



SMALL MAMMAL
CONSERVATION
ORGANIZATION

2024 Annual Report

Conserving Native Habitat,
Restoring Ecosystems, Safeguarding Livelihoods



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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

From the forests in Nigeria, to the minds of young West African students, we took our work to new heights, taking the long view and deepening commitments. Read about our major wins in 2024, the amazing people, from women restorers, to a swanky new partnership that made it all happen.

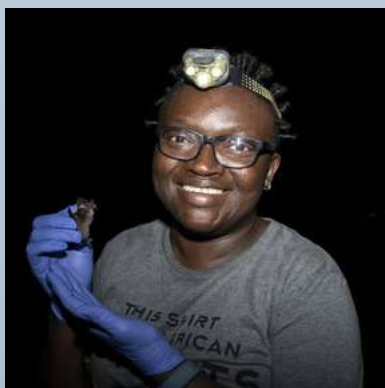
At Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary (AMWS), our fire prediction and prevention program achieved its third consecutive year without a single wildfire event. Zero wildfires means intact forests, for bats, pangolins and other Endangered species. Our community-led fire prevention patrols are a testament to what is possible when conservation is locally driven and sustained long term. Plus, our species monitoring efforts yielded exciting results as field teams documented two new species of bats for Nigeria.

We deepened our conservation commitment to habitat protection by launching a women-led community-based forest restoration group called Kujo Women, who collect native seeds from the forest, raise them in our nursery and, transplant seedlings to fire-damaged habitat. Beyond restoring the forest, these efforts also create income, foster ownership, and strengthen community involvement in conservation.

We also hosted the third cohort of the West Africa Mammal Fellowship at our recently government approved field camp. Read on to find out why this was a proud moment as we achieved a new milestone in the five-year history of this program. Even more, hosting this event at Afi marked the beginning of the use of our field stations as a training hub. We've now joined a growing network of tropical field stations, see section on COP16 in Cali, Columbia.

We have big news! SMACON became a **Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN) partner!!!** This will be a big platform for SMACON to learn, share and fundraise. This partnership along with our developing financial strategy and strategic plan boosts our outlook for the next decade. There is so much more in this report that explores themes of protein demand and bat/wildmeat hunting; collaborative partner projects; and a new book scheme to equip African students.

Undeniably, SMACON's achievements are powered by people. Local guardians who protect forests, fellows who champion science, and partners who believe in our mission, including new team members who open new vistas. Together, we are not just conserving species, we are restoring balance, resilience, and hope for nature and people across diverse landscapes.



Dr. Iroro Tanshi
Co-Executive Director



Dr. Benneth Obitte
Co-Executive Director

VISION

Thriving small mammal
populations in West Africa

MISSION

Protect at-risk small mammals in West Africa,
through scalable evidence-based conservation
solutions that rely on socio-ecological research
and strengthened capacity of in-country
practitioners.



OUR TEAM

Incoming Board of Trustees



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Field Officer



Chinaza Ukwueze
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Dr. Akudi Nwauzor
Field Officer, Intern

Consultants



Elizabeth Usen
Research Associate



Amy Price
Consultant - Grant Writer



Dr. Foghor Tanshi
Consultant - Operations
Strategist

OUR APPROACH

Driving Impact for Small Mammals



By conducting **RESEARCH**, we fill knowledge gaps about the threats that small mammal species are facing.



We conduct **EVIDENCE-BASED CONSERVATION** aimed at deploying interventions that combine local knowledge with our research.



At SMACON, we conduct **COMMUNITY-LED INTERVENTIONS** that safeguard livelihoods and thus, set in the context of community needs.



Many species face common threats across regions, leading us to establish **TRANSBOUNDARY NETWORKS** to protect small mammals across borders.



To save species across the region, we are **BUILDING REGIONAL EXPERTISE** for the next generation of scientists to drive small mammal research and conservation in West Africa.



IMPACT IN NUMBERS

2024 Overview

0

Wildfire for the third consecutive year in Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary. A testament to the efficiency of our early-warning wildfire prediction and prevention program



2

New country records for Nigerian bats! Two bat species- one belonging to the family of free tailed bats and another, the slit-faced bats - were recorded for the first time in Nigeria



9

Postgraduate students from **seven** West African countries got hands-on field and research training experience as part of our priority to raise in-country experts who can lead conservation efforts across West Africa



3051

Native seeds collected and planted by the Kujo Women, an all-**women** local community team leading our efforts to restore fire-degraded parts of the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary



SAVING THE ENDANGERED SHORT-TAILED ROUNDLEAF BAT

The Short-tailed Roundleaf Bat (*Hipposideros curtus*), one of the world's most threatened bat species, is range restricted and relies on intact forests and undisturbed caves, yet it faces growing threats from habitat loss (wildfires, logging, and farm encroachment) and cave disturbances.

In 2024, SMACON intensified efforts to conserve this species through habitat protection, identification of new cave roosts (where bats sleep), and monitoring populations. Our lasting partnerships with local communities and government allows the SMACON team to implement conservation interventions to reduce disturbances and protect its habitat, enabling the species to thrive.

Our habitat protection work primarily stops annual fires, and restores fire-damaged land. To read all about this, head over to the [Wildfire Prediction and Prevention Program](#) (p.18) and [Forest Restoration](#) (p.20) sections of this report.



