



Developing Conservation Leaders through MENTOR





A Model for Transformative Capacity and Leadership Development in Africa

Wildlife conservation holds great promise for sustainable development in Africa. This promise comes with complex threats and dynamic challenges that demand professionals in leadership positions who are equipped with new skills and appropriate competencies. Wildlife conservation as a discipline must evolve to accommodate this reality and attract professionals with diverse skillsets. This is precisely the rationale behind the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) MENTOR Program.

Since its inception in 2008, a range of USFWS MENTOR programs have addressed capacity and leadership needs in relation to major threats facing wildlife conservation on the continent. This includes illegal wildlife trade, extractive industries and deforestation, and commercial bushmeat. The programs have also targeted wildlife species that are amongst the most threatened globally: African manatee, pangolin, and western chimpanzee. By anchoring training and mentoring activities on these priorities, the programs ensure that participating Fellows understand and appreciate what is at stake for integrating the human dimension into wildlife conservation.

Despite coming from diverse academic and professional backgrounds, the Fellows in each MENTOR program share a common sense of purpose focused specifically on acquiring knowledge and expertise for their personal growth and ability to engage with others. To ensure this, the programs combine rigorous academic and field-based training with mentoring, team building, and experiential learning. This approach instills in the Fellows many of the core values of leadership, such as having a clear vision, mobilizing and inspiring others, mitigating conflict, building partnerships, and managing adaptively.

This booklet is a powerful testament to this innovative approach toward building capacity and inspiring leadership for wildlife conservation in Africa. It provides an overview of each program, including the substantive focus, institutional partnerships that supported implementation, and new networks for continued collaboration and growth. The experiences and stories also offer a glimpse into how the programs have impacted the careers and professional development of Fellows, resulting in a strong return on investment and moving forward the wildlife conservation agenda through innovative African leadership.

Mohamed Bakarr, Ph.D.

Lead Environmental Specialist, Global Environment Facility, Washington DC, USA

Adjunct Professor, School of Natural Resources Management, Njala University, Sierra Leone

MENTOR Fellows and Mentors with Mohamed Bakarr (right). Credit: Emma Gorenberg/USFWS

Front cover: MENTOR meeting on bushmeat with Maasai community. Credit: James Evanson Kariuki

**PROTEGER L'ENVIRONNEMENT C'EST
PRESERVER NOTRE AVENIR**





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*MENTOR-Manatee mural painting.
Credit: Christy Achtone Nkollo-Kema Kema*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's MENTOR Program in Africa: Investing in Individuals

Africa is home to some of the world's most astonishing and spectacular wildlife and landscapes. Since 1989, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) International Affairs Program has supported over 700 partners to protect Africa's elephants, rhinoceroses, gorillas, chimpanzees, pangolins, marine turtles, and myriad other species. Supported activities range from monitoring and research to protection of key wildlife strongholds and developing champions for conservation.

USFWS recognizes that conservation ultimately starts with and depends upon people: individuals who value and protect wildlife and are dedicated to the future legacy of conservation. In order to achieve success, these professionals not only require technical competencies to promote evidence-based approaches to conservation, but also skill sets in strategic planning, communications, team-building, networking, and above all the ability to inspire those around them to create lasting change.


The idea for MENTOR grew out of experiences in the USFWS Western Hemisphere Program and an interest in using mentoring to better link education to project implementation and problem solving. In 2008, USFWS launched the MENTOR Program under guidance from Nancy Gelman to promote conservation leadership of African professionals. MENTOR's model combines academic and field-based approaches through experiential learning. For each program, 8-11 Fellows are selected from a competitive applicant pool. Depending on the threats and needs, Fellows may include business, law, public administration, urban planning, and communications professionals alongside biologists.

MENTOR connects these transdisciplinary teams of Fellows with long-term Mentors: senior African conservation leaders and international experts who guide the Fellows, teach problem-solving techniques, and foster the development of creative solutions in a learning partnership that continues throughout the careers of both Mentors and Fellows. MENTOR programs have developed conservation leadership across a range of issues, including the bushmeat trade, extractive industries, fisheries management, and the unique challenges of manatee, great ape, and pangolin conservation.

As of 2021, MENTOR programs have supported 61 Fellows from 11 countries, who have gone on to lead conservation initiatives within governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector; perform research; earn post-graduate degrees; and become mentors themselves to new conservationists. The skills and networks developed through MENTOR help individuals grow far beyond the Fellowship, paving the way for visionary, African-led leadership for conservation.



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A photograph showing a man in a blue and white checkered shirt holding a small, brown, downy bird chick in his hands. He is looking down at the chick. Two men in green uniforms and berets, likely park rangers, are standing in front of him, looking on. The background is a lush, green forest with a large tree trunk visible.

