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FEATURED

Task Force Makes Gains in Combating Wildlife Crimes

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One of the confiscated chimpanzees

-WCTF's latest report shows

In the dense forest and diverse ecosystem of Liberia, the battle against wildlife crime has been an almost insurmountable task, but the latest report shows that progress is being made.

The Wildlife Crime Task Force (WCTF), under the auspices of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), has shown to be making headway in the battle against illegal wildlife trafficking.

Edward Y. N. W. Appleton is an experienced law enforcement expert and now manager at FDA whose work seems to be yielding necessary results in the face of the everyday challenges facing the management of wildlife.

A release that is in the possession of the Daily Observer contains that Appleton's leadership has empowered the Wildlife Crime Task Force and employed measures to ensure its productivity in conformity with the regulations of FDA.

“The Task Force, composed of skilled rangers and law enforcement officers, has been instrumental in tracking down and apprehending those involved in illegal wildlife activities. The task force was created in 2019 and with funding from the European Union through the project “PROBIO: (protecting biodiversity) through law enforcement and community-led initiatives,” which started in January 2024, there is a new boost given it and this has led to remarkable successes,” the statement contains.

Being a global biodiversity hotspot, Liberia’s wildlife is rich and unique, including highly endangered species such as chimpanzees, forest elephants, pygmy hippos, and various other species of mammals, birds, and reptiles.

Unfortunately, the illegal trade in bushmeat and other wildlife products poses a significant threat to these animals and their habitats. Poaching, trafficking, and habitat destruction are some of the key challenges facing the conservation efforts in the country.

With support from the European Union, WCTF has been able, as of January this year, available details show, to register nine convictions in line with the National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law compared to six in the year 2023.

“The fines amounted from 3 months in prison to the payment of US\$200. Two suspects were arrested in January this year, charged, forwarded to court, and convicted of hunting and possessing weapons in a protected area of Grebo-Krahn National Park,” the statement added.

Also in February, the statement notes that another suspect was arrested, charged, and convicted in court for hunting and killing protected species in the Grebo-Krahn National Park.

“One additional person was convicted for illegal possession of a protected species monkey (Sooty Mangabey) in a residential area in March. Later in April, two persons were charged and convicted for smuggling a Patas monkey, which is not of Liberian origin, and assorted bushmeat from protected animals. In June, three suspects were tracked down by the WCTF in Grand Gedeh and River Gee for having critically endangered chimpanzees. They were charged and prosecuted while three others are still pending trial in court,” the statement said.

The task force’s successes have been attributed to its participation in training programs and working alongside the ECOWAS Regional Wildlife Law Enforcement Task Force on intelligence and data sharing, which includes other member states of ECOWAS, such as Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria.

The EU-funded PROBIO project which began in January this year is expected to run up to March 2026.

It is a US\$16 million initiative in Liberia's Forest and Conservation sector
"Protecting a green future: forestry and conservation for a sustainable economic development in Liberia."

The PROBIO project is led by the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation, with four partners including The Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia, Libassa Wildlife Sanctuary, the Nature Compact, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

FDA, the Forestry Training Institute, and the Environmental Protection Agency are the main beneficiaries of the project, with local communities supporting the initiative through awareness and ensuring sustainable protection of Liberia's unique biodiversity.