Known localities of the Short-tailed Roundleaf bat on a vegetation change map. Recent records in filed circles. © Paul Bates

In February, we conducted a survey at the site where *curtus* was first recorded in Nigeria - the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary. Read more in the [bat diet section](#) (p.25). While a *curtus* roost remained elusive at Afi, we're confident that our successful wildfire program is saving the species forest habitat from fires.

December brought good news through exciting findings from our survey at Etamkpini, a village on the edge of the Oban Forest Reserve, in southern Cross River State (see map). We identified a new cave roost and captured 8 individuals of the Short-tailed Roundleaf bat. Alarmingly, plans for a new cement factory now poses a serious threat to these critical roosting sites for this Endangered bat. But community interest in saving the caves for bats and ecotourism give us hope.



A signpost that communicates wildfire risk to communities.

Monitoring Curtus in Nigeria

We still know very little about thriving populations of the species and the habitat quality at those sites. SMACON made significant strides in monitoring the Endangered bat, quantifying and population size, while addressing emerging threats. Our surveys across Nigeria revealed critical insights, culminating in a record-breaking year for *curtus* captures and the discovery of a new cave roost.



The Endangered Short-tailed Roundleaf bat

Expanding *H. curtus* monitoring in Bioko

SMACON expanded *curtus* monitoring efforts in Bioko, Equatorial Guinea in January, 2024, focusing on Riaba, where the species was first documented in the country over 50 years ago. We surveyed forests and potential cave and cave-like habitat after another, seeking roosts across the area. Alas, we found no cave roosts but, the survey strengthened our understanding of *curtus* habitats in Bioko. This effort marks a critical step in refining our strategies, expanding research efforts outside Nigeria, and building a more comprehensive picture of the species' current distribution across its range.

Bioblitz: Surveying a critical *H. curtus* habitat

In February 2024, SMACON led Bioblitz, a mini biodiversity assessment in Etamkpini, Cross River State, to assess the biodiversity of a 100 acre forest patch, sitting on a karst system, home to a critical population of the Endangered Short-tailed Roundleaf bat, and other species.

Prior to the bioblitz, we held a stakeholder meeting to discuss the proposed cave protection program at Etamkpini, that included the Cross River Forestry Commission, Tourism Bureau, and Ministry of Environment. This rapid biodiversity survey laid the groundwork for the proposed conservation plan in partnership with the host community.

Over three days, the SMACON team (Bats) was joined by a team of local and regional scientists: Abiodun Adedapo (Odonates), Dr. Yahkat Barshep (Birds) and Dr. Inza Kone, a renowned African primate conservation biologist, to conduct biodiversity surveys across forest patches, caves, and farmlands. The expedition provided valuable insights into this threatened habitat.

In light of increasing pressures from agriculture and mining, the bioblitz findings reinforced the urgency of protecting this landscape. SMACON is now shifting gears to save this critical population by working with our government and community partners. Stay tuned!

Short-tailed Roundleaf bat
Hipposideros curtus





Dr. Yahkat Basheb, an ornithologist and lecturer at the University of Jos and APLORI, Nigeria surveying birds during our Bioblitz.

TWO NEW COUNTRY BAT RECORDS!

During the bioblitz and rapid assessment in Etamkpini, bat surveys uncovered the first-ever Nigerian record of one bat specie belonging to a family of slit-faced bats. In addition to this record, our surveys of the Cross River National Park as part of our collaboratory NSF-funded bat virology study also yielded yet another first time record for Nigeria. This new find is a the free-tailed bats family. These two beautiful insectivorous bat species are now officially part of the country's incredible bat biodiversity. Their names will be revealed after results have been published in a peer reviewed journal.



A majestic individual of the new bat find, belonging to the free-tailed bat family

EIDOLON: A DECLINING BAT SPECIES



Migratory Straw-coloured fruit bats at the roost in Makurdi, Nigeria

If you're standing outside at dusk somewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, what do you do? You look up! Don't look up, and you'll miss Africa's greatest daily sky show - millions of bats taking to flight for the night. That's the Straw-colored Fruit bat. It is also migratory, and rivals the wildebeest in total number and distances covered. It has been dubbed the world's largest mammal migration. Its daily and annual movement are a wild spectacle, and truly one of Africa's great treasures.

The species is Africa's second-largest bat that forms large colonies in both wild and urban environments. Being so large, it eats small and large fruits that can be transported over great distances (>50 km in one night). Thus this giant of a bat plants trees and forests across the landscape. In spite of these super duper qualities, this species is subject to persecution, hunted for food, roost destruction.

The Straw-colored Fruit bat, though classified as Near-threatened, a pan-African 50-year monitoring data shows ongoing range-wide decline.

Our team initiated long-term monitoring for the species in 2013, as part of the continent-wide monitoring network (eidolonmonitoring.com). Although we had a three year hiatus during COVID-19, we have picked things back up again in 2024.

And we're back, bigger and better, with two dedicated volunteer teams comprising of students and citizen scientists working across Nigeria (north and south) to track populations and document habitat conditions.

These dedicated volunteers conduct monthly surveys at bat roosts using physical counts and acoustic recordings to track populations in the cities of Benin and Makurdi. A single large tree holds up to 5000 bats. Most colonies aggregate on multiple trees in the same area. We get colony counts of up to 120,000 individuals. Volunteers also work with local government authorities and individuals to protect roosts. We're glad to be back at this.