With a genuine concern for wildlife and people and a solid understanding of what it takes to achieve conservation success, Francis builds upon each Fellow's strengths, helps them navigate the local context, and empowers them to develop the skills they need to make a difference.

- Heidi Ruffler, Outreach and Education Specialist, USFWS International Affairs


The Importance of Long-term Mentors: Francis Nchembi Tarla

Long-term Mentors are a central component of the MENTOR Program's model and the success of its Fellows. Francis Nchembi Tarla exemplifies the type of mentorship — a long-term learning partnership between Mentors and Fellows — that has become a signature of the MENTOR Program. A senior conservation practitioner and capacity development expert with over 30 years of experience in strategic planning, governance, and capacity building, Francis brings a wealth of knowledge to the Program and its Fellows. He relates to the Fellows with warmth and genuine care as he helps them gain insight into the issue at hand while empowering them to understand how their ideas, skills, and strengths can contribute to strategic solutions within the local context. Francis remains dedicated to the success of the Fellows both during and beyond their Fellowships, helping to set them up for success through learning opportunities, resources, and networks.

Francis' distinguished career path helped form the insight and skills needed to develop trans-disciplinary, international teams of conservation leaders. While teaching and conducting research on pasture management, animal nutrition in fragile ecosystems, and the carrying capacity of rangelands and protected areas, he gained extensive experience working on participatory approaches, community conservation, and co-management of natural resources, and addressing bushmeat and other wildlife conservation threats. From 2003 to 2014, Francis served as Director of Garoua Wildlife College, the only college in West and Central Africa designed to train professionals from Francophone nations in sub-Saharan Africa in wildlife conservation and protected area management. For many of these years, he also helped coordinate the Central African Network of Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions (RIFFEAC), promoting conservation capacity development across the region.

Francis began to work with the MENTOR Program in 2015 as the Coordinator of MENTOR-POP (Progress on Pangolins). He is now working with the latest MENTOR Fellows as part of the MENTOR-Bushmeat program while serving as Coordinator of the Central Africa Bushmeat Action Group (CABAG).

When asked about Francis' impact on his career, Ichu Ichu Godwill, a MENTOR-POP Fellow, shared the following words: "Francis is many in one, my supervisor, teacher, mentor, father, and friend. How he manages to play all these roles appropriately is something I will keep learning throughout my career. Not everyone has the luck to work with their role models. I am lucky to have been inspired by him on a daily basis."



Anne is an exceptional partner in wildlife conservation. Full of warmth and key insights, Anne has trained and mentored conservationists across Africa, helping us all improve how we design our efforts and where we're headed.

*- Matt Muir, Ph.D., Evaluation Officer,
USFWS Division of International
Conservation*

The Importance of Long-term Mentors:

Anne Ntongho

Anne Ntongho's involvement with the MENTOR Program is extensive, serving as a Mentor and teaching Adaptive Management in six of the seven MENTOR programs to date. Anne exhibits strength, technical expertise, and humor in working with the Fellows. Through her expertise in adaptive management, she has worked extensively with the Central African conservation community to improve project planning and design in order to achieve desired conservation outcomes. Anne draws upon this experience to provide the MENTOR Fellows a strong foundation in strategic planning, project implementation in a local context, and monitoring and evaluation. In addition, she teaches the Fellows how to effectively communicate results to donors and stakeholders — critical skills they use throughout their careers.

With an educational background in Sociology, Anne has over 12 years of experience working on a variety of topics and issues, ranging from socio-economic studies and gender work to program development and monitoring and evaluation. Anne has worked for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) for over a decade and currently serves as the monitoring and evaluation officer for all field and satellite programs of WWF Cameroon. Anne is also the lead for the Conservation Coaches Network for Central Africa and was recognized by the 'Liz Claiborne Women in Conservation in the Congo Basin' award in 2008. She applies these skills in her day-to-day work, such as through the elaboration of socio-economic indicators to monitor and evaluate the livelihood activities and outcomes of WWF Cameroon's field programs, and by implementing and coaching others on strategic development and reporting.

Anne regularly shares her expertise in conservation planning, project design, and monitoring and evaluation with great energy and passion. She serves as a role model for women in the MENTOR programs who strive to become leading conservation professionals in what is still a male-dominated field. Direct mentorship from Anne helps female Fellows navigate the challenges and opportunities they may face and opens the door to networking and collaboration with other women in conservation leadership across Africa.

