philip Tem Dia, Geraud Tasse, Moses Nsanyi Sainge and Blaise Jumbam.

REMARK FROM SELECTED PARTICIPANT

INSTITUTION
Tropical Plant Exploration Group (TroPEG) – Cameroon

NAME
Ngoh Michael Lyonga

STATEMENT:
I was part of the Biodiversity Informatics Training Curriculum, it was awesome being part of this International training. I participated in both the field and class phases. I did enjoy the whole structure of the course and the manner in which it was delivered by the instructors particularly the software application tools for calculating diversity and the use of QGIS and GPS.

I would say going into Korup for a field demonstration was really a great venture mainly because we were accompanied by the experts. The science of taxonomy was made easy while in the field; hence description and handling of field notes books were properly understood. I want to say that there are a lot more that was gained from this training that I am still to look for suitable words to describe.

INSTITUTION

National Museums of Kenya (NMK), within the Department of Zoology which has Ornithology (birds), Mammalogy (mammals), fish (ichthyology), reptiles and amphibians (Herpetology), Osteology (bones) sections.

NAME

Alex Mutati Syingi

STATEMENT:

My name is Alex Mutati Syingi I was one of the (BITC) Biodiversity Informatics Training Curriculum Participants at Buea Cameroon, despite the class phase and the field work at Korup National park, where I learned the ornithology work and Taxidermy skills I also made new friends.

As a young conservation biologist at the start of my career this BITC training has really open up my thinking and views for conservation of species in the world, as well as practically introduced me to ecological research methods and procedures.

I would like to thank Town Peterson and the BITC crew for organizing this special training.

REMARK FROM SELECTED INSTRUCTORS

INSTITUTION

California Academy of Sciences San Francisco, CA, USA

NAME

Dave Blackburn

STATEMENT:

Participating as an instructor in the BITC course in Buea, Cameroon was an excellent experience. The combination of coursework with hands-on experiences in the field in Korup National Park created a unique opportunity for both instructors and participants. For those coming from other countries, it was a chance to see the unique flora and fauna of the Lower Guinean Forest Zone, and all participants benefitted from working with colleagues in different fields (botany, ornithology, herpetology) and from different career stages (senior professors to university students). None of the success of the BITC course would have been possible without the hard work of TroPEG and its staff.

--

David C. Blackburn, Ph.D.
Associate Curator of Herpetology

INSTITUTION
Tropical Plant Exploration Group (TroPEG) – Cameroon

NAME
Moses Nsanyi Sainge

STATEMENT:
All preparation and logistics for this training was done by TroPEG with collaborative advice from BITC Coordinators. I will use this opportunity to thank Kate and Town for their great collaborative spirit and for giving us the chance to be involved in technical aspects of this course. Dr. Eric Fokam was a strong force on technical aspects prior to this course. I herein give him a big thank you. I personally have gain experience in organizing courses of this type in future.

I am sure our foreign participants and researchers did enjoy the course and our country. If I am to advice, I will wish to see the seed of this course being planted in each country where participants were represented (Cameroon, Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda).

I was also overwhelmed with the involvement of other Cameroonian scientists during this training: Drs. George Mafany, Fokam Eric, and Peguy Tchouto. I pray that this collaboration between BITC, University of Kansas, and TroPEG should continue.

TROPEG LEADS A BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH TEAM TO EXPLORE THE CAMEROON MOUNTAIN RANGE

After the training course on Biodiversity Inventory in Buea and Korup National Park, a specialist group was assembly let by experts in Birds (Townsend Peterson, Mark Robbins, Jacob Cooper and Kate Ingenloff), Reptiles and Amphibians (Rafe Brown and Lovett Gamua), and Plants (Moses Sainge and Peter Mambo). This specialist group spend an additional two weeks at the eastern part of Rumpi Hills forest area which forms part of the Cameroon Mountains and is close to Dikome Balue village.

This expedition was actually a continuation of the work that TroPEG is doing on the Cameroon Mountains with grants from Rufford Small Grant. With regards to this grant (booster grant), so far 8 ha have been sampled at the Southern part of Rumpi Hills forest area, 2 ha in the east and 3 ha on Mt. Rata. This gives a total of 13 ha completed. Data entry is underway.

Activities at Rumpi Hills site (Cameroon Mountains Biodiversity Project)

Mt. Rata view from Dikome Balue village

Consultative meeting with community

Visitors in consultative meeting with the village Community

Traditional rite perform by the HRH Chief of Monyange Village Community

Climbing up the Mountain for data Collection

Climbing up the Mountain for data Collection

Research team

Laying of plot for data collection Exercise

Plot sampling

Describing, pressing and arrangement of plant species

Unique diversity of Rumpi Hills *(Deinbolia angustifolia)*

Battling with the terrible cold weather condition at night (Field realities)

WHAT WE DO AND SERVICES OFFER

-Transect sampling
-Small plots sampling
-Establishment of permanent one hectare plot for bio-monitoring
-Establishment of 50 ha plot for long term bio-monitoring
-Identification of all forms of Plant life within the Tropics
-Ecological research
-Biodiversity and forest assessment surveys
-Ecological niche modelling
-Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Studies
-High Conservation Value (HCV) Assessment

DATA ANALYSIS

-All forms of Data can be arranged and analysed using specialised software such as SPSS, MINITAB, PAST and Microsoft Excel
-Biodiversity informatics in Data cleaning and data publishing.

TROPEG ADDRESS

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