THE WEST AFRICA MAMMAL FELLOWSHIP

Picture trying to protect a forest teeming with rare species, only to find that just a handful of scientists nearby have the training to help. That's the reality across much of West Africa, where small mammals often slip through the cracks of broader conservation work. The West African Mammal Fellowship (WAMF), in partnership with the West Africa Mammal Partnership, was created to change that, mentoring postgraduate students and building the homegrown expertise needed to safeguard the region's biodiversity.

In February 2024, nine postgraduate students from seven West African countries arrived in Cross River State, Nigeria, for the biennial West African Mammal Fellowship (WAMF). From March 9 to 23, they hiked the green ridges of Afi Wildlife Mountain Sanctuary and Obudu Mountain Resort, moving between cool misty trails, evening data sessions, and early-morning surveys.



**This fellowship, now in its
third cohort, has
supported**

15

Postgraduate students

With mentors and facilitators from Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Italy, Nigeria, South Africa, UK, and USA, the program gave students access to some of the top minds in the field, all while working in the heart of Nigeria's biodiverse forests. Many thanks to this cohort's facilitators and mentors (listed below) for the time and skill expended in making the fellowship a huge success.

Dr. Anna Bastian
Dr. Paul Bates
Dr. Chabi Djagoun
Dr. Malika Kangoye
Dr. Grace Kia
Ms. Beatrix Lanzinger-Bates

Ms. Lucia Guaita
Dr. Benneth Obitte
Dr. Karen Sears
Dr. Iroko Tanshi
Dr. Noel Thiombiano
Dr. Amy Wray





Camera Trap training sessions



Sound ecology sessions

TRAINING STUDENTS IN THE FIELD



Students interacting with a mentor



Curious what the fellows did in those two weeks? They learned sound ecology, statistics with R, small-mammal taxonomy, aging in bats, DNA extraction, and sharpened their research skills.

The fellowship doesn't stop there. Mini grants, paid internships, and monthly virtual labs keep the ideas alive long after their training boots come off.



Each fellow left with field-tested skills and a project, ready to carry forward small-mammal conservation efforts in their home countries. The best part? Students worked side by side with seasoned mentors, turning fresh ideas into actionable conservation plans.



Dr. Paul Bates and Ms. Beatrix Lazinger-Bates led students through a bat taxonomy session



Showing students how community based conservation works using SMACON's Wildfire Prevention Program