Anne Ntongho (left) with Nancy Gelman, Program Officer of the USFWS MENTOR Program at the MENTOR Forum in Sierra Leone in 2020. Credit: Mohamed Bakarr

African Countries Represented in USFWS MENTOR Programs Launched 2008-2020

Sierra
Leone

Liberia

Cameroon

Equatorial
Guinea

Gabon

Republic
of the Congo

MENTOR and BEAN - 2008

Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda

MENTOR-FOREST - 2010

Gabon, Republic of the Congo

MENTOR-PACE - 2014

Liberia, Sierra Leone

MENTOR-Manatee - 2015

Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon

MENTOR-POP - 2016

Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Vietnam

MENTOR-Fish - 2019

Gabon

MENTOR-Bushmeat - 2020

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon,
Republic of the Congo



South Sudan

Uganda

Kenya

Democratic Republic
of the Congo

Tanzania

MENTOR and Bushmeat-free Eastern Africa Network (BEAN)

2008-2009, in partnership with the Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group and the College of African Wildlife Management

USFWS launched the first MENTOR program, referred to simply as MENTOR, in 2008 with the goal of developing a transdisciplinary team of professionals dedicated to combating the illegal bushmeat trade in eastern Africa. In collaboration with the Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group and the College of African Wildlife Management (CAWM) in Mweka, Tanzania, the 18-month program brought eight Fellows from Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda to work alongside Mentors with expertise in bushmeat, socioeconomic research, and adaptive management to address unique challenges and associated threats to wildlife caused by illegal bushmeat trade in this region.

Thought to be primarily an issue of Central and West Africa, MENTOR mobilized a team of individuals to investigate and better understand the growing impacts of the illegal bushmeat trade across eastern Africa. The team documented that it was already impacting both the diversity and populations of species in the region. Developing skills in adaptive management, the Fellows established a model strategy integrating bushmeat and livelihood alternatives, public awareness, and wildlife conservation. They initiated nationwide stakeholder dialogues and launched the Bushmeat-free Eastern Africa Network (BEAN) to facilitate information sharing and continued collaboration. After studying at CAWM, they implemented projects on bushmeat in their home countries, while ultimately earning postgraduate diplomas in wildlife management from CAWM.

The Fellows of this first MENTOR program included a lawyer, environmental communicator, urban planner, educator, public administrator, and wildlife managers. Fellows went on to receive national and international attention for their accomplishments. These include creating and leading Uganda's first NGO to improve national wildlife law enforcement, completing a doctoral degree on elephant conservation and postdoctoral work to address zoonotic health risks associated with wildlife consumption, becoming the first woman to lead the Pasiansi Wildlife Training Institute in Tanzania, holding leadership positions within national wildlife agencies and NGOs, and working at the forefront of community-based projects to conserve lions. As graduates of the first MENTOR program, this group of professionals now helps mentor, educate, and guide new generations of emerging African conservation leaders.

Unsustainable bushmeat hunting can deplete the availability of prey for predators such as the African lion. Credit: Meenakshi Nagendran/USFWS



Vincent is doing an incredible job when it comes to wildlife law enforcement. What stood out for me in his organization is that he has a mastery of what he's doing, and he's been able to bring everybody that links up in the chain from arrest to prosecution together under one umbrella.

*- Euphemia Fosab,
Lawyer and
MENTOR-POP
Fellow*



MENTOR Fellow Spotlight: Vincent Opyene

CEO and Founder, Natural Resource Conservation Network

MENTOR Fellow Vincent Opyene was inspired by Uganda's wildlife from childhood. Personally driven by the extinction of Uganda's rhinos due to intense poaching, he combined extensive field knowledge from conducting ranger patrols with his experience as a state prosecutor to focus his mission on bolstering Uganda's wildlife law enforcement. In 2007 he attended a criminal investigator training taught by USFWS at the International Law Enforcement Academy in Gaborone, Botswana, and the next year he became a Fellow in the first USFWS MENTOR program.

After the experience of working alongside a team of professionals through MENTOR to respond to the threat of the bushmeat trade in eastern Africa, in 2009 Vincent co-established the Bushmeat-free Eastern Africa Network (BEAN). The network brought together a collaborative and trans-disciplinary group of experts to address the unique challenges posed by the unsustainable commercial bushmeat trade, one of the greatest threats to Africa's wildlife. Over the following years, Vincent's experience with MENTOR inspired him to start his own NGO focused on improving wildlife law enforcement in Uganda. In 2013, USFWS provided Vincent seed funding to form the Natural Resource Conservation Network (NRCN), which would go on to obtain a memorandum of understanding to prosecute wildlife crime on behalf of the Ugandan government.

NRCN continues to have broad and extensive influence on Uganda's ability to break long-standing patterns of corruption and improve its enforcement and governance within a major international epicenter for wildlife trafficking. In 2018, NRCN received an award from the USFWS Combating Wildlife Trafficking program in order to counter illegal trade in pangolin and hippopotamus parts. In 2018, the Duke of Cambridge presented Vincent with the prestigious TUSK Award for Conservation in Africa to honor his extraordinary contributions to wildlife law enforcement. NRCN has since gone on to work with the USFWS Office of Law Enforcement to bring down international wildlife trafficking networks and has also become a trusted partner of the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL).

