

Liberian government prosecutes elephant ivory trader

Title

Post war Liberia has seen the Country expanding from solely subsistence bush meat hunting and use of animal parts for totem and traditional purposes, to additional local-global commercialization driven hunting due to the global market demand for wildlife products. These factors, along with insufficient resources for effective law enforcement, poor judicial system, weak penalty measures, and corruption, have led to an increase in incidences of the crime of plundering wildlife. It has also led to illegal wildlife trade becoming a low risk business with high returns around the world. For the case of Liberia, hunters, traders and vendors of wildlife products, especially protected species have been sailing sky free and going with virtual impunity while our protected animals (dead & alive) are being sold indiscriminately on the streets of Liberia, and their products at international markets.

While one cannot throw blind eyes to the extent and efforts at which the Government is working, especially in the rural areas where substantial piles of bush meat and sometimes animal parts are confiscated from poachers and vendors, we are also aware of too many of our Country's protected animals been sold without remorse on the streets of Monrovia and its environs, while the authorities drive by everyday with little been done about it. While there is still a need to increase public awareness of the Laws on wildlife and natural resource management, nevertheless even in areas where awareness is on the increase, hunting and bush meat trade is still on the rise.

Some of the Liberia's protected wildlife under Regulation #25 currently being used by the Government, are the Red, Olive, Black & White Colobus monkey, Diana Monkey, Chimpanzee, all birds of prey, all sea turtles, all Crocodiles, Forest Buffalo, Jentink's, Yellow-backed, Ogilby's, and Zebra duikers, and the Forest Elephant among others.

In spite of the protected status of these animals, take a drive through Monrovia, our capital city, and you'll see vendors openly displaying and selling duikers, monkeys, pangolins and crocodiles, and various other protected species.

However, part of the growing effort of the Government to curtail the situation is its stand to go from just confiscation to actual prosecution of poachers and vendors. According to the Government of Liberia through the [Forestry Development Authority \(FDA\)](#), on average they arrest 35 bodies of bush meat per month during their regular patrols in the Gola forest area.

During one of the regular patrols on Saturday 3rd May, 2014, FDA Forest Guards confiscated elephant tusks (ivories) and a consignment of bush meat from a trader within the vicinity of the proposed Gola Forest National Park in the west of the Country.



The confiscated goods and the suspect were turned over to the Liberia National Police who later transferred the case to the magisterial court in Tubmanburg, Bomi County. The preliminary court hearing was conducted on Wednesday 4th June, 2014. After the hearing, the session was adjourned and the court ordered the suspect to be represented by a lawyer in the next hearing. Consequently, due to the outbreak of Ebola situation in the Country, the court ordered the bush meat to be burned, instead of being auctioned as is usually done, to avoid the risk of the spread of the ebola virus. It has been proven that the virus among other modes of transmission is also spread through primates and fruits eating bats. The public has therefore been advised to avoid bush meat eating and to stay away from bats and primates as much as possible. The next court term will be announced later by the Court.

[The Society for the Conservation of Nature in Liberia \(SCNL\)](#) believes this action on the part of the Government worth commendation. Notwithstanding the world is watching to see how far the Government will go on this case. SCNL is therefore calling on the Court to fast-track the case to serve as a deterrent to the rest of the hunters and bush meat traders out there who are still engaged in illegal trade of wildlife. In the same manner we also do call on the legislature to see reasons to fast track the passage of the Wildlife Act and the proposed Gola Forest National Park into law, which were recently sent to the house of parliament by the President of the Republic of Liberia. The passage of these Acts we believe will boost the necessary legal framework for biodiversity conservation including wildlife in Liberia.

The proposed Gola Forest National Park FDA Forest Guards are supported under the [?The Gola National Park in Liberia: realizing its vast potential Project?](#) which is funded by the [Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation](#) and which is part of the BirdLife International [Forest of Hope Programme](#).

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