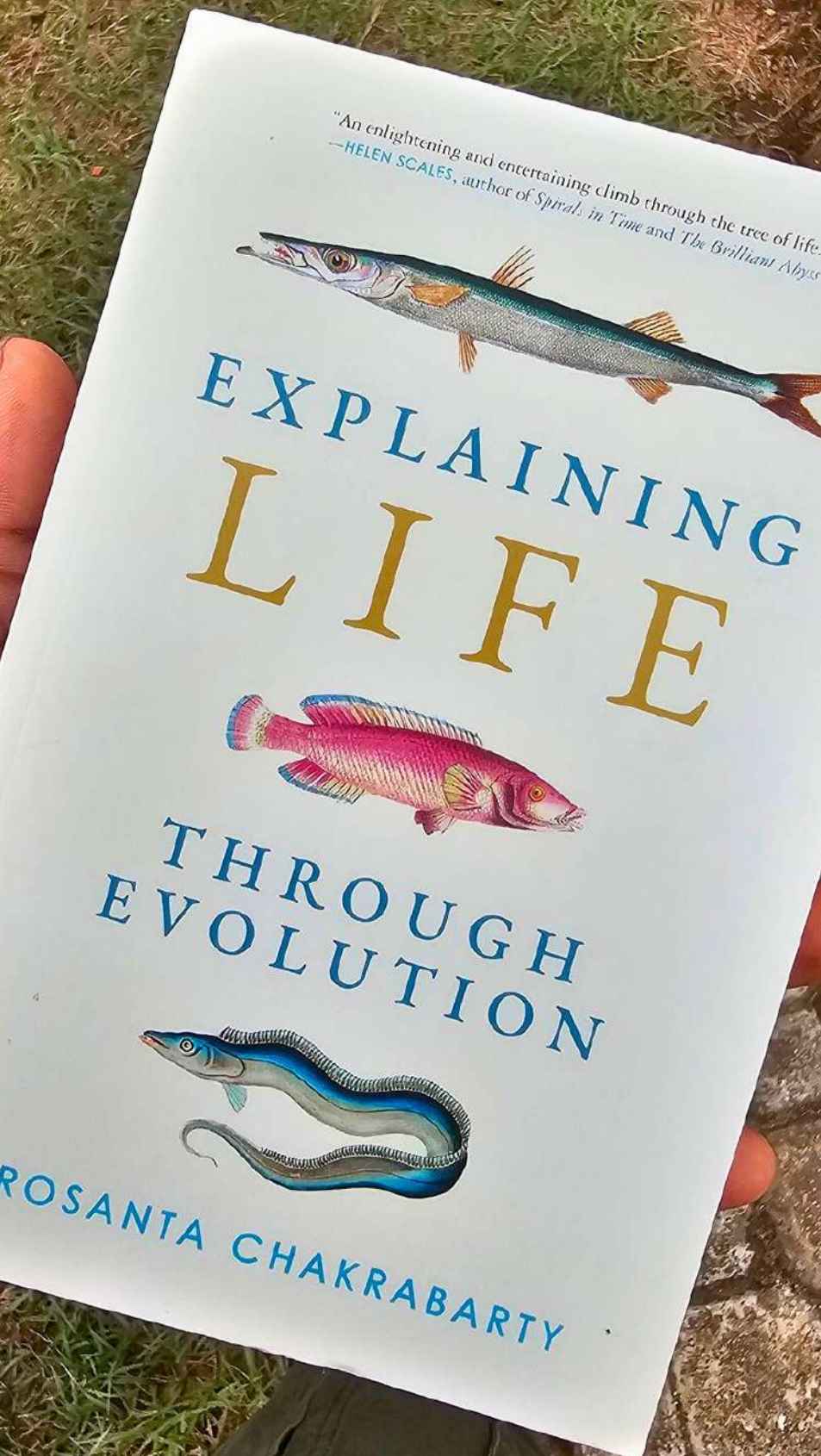
ECO EVO BOOK SCHEME

Our commitment to capacity building extends to supporting the development of well-equipped African scholars. To this end, we initiated a dedicated scheme focused on providing crucial library resources in the fields of ecology and evolution to students across Africa. This scheme is specifically designed to support learning and research capabilities by giving postgraduate students access to essential academic materials.

Applications formally commenced in February 2024 and the inaugural library resource provided through this scheme was the highly regarded book, "**Explaining Life through Evolution**" by Dr. *Prosanta Chakrabarty*.

As part of this initial rollout, [30 students](#) from [8 African countries](#) were selected to receive this resource on evolution.

There is more to do, as we plan to reach 100 students in 2025 and we have new book titles coming to the scheme.



WILDLIFE CONSERVATION NETWORK (WCN) WELCOMES SMACON

We are thrilled to announce that SMACON has officially become a partner of the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN)! SMACON joins as the 26th member of this partner network. This milestone marks a major step forward for us, as WCN connects passionate conservationists and supporters around the world to safeguard endangered species and their ecosystems.

WCN identifies the best entrepreneurial conservation organizations and invites them to receive in-depth, ongoing support by joining their Network of Conservation Partners. All organizations in the partner network go through a rigorous vetting process. This WCN stamp is an opportunity to work with the broader WCN family to strengthen our conservation efforts and protect the incredible small mammals we all care so deeply about.



Dr. Zoe Nhleko (top row, third from right) Partner Manager at WCN with some SMACON staff and community members at the SMACON livelihood project; a community cane rat farm project in Afi, Cross River State, Nigeria.

SMACON AT WCN FALL EXPO '24

For the first time as WCN partners, SMACON participated at the WCN Wildlife Conservation Expo! The expo, a gathering of conservation leaders, partners and supporters, took place in October 2024. It was an exciting opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and engage in conversations about our work and the future of wildlife conservation. Watch our EXPO presentation [HERE](#).



Iroro with volunteers at SMACON's exhibition booth at 2024 WCN Fall Expo



ZERO wildfire recorded in Afi
Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary
for **3** consecutive years

SAVING THE AFI ECOSYSTEM ONE FLAME AT A TIME



A Forest Guardian puts out fires in a cocoa farm to prevent farm-to-forest spread. One of our key upgrades in 2024 equipped Guardians with field boots and motorbikes.

WILDFIRE PREVENTION PROGRAM



10 new motorcycles to optimize Forest Guardians' response time to farm fire ↑

Annual fires were once a thing, threatening the forest home of the critically endangered Short-tailed Roundleaf bat (*Hipposideros curtus*), but Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary now tells a different story. Since SMACON launched its wildfire prediction and prevention program in 2022, Afi's forest has gone three straight years without a single wildfire, a win sustained by local communities.

The 2024 fire season opened with a strategic meeting with community leaders and 50 Forest Guardians to review past challenges and sharpen wildfire prevention strategies. WCN representative, Zoe Nhleko, joined the discussion, which emphasized community-led enforcement and the use of SMACON's Early-Warning Prediction Signposts.

To reinforce prevention efforts, SMACON supplied 20 water backpacks, 10 motorbikes, 51 pairs of safety boots, 50 helmets, and 10 machetes to five focal communities around the sanctuary. Armed with training and gear, Forest Guardians patrolled 1,439 farms, stopped 22 farm-fire incidents, and kept every blaze from reaching the forest.

The benefits reach beyond fire control. Guardians earn income, families see their farmland protected, and the forest sheltering pangolins, drill monkeys, gorillas, and *H. curtus* remains intact. SMACON's results at Afi show that proactive, community-led conservation works.

Our firefighting efforts also continued with our annual fire break exercise in the Okwango-Boshi Extension division of Cross River National Park, before the dry season could spark new threats (January-April).



Community members participating in the annual fire break exercise at the Cross River National Park (CRNP)



First test transplant in
fire-damaged forest areas
completed

RESTORING FIRE-DAMAGED FORESTS: KUJO WOMEN LEAD THE WAY



Members of the Kujo Women group
tend to seedlings in the nursery

FOREST RESTORATION IN AFI MOUNTAIN WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



When Rose and her husband lost their cocoa farm to a terrible wildfire four years ago, it really hit them hard financially since that farm was their main income source. She says those times were pretty tough for a lot of farmers and their families who faced the same disaster. But with the help of SMACON's Wildfire Prevention Program, things are looking up now. [See our fire action here.](#)

There's still a lot to do because repeated wildfires have damaged big parts of the forest, leaving the soil bare or taken over by non-native plants, and natural regeneration is slow or impossible without some help.