Today, Vincent continues the cycle of mentorship that began with MENTOR and BEAN and contributes his expertise to benefit other professionals throughout Africa, including MENTOR-POP Fellow Euphemia Fosab, a lawyer from Cameroon focused on wildlife conservation. Vincent supported a three-month placement for Euphemia at NRCN in Uganda to transfer skills on how to drive reform and improve wildlife law enforcement and prosecution in Cameroon.

MENTOR-FOREST: Forest Research Ecology and Stewardship Training

2010-2012, in partnership with Gabon's National Parks Agency

The Congo Basin is home to some of the most important intact tropical forest ecosystems on earth and provides numerous ecosystem services, including staving off the negative impacts of climate change at both the local and global scale by serving as one of the world's most critical carbon sinks. Yet these habitats and the wildlife within them face complex threats from under-regulated natural resource extraction, including logging and mining, illegal poaching, and agricultural encroachment. In partnership with Gabon's National Parks Agency, the *Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux* (ANPN), MENTOR-FOREST (FOrest Research Ecology and Stewardship Training) developed a multi-disciplinary team of experts equipped to implement novel solutions to challenges in forest stewardship, sustainable management, and forestry practices, in order to ensure the ongoing engagement of national governments, NGOs, local communities, and private sector partners.

The success of MENTOR-FOREST highlights one of the keys to the MENTOR Program's approach and strategy: that for solutions to conservation challenges to be successful, they must be grounded in the local socio-economic and ecological context, especially when addressing specific drivers and pressures. All MENTOR-FOREST Fellows were from countries heavily affected by the ongoing threat of extractive industries (Gabon and Republic of the Congo) and both the curriculum and outcomes were geared towards specific needs. Fellows generated best practice guidelines for extractive industries and ecotourism, as well as guidelines for environmental impact assessments for extractive industries. These guidelines were ultimately incorporated into forest management practices by government and private sector partners in Gabon, a major achievement for a country with some of the most important and pristine remaining forest habitats in Central Africa.

MENTOR-FOREST led to ongoing collaboration with national and international experts, and upon completion of the 18-month program, the entire team was granted Master's degrees in Forest Management from Gabon's *École Nationale des Eaux et Forêts* (ENEF). Fellows have gone on to provide leadership for sustainable forest management, environmental impact assessments, wildlife and protected area management, human-elephant conflict, botanical research, and community conservation. Their work continues to span across national government agencies, international NGOs, research institutions, and the private sector.

Forest elephants are just one of the species benefiting from improved forest management in Gabon. Credit: Matthew Luizza/USFWS



MENTOR-PACE: Protecting Apes and Conserving Ecosystems

2014-2018, in partnership with Njala University

Based at Njala University in Sierra Leone, MENTOR-PACE (Protecting Apes and Conserving Ecosystems) strengthened the capacity of conservation leadership in the West African countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia, with the goal of tackling challenges to the conservation of the western chimpanzee and the Upper Guinean Forest. Chimpanzees face a multitude of threats including loss of critical habitat, disease, poaching for bushmeat, and trafficking to supply the illegal live animal trade. In West Africa, the remaining chimpanzee population is scattered among isolated, shrinking habitats across neighboring countries. This necessitates a coordinated approach, with a team of dedicated individuals effectively working across borders to champion their continued survival.

The onset of MENTOR-PACE was delayed due to an outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. When it was launched, MENTOR-PACE took a different approach than other MENTOR programs. The Fellows continued to work in their home organizations while participating in the program. Njala University worked with governments and NGOs to select key staff who would be well placed to transfer skills and knowledge gained through the program back to their home institutions. Fellows came from diverse backgrounds, including tourism, forestry, and wildlife management, allowing for a multidisciplinary approach to the complex challenges to great ape conservation. The in-service learning they received through MENTOR-PACE, including rigorous academic and field-based training, as well as mentorship and networking, served to build individual as well as institutional strength and capacity.

All MENTOR-PACE Fellows earned a post-graduate certificate from Njala University. During the program, the Fellows participated in a West Africa meeting of the United Nation's Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP), allowing them to connect with multiple other professionals and conservation leaders working across all sectors. Fellows organized and conducted trainings for communities to monitor great ape populations, collaborated with INTERPOL and other entities to combat wildlife crime, and ultimately participated alongside established professionals in the development of an action plan for the conservation of the western chimpanzee. With this action plan, the Fellows contributed to a meaningful outcome that has tangible utility for West African nations and for the larger international conservation and donor community.





