

Central African Republic: Elephants in Turmoil

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What?

Massive poaching of elephants for ivory

Where?

North East of the Central African Republic (CAR), Bamingui-Bangoran and Vakaga Provinces, near to the borders with Sudan (South Darfur Province) and Chad (Salamat Region).

When?

In 2007, such as in the previous years, we are faced here with a really organised campaign. The slaughter of elephants started with the arrival of Sudanese poachers at the beginning of the dry season, early January for some areas, and mid-January for others. The end of the campaign takes place when the poachers leave with the onset of the wet season, around mid-May in some areas, and end of May for others. One can therefore estimate that the poaching campaign lasted 4 to 5 months.

Old or new?

This poaching campaign is not new; it is a recurrent phenomenon which repeats itself at each dry season, most probably since centuries. Qualifying it as a “traditional” event is probably not appropriate in this context, but it is a good image of the reality. This phenomenon is fluctuating a great deal, particularly according to the level of the anti-poaching efforts. This year is a “great year » for the poachers who have taken advantage of the interruption of the [ECOFAC/ZCV](#) Program. Financed by the European Union, the ECOFAC/ZCV Program provides support to the Central African authorities and to the local communities to manage their wildlife in the North of the country

Which evaluation method?

o Data collection:

All the data have been directly collected by the authors who were physically present in the concerned area during the poaching campaign. The authors only collected statements and reports from direct observers (first-hand observations), in other words from persons who directly witnessed elephant carcasses. All the statements reported by third parties (second-hand observations) were systematically rejected.

o Observers:

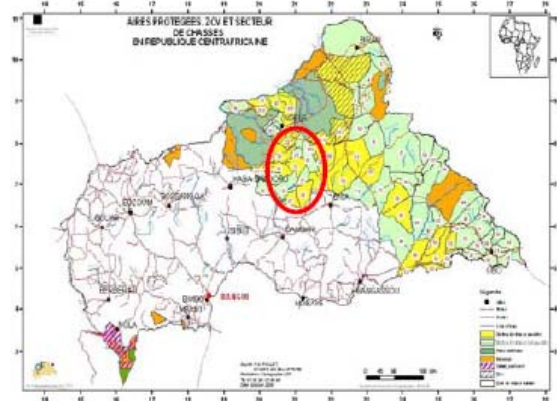
All the observers (in alphabetical order : Stéphane Cordesse, Thierry Fécomme, Richard Guhenne, Daniel Kou-doumé, Jean-Louis Laborde, Matthieu Laboureur, Christophe Lemée, Florent Mathieu & Jean-Jacques Roulet), nine in total, are field working individuals who lived through the poaching campaign whilst in their working areas; these areas being perfectly known to them as they have been responsible for their management for years. These observers include either professional guides, or tourist operators who have been assigned with management responsibilities by the Government for their contract period, either for the

lease of a Game Management Area (GMA), or the rent of a Community Hunting Area (*Zone de Chasse Villageoise – ZCV*). All these operators have joined to form an association (NGO) officially registered in CAR: the *Association pour la Protection de la Faune Centrafricaine (APFC)*. On the ground, the observers are in connection with each other through a double network of HF radio and satellite telephone.

o Evaluation area:

The present evaluation is strictly limited to the very areas managed by the observers concerned. Contiguous neighbouring areas have not been integrated in this evaluation, even though one can reasonably suspect poaching incidents also. All the areas concerned by this evaluation are listed into the category IV of the IUCN. With respect to Central African legislation, all these areas are officially listed into two categories:

- (i) either Community Hunting Areas (*Zone de Chasse Villageoise – ZCV*) subject to an agreement with local communities;
- (ii) or Game Management Areas leased by the Government.



o Size of the evaluation area:

The total size of each of the concerned areas put together amounts to 23,634 km², or around 2.4 million hectares.

o Carcass observation:

Each observer has recorded the number of elephant carcasses witnessed by him in his own working area during the poaching campaign, excluding any other areas including contiguous ones. All the carcass observations were made at random. This means they are not the result of specifically focused research aiming at discovering elephant carcasses. Observers did not make any particular effort to find the elephants because they are not elephant hunters. Indeed, elephant hunting is now suspended in CAR. Therefore, all the observed carcasses were accidentally found in the course

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of tourist operations. Several observers have even mentioned that they were intentionally avoiding looking for carcasses when they suspected they were nearby, either from the smell in forest galleries or from the close sound of gun shots.

o Carcass observation rates:

Each observer provided his own estimation of "the carcass observation ratio", i.e. the ratio between (i) the number of witnessed carcasses & (ii) the evaluated total number of carcasses in their specific operating area, during the campaign period. This estimate is of course subjective, but it is supported by a whole set of indices, direct and indirect, that were collected in the course of daily movements throughout the area:

- Strong smell of decaying carcass in forest galleries;
- Gun shots heard every day, mainly from war weapons;
- Baby elephants observed on their own in the bush (the very small one come to take refuge with the observers);
- Tracks of Sudanese poachers: footprints of military shoes, of donkeys, of horses and of camels, campsites;
- Increasingly aggressive elephants, etc.

o Total number of elephants killed:

By applying the carcass observation rate to each area, we have managed to estimate the total number of elephants shot in the given area. Adding up all the figures obtained in each area, we have estimated the total number of elephants slaughtered.