SMACON has stepped up to restore fire-damaged habitats in Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary by supporting a group of local women in charge of reforestation called Kujo Women.

These amazing women, whose group name means 'Forest' in their local Boki language, have kicked off some crucial restoration work, starting with a pilot nursery in the Buanchor community.

Rose who was one of the first to join the group says, "I'm really proud to be a part of Kujo Women, because we are replanting the areas damaged by the fire. Also, by being a part of this group, I have been able to support my children through the money that we're receiving from working on the project".



→ Elizabeth, our Research Associate and Kujo Women setup a pilot nursery for the reforestation project



TURNING THE TIDE ON WILDLIFE HUNTING

ALTERNATIVE PROTEIN PROJECT



Cane rats raised at our farm, to provide alternative protein to communities in Afi



For many families around Afi Mountain, protein often comes straight from the forest, but as demand grows, wildlife populations shrink.

Now, what if communities could raise their own source of alternative and affordable protein, without turning to the forest? That question gave birth to the Alternative Protein Project. The result of an intense socio-ecological survey during which community members shared that cane rats are a preferred alternative source of protein.

Cane rats, locally known and widely consumed as a delicacy, became the focus of a pilot farm that offered an alternative to hunting bats and other small mammals.

In 2024, the project really took off, and several cane rats littered - big potential as an alternative protein source. Replacing protein sources is certainly a long-term project. We're indeed taking the long view here and excited for how this will rescue bat and pangolin populations, and also reduce zoonotic spillover risk.

QUANTIFY PROTEIN, PROTECT PANGOLINS

Our alternative protein project is budding as wildlife hunting rages on, fueled by demand. To effectively replace or at the very least, drastically reduce wild game hunting, we first need to understand how much wild meat people are consuming, how much total protein is wild, and understand the value chain of wild meat trade within each community.

Over the last few months, we have surveyed hunters and protein vendors in all sixteen communities surrounding Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary. SMACON is working with local communities to co-design and co-manage sustainable ways to meet local protein needs through our cane rat farms that complements ongoing wildlife hunting mitigation efforts.

This painstaking effort was funded through the support of the Pangolin Conservation Fund (PCF). Pangolins were still abundant at Afi Wildlife Sanctuary a decade ago. Our field teams typically spotted pangolins during bat surveys, but that has changed. To save pangolins, we must start with immediate demand reduction. But to be effective, we must quantify demand.

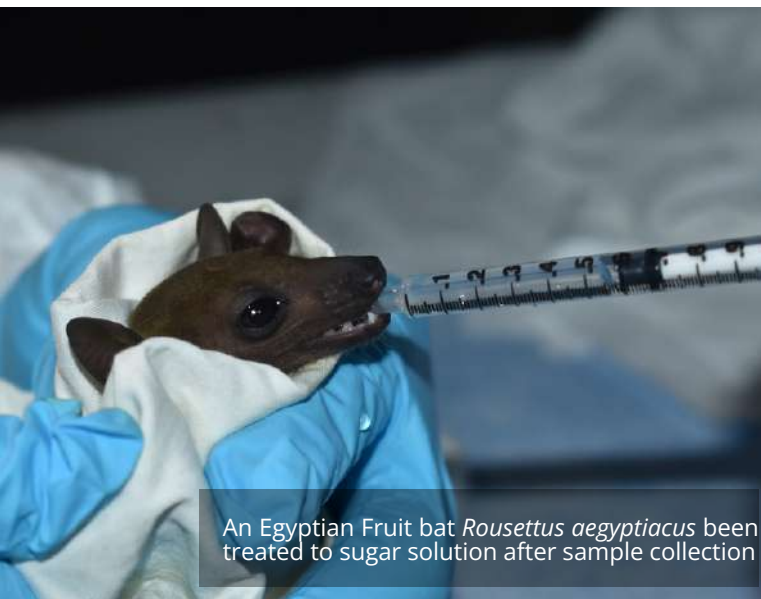


A pangolin spotted during one of our species monitoring surveys.





BAT VIROLOGY STUDY



An Egyptian Fruit bat *Rousettus aegyptiacus* been treated to sugar solution after sample collection

In May 2024, our co-founder, Dr. Benneth Obitte, wrapped up an NSF-funded collaborative study on Egyptian fruit bats as part of his postdoctoral research with Dr. Tigga Kingston at Texas Tech University. Working alongside SMACON, the project brought together partners from UC Davis, Stony Brook University, and the University of Saskatchewan to investigate how human activities shape the viruses carried by these bats, research with important implications for preventing future pandemics.

The team collected > 6000 samples from over 1200 bats from nine caves, providing comprehensive data on bat ecology, viral diversity, and environmental conditions across areas with varying levels of human disturbance. By examining how factors like hunting and habitat changes impact bats and their viruses, we're developing a deeper understanding of disease dynamics in the wild.

This study not only focused on bats but also provided insights applicable to other wildlife-human interfaces, contributing to broader efforts in predicting and preventing zoonotic disease outbreaks.

Eleven (11) young Nigerian scientists and conservationists were trained using techniques in virology and disease ecology. This investment in local expertise not only enhances the project's immediate outcomes but also strengthens Nigeria's long-term capabilities in addressing complex ecological and public health challenges.