MENTOR-Manatee

2015-2018, in partnership with the African Aquatic Conservation Fund

African manatees face many threats, including poaching for bushmeat and accidental capture in fisheries. Lack of knowledge about their distribution, behavior, and ecology has been a hindrance to conservation efforts for this unique species. Under the guidance of world-renowned African manatee expert Lucy Keith-Diagne, MENTOR-Manatee convened a team of conservation professionals to address the threats to this species and contribute to a growing body of knowledge and research. Held from 2015 to 2018, the program brought together eight Fellows from three countries (Cameroon, Gabon, and Democratic Republic of the Congo) to conduct field research on the presence and extent of manatee bushmeat in Central Africa and engage in education and outreach, working with experienced Mentors to provide much-needed regionally pertinent expertise to this little-known species.

Many MENTOR-Manatee Fellows were enrolled in graduate studies at the Master's or Ph.D. level at the time of participation, allowing for targeted application of their academic interests and backgrounds to conservation challenges. This approach exemplifies one of the main pillars of the MENTOR Program: that while the development of individual skills is important, team-building, interpersonal collaboration, and information sharing are also crucial for conservation success. As such, MENTOR-Manatee promoted team-based approaches to projects and programmatic goals. As a team, Fellows spent time at each others' field sites to share experiences and information, foster coordinated research, and pilot creative solutions to threats faced by manatees.

MENTOR-Manatee Fellows have gone on to serve in protected areas, local and international NGOs, and academia. Two Fellows established and lead NGOs in Cameroon and Gabon, where they continue to strengthen efforts to improve aquatic conservation.

In January 2021, the MENTOR-Manatee Fellows shared their research and conservation initiatives at the First African Manatee Symposium, held virtually due to COVID-19. This was a major milestone for the MENTOR-Manatee Fellows since they embarked on their MENTOR journey six years earlier. The MENTOR-Manatee program's impact was evident as the now seasoned manatee conservationists shared their on-the-ground experience with 80 attendees from 17 countries. While much work lies ahead, the manatee network has strengthened, commitment to continued information sharing continues, and there is greater hope for the future of African manatees.

Gabon's Lake Oguemoué is part of a chain of lakes to the south of Lambaréné that is home to one of the largest remaining populations of manatees in Africa. Credit: Heather Arrowood/OELO



MENTOR-POP: Progress on Pangolins


2016-2018, in partnership with the Zoological Society of London

Pangolins are considered to be the world's most trafficked wild mammal, and all four species in Central Africa are threatened by the illegal commercial bushmeat trade and international trafficking, mainly for their scales. Launched in 2016 in Cameroon in partnership with the Zoological Society of London, MENTOR-POP (Progress on Pangolins) supported nine early-career Fellows to champion the conservation of pangolins in Central Africa. In addition to Fellows from Cameroon, Gabon, and Democratic Republic of the Congo, the team included a Fellow from Vietnam in order to incorporate perspectives on demand from Asia in their efforts to save Central Africa's pangolins. The Fellows worked in groups to assess pangolin populations, document confiscations, and raise awareness.

In 2016, the MENTOR-POP Fellows traveled to Johannesburg, South Africa to participate in the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). There they successfully advocated for the inclusion of all eight of the world's pangolin species in Appendix I, a major milestone for pangolin conservation, which banned commercial trade and increased national and international commitment to save pangolins.

Fellows co-authored scientific publications with the IUCN Pangolin Specialist Group and contributed comprehensive data for a recent report on the trade of African pangolins into the Chinese Traditional Medicine industry. Their efforts at CITES ultimately contributed to the first-ever public burn of confiscated pangolin scales, held by the government of Cameroon as part of World Pangolin Day 2017. The event destroyed eight tons of seized pangolin scales, the equivalent of 12,000 individual pangolins, to raise awareness about the pangolin conservation crisis. At the same time, the Cameroonian government enacted policy changes to ensure full protection for the three pangolin species in their country, setting an example for other countries to follow suit.

MENTOR-POP Fellows now hold key positions in government, NGOs, and academic institutions. Their accomplishments include coordinating targeted behavior change campaigns for international NGOs, contributing expertise to their governments, pioneering wildlife law enforcement in their home countries, pursuing doctoral training, working on pangolin research and population modeling, and becoming USFWS grantees themselves. To continue their joint activities, the Fellows established the Pangolin Conservation Network. Each year they meet virtually or in person on World Pangolin Day to raise awareness about the international trafficking threat to pangolins in their home countries.



Carla is a conservation leader who exemplifies the use of sound science in making conservation decisions to manage and protect Gabon's wildlife. At CITES meetings, her professionalism and demeanor serve the wildlife and people of Gabon well.

*- Rosemarie Gnam, Ph.D.
Chief, Division of
Scientific Authority,
USFWS International
Affairs*

GABON

MENTOR Fellow Spotlight: Carla Louise Mousset Moumbolou

CITES Expert, Gabon National Parks Agency

Carla Louise Mousset Moumbolou is a graduate of the USFWS MENTOR-POP program, held in 2016 and 2017 in Cameroon. A native of Gabon, Carla arrived to the program with a Master's degree in ecology in order to develop skills to champion and protect species like pangolins that are severely threatened by the commercial bushmeat trade and trafficking of scales.

