



MALI ELEPHANT PROJECT SYNOPSIS

Across the country of Mali, the most northern African herd of around 550 elephants makes the longest and most unique 600km migration in Africa. They represent 12% of West African elephants and are accorded a high priority in the IUCN regional elephant strategy. Increasing human pressures are threatening this last remaining open territory of the Mali herd, and yet our studies show that there is still time to save them if we act now. Government resources are wholly inadequate to protect this population and its vast range: a different approach is needed.

After eleven years of building strong rapport with the Malian government and local communities and a solid basis of scientific data, WILD and its partners have made unprecedented advances towards its goal of protecting the migration of this rare elephant. We are working with communities to devise strategies and plans that solve problems for the local population, keep the migration route free of human occupation, and ensure that elephants can find the resources they need. Thus far it is working better than hoped, and adjacent communities are requesting to join the process. Daily challenges abound, but results are emerging.

THE MALI ELEPHANT PROJECT

During the first phase of the Mali Elephant Project (2003-2007), The WILD Foundation, in collaboration with Save the Elephants, undertook scientific studies to understand how the elephants' use of space enables them to cope with the dispersed and variable nature of the Gourma's resources and identify the threats to their survival.

A subsequent attitude survey, and workshops that brought together community leaders (both traditional and elected), government, NGOs and projects operating in the area, helped to understand attitudes towards the elephants and links to the wider socio-environmental context, including the particular problems faced by those communities. It became clear that the threats to the elephants were the same as the threats to the livelihoods of the population, and the resilience of the ecosystem to cope with environmental change. This exchange of information helped identify the way forward, develop effective tools for action, and craft appropriate messages for the outreach programme.



A community-forester patrol

The Mali Elephant Project is designed to address the underlying problem, which is the anarchic use of natural resources by multiple interests and ethnicities. Even though each ethnicity has its own systems of resource management, it will not conform to the systems of another ethnicity. The resultant “free-for-all” has led to resource degradation, habitat destruction, impoverished livelihoods, and an increase in human-elephant conflict.

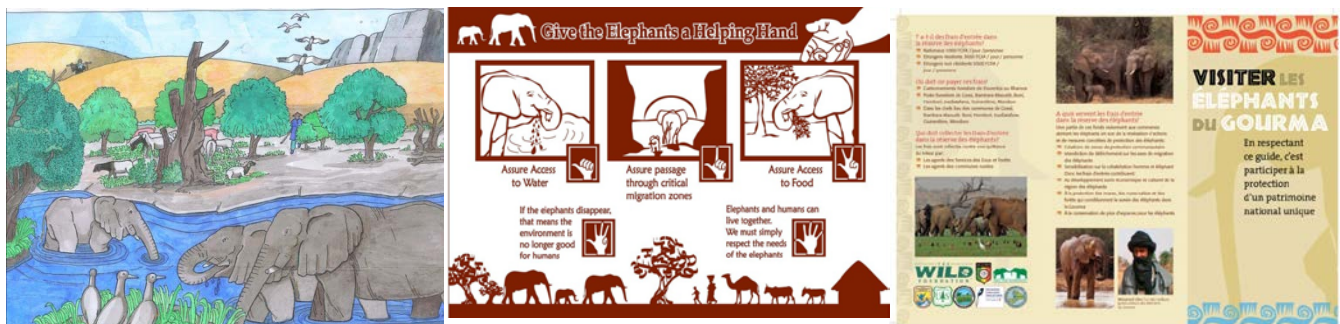
The ultimate goal, and guiding philosophy, is for elephant conservation to be in the interest of the local population, embedded in their day-to-day activities, supported by the institutions, policies and laws of Mali.

Action on the ground began at Lake Banzena the top priority. This is the only water accessible to elephants at the end of the dry season and in 2009 it dried completely

A socio-economic study of the community around Lake Banzena provided the basis for a plan developed collaboratively with the local population. This revealed the scale of local resource use by urban interests¹ and that >50% of the population suffered from water borne disease. The local community voluntarily relocated outside the elephant range to allow exclusive elephant use of the lake, in return for being provided clean water in an area of good pasture and help in implementing natural resource management protection and management systems.

The initiative at Lake Banzena is so far working better than we ever hoped, and the model is being extended to adjacent communities who are requesting to join the process. We now cover 45% of the range and bit by bit we are extending the approach ever further, as resources allow. This firm basis in the community allows response to unforeseen circumstances, especially the political unrest and Islamist conflict. This also enabled the establishment of community vigilance networks that have successfully contained elephant poaching during the post-coup insecurity when all government presence was withdrawn from the zone.

Outreach - We are supporting action on the ground with a substantial outreach program. This includes community poster-brochures in local languages and locally-developed teacher resource materials that have become an integral part of the school curriculum in the schools of the Gourma, the first of its kind in the region. We have also developed information packs for government, projects working in the area, and other educated audiences, as well as brochures of information and a code of conduct for tourists and visitors.



L to R: One of the posters developed for schools; community information brochure; tourist code of conduct brochure

¹ 96% of the cattle using the lake belonged to prestige herds owned by distant urban dwellers