Dr. Benneth Obitte and his team members during a sampling session in Afi mountain Wildlife sanctuary

UNDERSTANDING BAT DIET AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IN THE GULF OF GUINEA FORESTS

As part of her postdoctoral research on bat diets with Dr. Sharlene Santana at the University of Washington, our co-founder, Dr. Tanshi, has been collaborating with SMACON staff and regional partners to conduct fieldwork in the Gulf of Guinea Forests, including southern Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea Islands (Bioko, Sao Tome, and Principe).

Irero uses various techniques to study key bat species and their feeding patterns, including which bats compete for the same food and which species are best suited to eat different types of insects based on their skull size and shape. This research will reveal fascinating aspects of bat biology and demonstrate how bat communities provide essential services to the ecosystem, like controlling insect pests.

The basic result usually starts as a species list for each site. Over five nights, 89 individuals across 18 species were recorded, contributing valuable data to Nigeria's bat species checklist.

In 2024, this survey included additional captures from Afi Mountain, and the Obot Ndom Forest Reserve, Akwa Ibom, in the Niger-Delta Transition Forest ecoregion.



Dr. Tanshi measuring how hard bats can bite.



As forest reserves typically lack formal protection, the landscape has been extensively logged, with a few patches of palm/raffia-dominated riparian patches. There are no protected areas in this ecoregion, leading us to an alarming realization that this unique forest type has disappeared before our very eyes.

Irero is currently examining the bone and muscles using 3D imagery from a CT scanner to understand the structure of bat diet across the landscape.

At SMACON, we aim to support such local and international research projects by hosting researchers at our field stations.



Sao Tomé Island



Bioko Island

NIGERIA POLLINATOR DATABASE PROJECT



Photo: Andreas Trepte

Cataloging Biodiversity for a Sustainable Future

SMACON partnered on the Nigeria Pollinator Database Project, a key initiative developed by the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net) aimed at cataloging the diverse pollinator species in Nigeria. Recognizing pollinator conservation as a critical area for healthy ecosystems, BES-Net supports Nigeria's national pollinator action plan.

The project's primary goal was to create a standardized database of Nigeria's pollinators, compiling data from existing literature, private collections, and personal communications. This database is designed to serve as the foundation for a comprehensive Pollinator Information Management System (PIMS).

The project is crucial for biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, and informed policymaking in Nigeria and serves as a collaborative platform for scientists, policymakers, and conservationists to share data and raise awareness about pollinator protection.

The database catalogs 85 pollinator species interacting with 178 plant species, encompassing diverse taxa such as bees, butterflies, birds, bats, and flies. Key bat pollinators like Straw-coloured Fruit bat, Woermann's bat and Egyptian Fruit bat were highlighted, alongside economically important bat pollinated crops like *Parkia biglobosa* (African locust bean), *Carica papaya* (Paw paw), and *Vitellaria paradoxa* (Shea tree), emphasizing the ecosystem's complexity and pollination versatility.

By identifying essential pollinators and plants that attract them, this resource will inform agricultural practices aiding crop diversification, seasonal planning, and sustainable farming methods. The project's recommendations extend beyond data collection to practical implementation through expanding farmer education, integrating technology for data accessibility, and encouraging further research on lesser-known Nigerian pollinators. Overall, the database is a key move towards protecting Nigeria's pollinators, securing food supplies, and boosting biodiversity, with a lot of room for future growth and connection to global biodiversity efforts.



CONF
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BIOD

COP16 /
CALI -

COP16
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Paz con la Naturaleza



**Naciones
Unidas**

SMACON at COP16: Enhancing Field Station Infrastructure for Wildlife Conservation



In October 2024, Iroro Tanshi, participated in a side event at the 16th United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) held in Cali, Colombia. This conference marked the first biodiversity-focused COP since the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in 2022, bringing together environmental leaders from nearly 200 countries to assess commitments to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

This side event focused on the role of field station networks in implementing science-based inclusive conservation and we contributed to discussions emphasizing the critical role of field stations in wildlife conservation. Field stations, especially in the tropics, serve as hubs for research, long-term ecological monitoring, and conservation planning, providing bases for scientists to conduct studies in biodiversity-rich regions. These field stations support local capacity building while often serving as ground zero for scientific data collection.

In contributing to this network of field stations in the tropics, we are in collaboration with funding partners, government and local community, developing two field stations: one in Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary (AMWS) and another in Obudu Plateau. These stations will enhance the organization's capacity to conduct long-term ecological monitoring and research on small mammals and their habitat.



At Afi Mountain, we are collaborating with the state government to establish a field base station that will act as a Fire Command Center and a Conservation Coordination Center. This station will be instrumental in monitoring the effects of wildfires, which are a major threat to the habitats of endangered species like bats. It will also serve as a coordination hub for conservation activities in the Wildlife Sanctuary.

Meanwhile, at Obudu Plateau, construction is underway for Anape Natural Science Research Station. This facility will include a 25 person capacity residential area, teaching spaces, and labs (wet and dry) for various types of research, including acoustic and biomechanical studies. The research station will also house a vivarium for studying live specimens and will provide the infrastructure needed for advanced conservation research. The completion of this facility will mark a significant milestone in SMACON's vision of protecting small mammals and their habitat through evidence-based conservation.

SMACON's involvement at COP16 underscored its commitment to strengthening field station infrastructure to enhance conservation outcomes.