MENTOR-POP ultimately provided a catalyst for Carla to become one of Gabon's premier CITES experts. In 2018, she completed a Master's degree in the Management and Conservation of Species in Trade at the *Universidad Internacional de Andalucía* in Spain, where she graduated first in her class. Through her Master's program, she conducted focused research on protection of three of Gabon's native timber species, and her data was influential in creating strategies and policies to prevent the overexploitation of juvenile trees belonging to vulnerable species.

Now, Carla works for the Gabon National Parks Agency, the *Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux* (ANPN). A long-term major partner of USFWS, ANPN manages Gabon's network of 13 parks, which provide critical habitat for a variety of threatened species, including great apes and the largest remaining population of forest elephants. Carla is an indispensable part of Gabon's CITES officials, and provided crucial expertise in the lead-up to the 18th Conference of the Parties (CoP) held in Geneva in 2019.

The integrated approach of USFWS to CITES was evident in the months leading up to the CoP, throughout which Carla collaborated with staff from the U.S. Management and Scientific Authorities as well as the Combating Wildlife Trafficking Branch, all housed in the USFWS International Affairs Program. In addition to CITES, Carla's portfolio has expanded to cover issues pertaining to IUCN and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). She continues to represent Gabon in national and international fora, and the training, mentorship, and networks she experienced and developed as a MENTOR-POP Fellow continue to support her as she becomes one of her country's most trusted CITES experts.

In addition to her work for ANPN, Carla's role recently expanded to playing an advisory role on incorporating forensic science into the detection and management of wildlife crime across Central Africa.

Carla Louise Mousset Moumboulou representing Gabon at CITES CoP18 in Geneva, Switzerland. Credit: Yula Kapetanakos/USFWS

MENTOR Fellow Spotlight: Jerry Kirensky Mbi

Conservator, Takamanda National Park

Jerry Kirensky Mbi exemplifies the leadership, enthusiasm, and profound dedication that are all essential to the management of Africa's most important protected areas. He continues to drive innovative solutions to conservation's barriers as he works for wildlife and habitat protection in his home country of Cameroon.

Jerry came to the MENTOR-POP program from Cameroon's Ministry of Forests and Wildlife (MINFOF), where he worked as the Regional Controller of Forestry and Wildlife and the Chief of its Bureau for Training. Following his completion of the MENTOR-POP program, Jerry applied his new skills to pursue his career goal of protected area management. He was appointed as Conservator to manage Kimbi-Fungom National Park, established in 2014 in an important and biodiverse area within northwest Cameroon. Kimbi-Fungom also exists within a region heavily affected by conflict and unrest, which has had ongoing impacts on the park's security and park staff's ability to monitor its wildlife and landscapes. Navigating these challenges, Jerry promoted and supported remote sensing technologies to safely gather field data and engaged in ongoing fundraising and outreach for continued growth and development of the park's resources.

A trained anthropologist, Jerry provided expertise on the threats the park faces, including significant livestock incursion from nomadic pastoralists seeking access to seasonally available grazing resources and water (known as transhumance, or transhumant pastoralism). He applied his training to engage local underserved people, promoting the hiring of unarmed indigenous community members as well as those from traditionally pastoral ethnic groups to help manage the park. In 2018, Jerry became a USFWS grantee, embarking on a collaborative two-year project to build on his work to reduce threats around transhumance, raise awareness amongst the government and local constituencies, and integrate local communities into the future of Kimbi-Fungom National Park.

In 2020, Jerry was transferred to the larger Takamanda National Park in Cameroon, where he carries his experience and lessons learned to manage the 67,000 hectare protected area that is home to forest elephants, chimpanzees, and Cross River gorillas. With fewer than 300 individuals remaining, the Cross River gorilla is the world's rarest great ape. USFWS has a long history of support to Cross River gorillas and is encouraged to know that Jerry's skills, energy, and dedication will build upon past support to ensure the conservation of this critically endangered great ape.

In addition to working for MINFOF, Jerry is pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Buea in Cameroon.



Jerry is a tireless advocate for wildlife conservation and cares deeply about the wellbeing of his staff and the communities that depend on the protected areas he manages. He is a model conservation champion and shining ambassador for socially responsible protected area management.

*- Matthew Luizza, Ph.D.
Program Officer, USFWS
Africa Branch*

MENTOR-Fish

2019-2021, in Partnership with The Nature Conservancy

Freshwater fisheries are crucial to the economy of African countries like Gabon, but significant expertise, professional networks, and the development of coordinated teams of professionals are needed to ensure their sustainable management. MENTOR-Fish, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, sought to bring together a group of eleven individuals from government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector to address the conservation of inland fisheries in Gabon. For decades, Gabonese communities used small-scale traditional techniques for freshwater fishing. Now, growing demand in urban centers and access to novel fishing gear and techniques are increasing pressure on fish populations in certain regions, resulting in a decline in recent years of commercially important species. Technical capacity in fisheries management in Gabon is limited, with very few professionals working in this field. To address this, MENTOR-Fish was launched in 2017 to build a team of Gabonese fisheries management professionals to develop and implement models of sustainable fisheries management and maintain viable populations of freshwater fish.

