

UPDATE REPORT: COMMUNITY-BASED THREAT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE VULNERABLE WEST AFRICAN DWARF CROCODILE IN GHANA

Introduction

This report presents the progress made in the third phase of my Rufford Small Grant project, aimed at developing community-based management strategies for the protection of the Vulnerable West African dwarf crocodile within an urban landscape in Ghana. Our objectives included raising awareness, strengthening institutional collaborations, creating riparian buffer protocols, and restoring degraded areas of the crocodile's habitat.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

1. Engagement with Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST):

- Recognizing KNUST's administrative authority over the habitat, we organized high-level discussions with the University Council to establish guidelines for an action plan focused on habitat management.
- Vegetable farmers operating near the habitat and traditional authorities were engaged to foster education and gain ongoing support for the conservation action plan.

2. University Support:

- KNUST has committed technical and administrative backing for the project, emphasizing the importance of integrating crocodile conservation into the University's planning policies.

3. Nursery Development:

- A nursery has been established, yielding 5,000 seedlings for the restoration of degraded habitat areas.

4. Community Surveys:

- We conducted interviews with 300 locals from markets and households to assess current perceptions of the species and gauge support for habitat conservation.

5. Awareness Campaigns:

- A community awareness event featured PowerPoint presentations at a local durbar, complemented by project flyers, posters, and two educational campaigns in community basic schools to enhance public knowledge about the species and its habitat.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

1. Engagement Delays:

- Academic strikes at Ghanaian universities have slowed the process of engaging with the University Council, impacting project timelines.

2. Flooding Issues:

- The habitat experienced significant flooding during the planned riparian buffer establishment and tree planting periods, complicating restoration efforts.

3. Seedling Acquisition:

- Challenges in sourcing preferred seedlings led us to collect seeds from certified sources and establish our own nursery.

OUTPUTS ACHIEVED

1. Land Use Consensus:

- Through dialogues with the University Council, traditional authorities, and farmers, we reached a consensus to establish a 30-meter buffer on each side of the river. Beyond this buffer, a well-designed agroforestry system will be implemented for farmers currently operating near the habitat. KNUST has agreed to facilitate the sustainable relocation of these farmers.

2. Increased Awareness:

- Compared to earlier surveys of the earlier phases of this project, the current surveys indicate a 60% increase in local awareness regarding the species and the necessity of conserving its habitat.

3. Seedling Production:

- We successfully raised 5,000 seedlings designated for habitat restoration.

4. Educational Programs:

- A total of three awareness and education programs have been conducted in schools and community settings.

Conclusion

Significant strides have been made toward achieving the project's goals, particularly in terms of community engagement and habitat restoration efforts. While challenges persist, the commitment from local stakeholders and the University provides a strong foundation for continued progress in the conservation of the Vulnerable West African dwarf crocodile in Ghana. Moving forward, we will prioritize overcoming these challenges and expanding our outreach efforts.