Iroro's visit to the Congo Basin Institute field camp at Dja Forest Reserve, Cameroon, to learn field station management

WAMF students learned field techniques at the Afi Mountain Field base Station (under construction)



Pre-construction work at the Anape Field Station. Locally sourced rocks are chiseled to shape and size.

A meeting with Anape's chief Imbush who stated commitment to supporting our field station construction



STAFF ENGAGEMENT

AG Leventis Biodiversity Fellowship at Oxford University

- Our Program manager for Science Projects, Juliana Labiran, was selected as a Biodiversity Fellow for the AG Leventis Biodiversity Fellowship at Oxford University. This prestigious fellowship provided an opportunity to collaborate with leading conservation scientists and engage in high-level biodiversity research.
- The experience further solidified SMACON's reputation and dedication to capacity building and international partnerships.



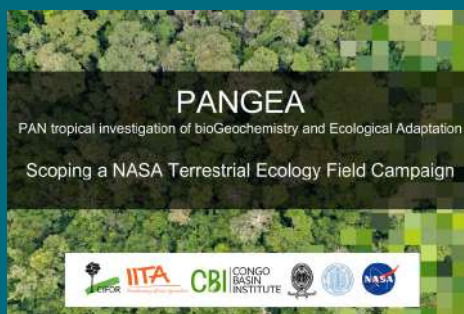
SMACON at the 60th African Tropical Biology Conference

- Science and Engagement Coordinator Oluchi Agodi and Volunteer Elizabeth Usen presented their work on acoustic monitoring and herbarium collections respectively at the 60th Annual Meeting of The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation in Kigali, Rwanda. Their involvement highlights SMACON's dedication to staff development in conservation science in West Africa.
- Oluchi discussed using passive acoustic monitoring for bat assessments, while Elizabeth shared a poster on mapping undigitized herbarium collections. This participation enhances local expertise and contributes to global conservation dialogues.



INTERNATIONAL RAPID ASSESSMENT OF EQUATORIAL GUINEA BY CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

Dr. Tanshi participated in an international expedition to document the biodiversity of Bioko Island, as part of a larger effort to support protected areas in Equatorial Guinea. Iroro was part of the mammal diversity team that focused on bat and rodent surveys, with visual and acoustic observations of medium to large mammals. As part of her postdoc at the University of Washington, Iroro has conducted multiple field surveys of bats in the Gulf of Guinea Islands, including Bioko. The Conservation International funded project captured multiple species new to science, included a previously undescribed bat.



PANGAEA: A NASA FUNDED PROJECT TO STUDY AND PROTECT TROPICAL FORESTS

Iroro and Ben attended a townhall meeting as part of a NASA-funded scoping study that aims to understand tropical forests around the world. Forests in the tropics are understudied, limiting conservation opportunities and outcomes for local people. This mission was funded to develop and scope the potential of the proposed project to involve international and in-country stakeholders. As one of nearly 10 such meetings held around the world including the USA, this meeting in Yaounde engaged the African community. Led by Dr. Elsa Ordway, of UCLA, this project, if funded, will develop new research products to guide conservation action.

GBATNET TRAINING FOR US-INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS DURING A THREE-DAY INTENSIVE WORKSHOP

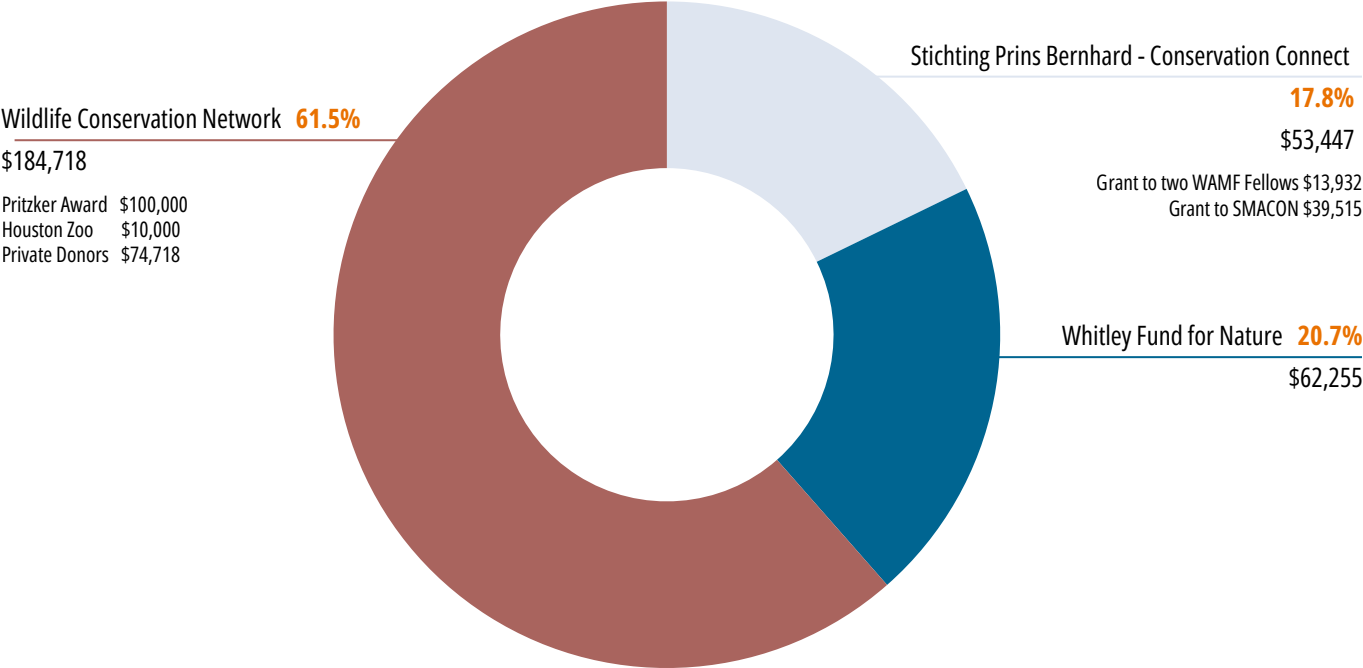
Iroro is a steering committee member in the Global Union of Bat Networks (GBatNet), and co-led (alongside core leadership team, Drs Nancy Simmons and Susan Tsang) a three day project proposal development workshop for GBatNet's US-international student cohort in Arizona. Students worked in groups to produce high quality proposals for projects that would receive GBatNet funding, expand their capacity to collaborate, and grow technical and scientific capacity overall.