How many elephants killed?

The detailed results of the evaluation are provided in table in the next column, the grand totals are below:

- o Total number of elephant carcasses observed: 180
- o Estimated average rate of carcass observations: 33%
- o Estimate of the total number of carcasses: 553
- o Total area (square km) 23,634

The total number of elephants killed in the North of CAR is difficult to assess, especially because the evaluation area covers less than 30% of the total elephant range in this part of the country. However, it can be reasonably said that:

- Estimated figure for the evaluation area is a minimum
- The actual figure is, of course, much greater because elephants, as well as poachers, extend beyond the area subject to this study.

What percentage out of the total population has been killed?

- o The estimate of the elephant population in CAR provided by the Group of Specialists on the African Elephant of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (Elephant Survey 2007, AfESG/SSC/IUCN) cannot be taken into account as a basis for calculation because it only involves extremely

fragmented information. The limits of the elephant range are a good indicator of this deficiency. The occurrence of elephants in areas where they are regarded as absent, in the assessment published by IUCN is well known in CAR. At present, no reliable evaluation of the elephant population in CAR is available.

- o Even if we estimate that the evaluation area represents 30% of the Northern Region, it is not correct however to use this percentage to calculate the total number of elephants poached, simply because the elephant density in the evaluation area is probably much higher than that of the contiguous areas. Indeed, the presence for many years, of tourist operators has certainly fostered a bigger concentration of elephants in the Hunting Areas and the ZCV where they appear more secure than elsewhere.
- o With the arrival of the wet season, the 2007 poaching campaign is now over. Poachers are on their way back with their ivory booty. Today, information from the ground is coming from the permanent staff in place to secure the areas and camps managed by the hunting tourism operators. Informants report that elephants are still there. Evidently, not all the elephants have been shot yet. The poaching level is therefore probably not reaching 100%. Therefore, a new poaching campaign can be expected for 2008.

2006/2007 Season	GMA	21 & 21 bis	73	27	66
	Area km2	2423	1515	1984	1884
	Elephant Carcasses Observed	25	48	6	13
	Estimated Percentage of Carcass Observation	25%	25%	15%	25%
	Estimated Number of Elephant Shot	100	192	40	52
	GMA	24,25, & 26	22	20 & 23	28 & 28 bis
	Area km2	7195	2730	2863	3060
	Elephant Carcasses Observed	23	19	26	20
	Estimated Percentage of Carcass Observation	50%	50%	50%	60%
	Estimated Number of Elephant Shot	46	38	52	33

Poachers

Elephant poachers belong to two main categories:

- o Foreign poachers :
They do not speak the local language, Sango. They wear, at least partially, military clothes and shoes and are generally identified as coming from Sudan. They carry war weap-

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ons and have donkeys, often horses, sometimes camels, even in areas infested by tse-tse fly. There are almost exclusively, but not completely, interested in ivory and generally leave the elephant meat untouched. The meat is then collected by local people of the region. The poachers invest all their efforts in the search of elephants.

o **Local poachers:**

They are villagers from local communities, or from more distant areas, who are coming to take advantage of the situation, or mainly to search for diamonds. These are not focusing exclusively on elephants, but poach all the available species for bushmeat.

The fight against poaching

The fight against poaching is theoretically implemented by:

- o **Government authorities:** due to the current context, the relevant authorities have to tackle an extremely difficult situation. Rangers are faced with gangs of poachers who are, at the same time, better equipped, more experienced and trained, more numerous and certainly more motivated.
- o **International assistance:** The ECOFAC/ZCV Programme, interrupted two years ago, was playing a double role: (i) deterrent, with the distribution of the revenue derived from sport hunting to the local communities & (ii) repressive, with anti-poaching patrols, including with the assistance of community rangers.
- o **Private operators:** hunting tourism operators have always contributed to the general effort in the fight against poaching. This year, however, due to the general context and the interruption of the ECOFAC programme, private operators suddenly found themselves alone facing the problematic situation by themselves. Unfortunately, they have suffered from injuries and even human losses among their staff.

The methods used for anti-poaching differ:

- o **Poaching by outsiders:** preventive methods (community-based approaches) proved to be ineffective; therefore only coercive (repressive) methods can be contemplated. However, negotiations with the sleeping partners abroad might be envisaged.
- o **Local poaching:** The community-based approaches have already been in place for several years. Thanks to the ECOFAC programme and the voluntary contribution of tourist game operators, the ZCV are already functioning through a mechanism similar to CAMPFIRE, where local communities benefit from tourism. Nevertheless, the current system appears to be insufficient to provide enough incentives to dissuade communities from pursuing their poaching activities.

Need for help

Considering the magnitude of the problem, only international assistance can improve the situation and save these elephants.