As the sixth MENTOR program, the focus of MENTOR-Fish exemplifies the interconnectivity of conservation issues and the ways in which the MENTOR model seeks to build networks of leaders who can address complex and interdependent issues. MENTOR-Fish Fellows possess a wide range of backgrounds and expertise, from fisheries science and agronomy to research and the private sector fisheries business. The MENTOR-Fish program combines academic and field based training. Fellows are developing fisheries management plans in conjunction with local communities to determine sustainable use at key sites. In addition, they are producing written resources on sustainable fisheries science, principles, and practices.

MENTOR-Fish works closely with MENTOR-Manatee Fellow Cyrille Mvele, Co-founder and Program Director of the Gabonese NGO *Organisation Ecotouristique du Lac Oguemoué* (OELO), a long-term USFWS grant recipient. OELO has been integral to the establishment of community-led fisheries management plans on Gabon's Lake Oguemoué. As a small NGO, OELO has benefited from the MENTOR-Manatee, MENTOR-Fish, and MENTOR-Bushmeat programs through advanced training and support networks as well as regional and international exposure to different perspectives that help to strengthen individual and institutional capacity.





MENTOR-Bushmeat

2020-2022, in partnership with the Zoological Society of London

Unsustainable hunting and trade of wild-sourced meat, commonly referred to as bushmeat, is one of the greatest threats to Central Africa's wildlife. Fueled by demand in the region's expanding urban centers, the commercial bushmeat trade empties forests and other habitats of their wildlife, and impacts not only wildlife populations, but also ecosystems and human communities. Urban demand for bushmeat trade is driven by luxury consumers. Though nearly all species are affected, concern is greatest for protected species such as gorillas, chimpanzees, monkeys, pangolins, and crocodiles.

In 2016, USFWS convened a forum of grantees working on combating the bushmeat threat. Participants formed the Central Africa Bushmeat Action Group (CABAG). In October 2020, USFWS and the Zoological Society of London launched MENTOR-Bushmeat to build a team of early-career Central African professionals to address this complex threat. Fellows were selected from four organizations within CABAG with a history of tackling bushmeat issues, including Bioko Biodiversity Protection Program in Equatorial Guinea, *Organisation Ecotouristique du Lac Oguemoué* (OELO) in Gabon, Frankfurt Zoological Society's Tshuapa-Lomami-Lualaba (TL2) Project in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Wildlife Conservation Society's Urban Bushmeat Programme in DRC and Republic of the Congo. Through academic and field-based training, the MENTOR-Bushmeat Fellows collaborate to design and deliver results-oriented actions to reduce the trafficking of protected species in the commercial bushmeat trade in urban centers.

MENTOR-Bushmeat launched during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which presented challenges. However, the transition to alternate, virtual interactions also presented opportunities, including remote engagement by international and regional experts on adaptive management and on addressing bushmeat and One Health issues, which aim to achieve optimal health outcomes recognizing the interconnection between people, wild and domestic animals, plants, and their shared environment.

With an adapted curriculum combining virtual and in-person learning, the Fellows arrived in Cameroon only when it was deemed safe to do so, and continued following strict safety protocols.

Representing four countries across Central Africa, the eight Fellows have broad experience in bushmeat interventions, including behavior change, environmental education, research, law enforcement, and ecotourism. After six months of training, they apply their new knowledge to their home organizations for one year, designing and implementing strategies to reduce the commercial trade of giant ground pangolins and monkeys and to promote bushmeat alternatives to consumers.

MENTOR's Support for Women in Conservation Leadership

Women play an essential role in natural resource management and conservation but remain underrepresented in these professional fields. Through the MENTOR Program, USFWS has helped increase representation of women within government agencies, NGOs, and academia. MENTOR has supported 18 female Fellows across its seven programs. Efforts are made to ensure access to the networks, resources, and direct mentorship from other female conservation professionals that help female Fellows navigate the challenges and opportunities they may face.

Women who have participated in MENTOR programs and associated networks have gone on to great achievements. For example, following her participation in MENTOR and BEAN, Lowaeli Damalu went on to receive several promotions within the Tanzanian government. In 2011, she became the first female head of the Pasiansi Wildlife Training Institute, which is responsible for training staff from protected areas and wildlife management sites across Tanzania. Lowaeli built upon the skills she learned in MENTOR regarding strategic and adaptive planning, teamwork, communications, and fundraising not only to achieve a senior position, but also to pursue and complete an advanced degree and leverage additional funding for her agency from high-profile international donors. After almost a decade of leadership at Pasiansi Wildlife Training Institute, Lowaeli was recently appointed to lead wildlife law enforcement training for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism in Tanzania.