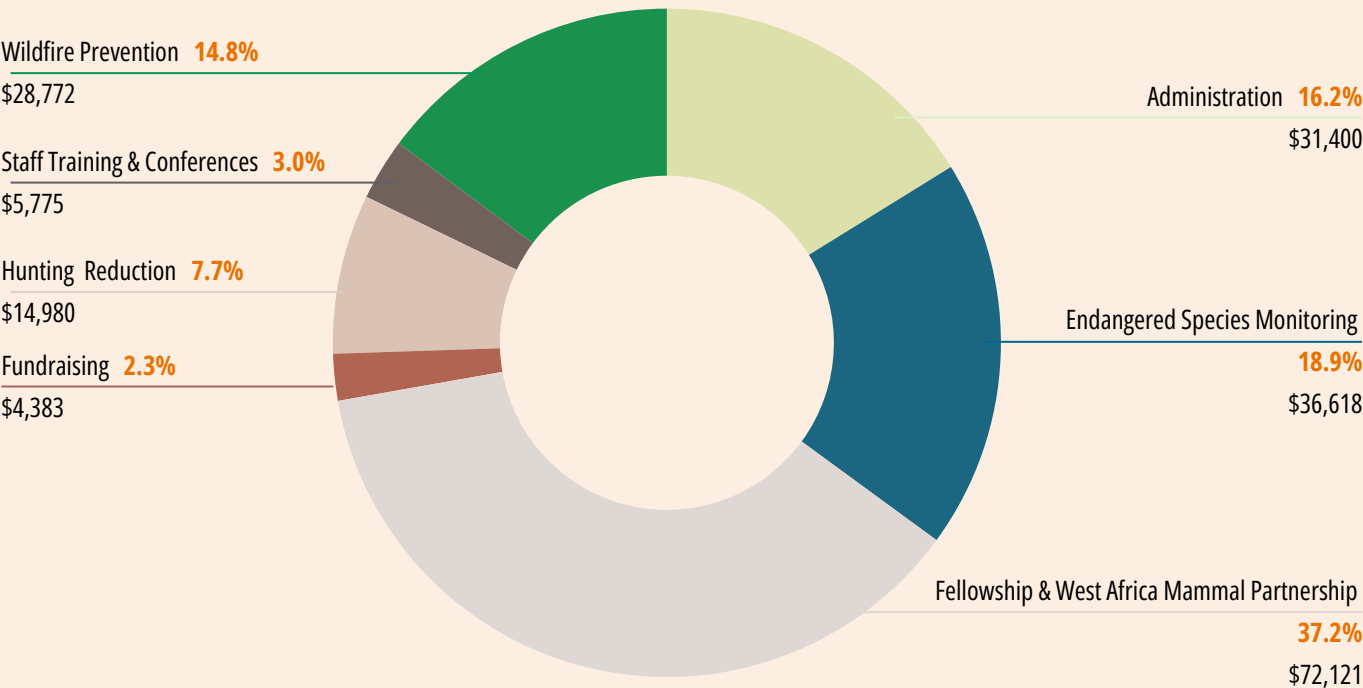


2024 Financial Report

Total Revenue \$300,420



Total Expenses \$194,048



2025 OUTLOOK AND BEYOND

FINANCIAL STRATEGY MEETING

- For the first time, we developed a financial strategy, thanks to the help of incoming board member Lucia Guaita (right). Together we identified new funding mechanisms to improve SMACON fund raising, projection to raise \$1 million/year.
- Lucia has worked for about a decade on fund raising and international philanthropy. We got to work at the Duke's Lodge on the Obudu plateau, where Lucia had just trained our students on grant writing.
- This strategy will be strongly supported by Amy Price, our Consultant Grant Writer



OUR WISHLIST

- ☐ Two field trucks \$96,000
- ☐ Field station 1: \$100,000
- ☐ Solar power for field station \$26,000
- ☐ Increased staff salaries \$10,000

Tick these boxes with your tax deductible donation through our partner Wildlife Conservation Network.

We always end up with overloaded trucks because there are no field stations in south-eastern Nigeria. Our over-enthusiastic Co-Founder, Ben pictured below.



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