

MENTOR Programs:

Team training for Africa's emerging conservation leaders



MENTOR-FOREST fellows conducting fieldwork. Credit: Lauriane Besse-Streit / USFWS

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) MENTOR Programs bring together teams of emerging conservation leaders and combine rigorous academic and field-based training, long-term mentoring, learning through experience, and project design and implementation to address major threats facing wildlife populations. These fellowship programs help strengthen capacity in-country – a fundamental objective of the USFWS in Africa.

Through MENTOR, which stands for Mentoring for ENvironmental Training in Outreach and Resource conservation, transdisciplinary teams work to solve challenging problems with multiple underlying factors. Collaborating with governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, and local communities, Fellows gain valuable insights into threats to wildlife while also expanding their professional networks to prepare for careers beyond the program.

In 2008, USFWS launched its first program, MENTOR/BEAN (Bushmeat-free Eastern Africa Network) to tackle illegal bushmeat trade in eastern Africa. The College of African Wildlife Management in Mweka, Tanzania, and the Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group collaborated on the 18-month program with eight Fellows from Kenya,

South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. The Fellows conducted national-level bushmeat analyses and field assessments, and tested pilot projects for reducing bushmeat consumption through holistic awareness, livelihood alternatives, and law enforcement campaigns in their home countries. Accomplishments by Fellows after completing the program include developing a national wildlife law enforcement NGO in Uganda and leading the training of rangers for anti-poaching patrols in Tanzania.

The second program, MENTOR-FOREST, focused on mitigating the negative effects of extractive industries on wildlife and forests. This program, launched in collaboration with Gabon's

Why develop MENTOR programs?

Successful wildlife conservation requires that countries develop the capacity to effectively manage their natural resources in the face of numerous threats. The USFWS MENTOR Fellowship programs play an important role in capacity development by providing high-level training and field experience to teams of young African professionals who are committed to becoming conservation leaders. Graduating Fellows offer new skills and expertise to strengthen ongoing conservation efforts and help organizations achieve long-lasting results.



MENTOR/BEAN Fellows conduct a meeting on bushmeat awareness with Maasai community members. Credit: Evanson Kariuki.

MENTOR programs address major threats to wildlife

While each MENTOR program has a unique focus, all directly or indirectly address common threats to wildlife.

Commercial bushmeat trade

Commercial demand for bushmeat poses the single greatest threat to the majority of African wildlife, and growing demand for preferred species such as pangolins exacerbates the problem. MENTOR/BEAN tackled the bushmeat trade in eastern Africa, where it was an under-acknowledged threat. MENTOR-Manatee and MENTOR-POP are now addressing the trade of manatees and pangolins in Central Africa.

Wildlife trafficking

Pangolins are believed to be the most heavily trafficked mammals in the world. MENTOR-POP has been critical in lending a voice to Central Africa's three pangolin species and championing their conservation in Cameroon and internationally.

Extractive industries

Unregulated logging, mining, oil exploration, and intensive agriculture threaten wildlife by destroying and degrading habitats. As the global demand for Central Africa's resources continues to grow, vulnerable wildlife populations and habitats will be placed at greater risk. MENTOR-FOREST developed products currently in use by the Gabonese government to promote better management by extractive industries in wildlife areas.

Disease

Frequent contact between wildlife and humans increases the odds that emerging infectious diseases will take a toll on humans and wildlife alike. Ebola, for instance, is a grave threat to both humans and apes. MENTOR-PACE is helping build the next generation of conservation experts who are focused on a range of threats to chimpanzees, including transmission of disease.

Threats to freshwater systems

Freshwater species such as manatees face significant threats from incidental capture in fishing nets as well as hydroelectric and agricultural dams that can isolate and trap individual animals. MENTOR-Manatee Fellows will contribute knowledge about the distribution, behavior, and ecology of this least-studied mammal in Africa.

MENTOR programs develop transdisciplinary teams of emerging African conservation professionals, providing the academic and field-based training and mentoring needed to implement conservation actions to address major threats to wildlife.

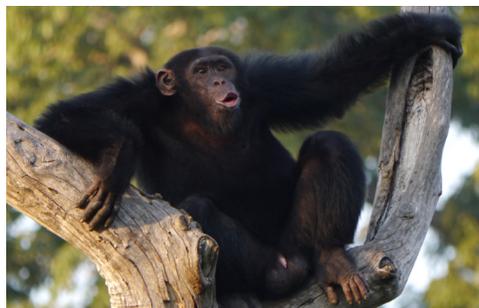


MENTOR-POP Fellows conduct fieldwork to assess the status of pangolins in Cameroon. Credit: Bill Kanapaux / USFWS

National Park Agency (ANPN) and the National School of Forestry (ENEF) in 2012, brought together nine Fellows from Gabon and the Republic of the Congo to develop new approaches to forest stewardship in the Congo Basin as part of a new Master's program. The Fellows developed best-practice guidelines with ANPN and private industries engaged in logging, mining, and oil production, which are now in use by ANPN.

MENTOR-Manatee, led by the African Aquatic Conservation Fund, is a regional program that was launched in July 2015. This three-year program is mentoring eight Central African nationals enrolled in separate educational programs. Based on their chosen areas of study, the Fellows are working as a team to conduct field work to document the extent of manatee hunting for bushmeat and to develop and conduct educational outreach activities for manatee conservation.

MENTOR-PACE (Protecting Apes and Conserving Ecosystems), based at Njala University in Sierra Leone, is an 18-month program that seeks to strengthen conservation leadership in



Conservation of great apes is central to the MENTOR-PACE program in Sierra Leone.

Credit: Direk Byler / USFWS

Sierra Leone and Liberia for addressing threats to the western chimpanzee and the Upper Guinean forest ecosystem. The onset of MENTOR-PACE was delayed due to the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. Now that it is underway, the eight selected Fellows are hard at work learning about threats, including habitat fragmentation, bushmeat hunting, the pet trade, human-wildlife conflict, and emerging diseases, and coming up with innovative solutions to ensure conservation of the western chimpanzee.

In collaboration with the Zoological Society of London, USFWS launched MENTOR-POP (Progress on Pangolins) in 2016. Based in Yaoundé, Cameroon, this 18-month program is developing a transdisciplinary team of nine early-career Central African and Asian conservation practitioners with academic and field-based training to champion the conservation of pangolins in Central Africa. All three species are threatened by bushmeat hunting and international trafficking of meat and scales. The Fellows are currently implementing projects on field assessment, law enforcement, and demand reduction.

After graduating from MENTOR programs, Fellows have gone on to play important roles in government and NGOs, leading wildlife training centers, implementing innovative wildlife law enforcement efforts, and conducting applied wildlife research to inform policy. USFWS plans to continue the MENTOR series to develop teams of African conservation professionals who can work together to effectively address threats to wildlife and their habitats.



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International Affairs**

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February 2017