During the USFWS MENTOR Forum, which was hosted by Njala University in Sierra Leone in 2020, Mentors and Fellows from the various programs gathered to share experiences, expertise, and lessons learned, discuss the impact of the MENTOR Program on conservation objectives and challenges across the continent, and determine critical unmet needs in African conservation capacity development and leadership. The Forum also facilitated discussions of gender and diversity both within the MENTOR programs and the field of conservation as a whole. Female Fellows and Mentors met to share insights and problem-solving strategies regarding the challenges facing women conservation professionals across the continent. They continue to exchange information, collaborate, support, and uplift each other in their roles as women in conservation leadership.

Nancy Gelman (center; top row), Program Officer of the USFWS MENTOR Program, with Lowaeli Damalu (second from left, top row) and other women conservation leaders from various MENTOR programs at the MENTOR Forum held in Sierra Leone in 2020. Credit: Emma Gorenberg/USFWS



Through the MENTOR Program, USFWS has helped increase gender representation within government agencies, NGOs, and academia.



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MENTOR's Impact on Conservation in Africa

In 2019, a team of West African university representatives and international monitoring and evaluation experts conducted an independent evaluation, subsequently published in the journal *Oryx*, to identify the strategic relevance and design of the MENTOR Program with respect to conservation priorities, impact on the Fellows, and sustainability of the model. The impact of the USFWS MENTOR Program is demonstrated not only by the work of each MENTOR cohort, but also the trajectory of each individual after the Fellowship is completed.

To date, the MENTOR programs have resulted in numerous achievements, including:

- The development and implementation of environmental impact assessments and best practice guidelines for extractive industries in Gabon.
- A coordinated approach to manatee research and conservation in Central Africa.
- Support for the 2016 uplisting of pangolins to CITES Appendix I and Cameroon's regional leadership on pangolin conservation, including by filling data gaps in pangolin research, enacting policy change to protect the species from consumption and trade, and raising awareness through the world's first public burn of confiscated pangolin scales.
- Professional development of Central Africa Bushmeat Working Group (CABAG) affiliates.
- In-service training on transboundary conservation of western chimpanzees.
- Establishment of the first fisheries reference collection for government and research institutions of Gabon and fisheries management plans in collaboration with local communities.
- Recognition of Program Officer Nancy Gelman with the prestigious USFWS Sam D. Hamilton Award for Transformational Conservation Science for her work to develop and manage the MENTOR Program.

Perhaps the most significant result of the MENTOR Program is the growing network and professional platform created by the Mentors and Fellows themselves. This network extends beyond cultural, language, gender, and professional barriers to create a productive environment for leaders to learn from one another while advancing their shared goals for wildlife conservation. The impact of MENTOR thus far outlasts the USFWS financial investment through the continued commitment of the Fellows as a growing conservation community. MENTOR Fellows now hold management and leadership positions across government agencies and national parks, NGOs, academia, research, and the private sector. The long-lasting impacts of the MENTOR Program continue to unfold as the Fellows themselves serve as Mentors to new cohorts of emerging conservation professionals.

Closing Statement: In Memoriam to Martin Hega

In 2020 the world lost Martin Hega, an international conservation leader and passionate champion of wildlife around the globe. At the time of his passing he was working for the *Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement* (CIRAD), specifically, on the Sustainable Wild Meat program of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Previously, Martin worked at the Wildlife Conservation Society for over 28 years, where he was well-known for his conservation efforts with local communities in Gabon's Monts de Cristal National Park. An international expert on pangolin conservation, Martin served as a Mentor for MENTOR-POP, where he provided guidance, leadership, and dedicated vision for the program and its Fellows. Martin believed that the protection of wildlife and wild spaces and the empowerment of communities that depend on them is one of the most important things we can do for future generations. We dedicate this publication to his memory and long-lasting impact.

The USFWS MENTOR Program continues to address the most pressing needs in African wildlife conservation through its commitment to the teams of individuals, mentored by conservation leaders like Martin, who will carry forward the legacy of conservation success. The support and development of these resolute professionals will, as Martin believed, lead to a meaningful impact on conservation and communities that will live on into the future.



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*Participants at the MENTOR Forum, held by
Njala University in Sierra Leone in 2020.
Credit: Emma Gorenberg/USFWS*

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MENTOR-POP and **MENTOR-Bushmeat:** Mr. Francis Nchembi Tarla, Zoological Society of London and Central Africa Bushmeat Action Group



USFWS recognizes that conservation ultimately starts with and depends upon people: individuals who value and protect wildlife and are dedicated to the future legacy of conservation.

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