CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

INTERNSHIP FINAL REPORT

Harnessing the potential of promising conservation leaders to conserve South Sudan's unique biodiversity

HOST COUNTRY, SITE LOCATION AND DATES OF INTERNSHIP:
South Sudan, Yambio, Western Equatorial State, 01/11/2019 to 28/02/2021

NAMES OF ANY SPONSORING INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN THE INTERNSHIP:
Fauna & Flora International, South Sudan

AIM:
In a conflict affected country with limited resources and capacity, FFI South Sudan aims to support the wildlife service and local communities better conserve their rare but little-known biodiversity

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FULL NAME OF SUPERVISOR AND THEIR AFFILIATION:
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SECTION 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This internship sought to grow my capacity as a young, aspiring conservationist by involving me in every aspect of the conservation activities of Fauna & Flora International's South Sudan programme. In a country recovering from decades of civil unrest, deemed the least developed and most corrupt in the world, there are few career opportunities that exist. It is also a country, however, that contains important biodiversity and large tracts of untouched wilderness. As an additional to FFI's small country team, I was mentored and involved in the provision of essential support to the national Wildlife Service and local communities of three protected areas. The internship saw me involved in the administrative and logistical arrangements of providing food rations, equipment and patrol wages to rangers and community members in field sites, as well as developing basic infrastructure. I was involved in awareness-raising activities and helped facilitate stakeholder engagement meetings with government authorities and local communities. I built on and improved my practical skillset – skills like biomonitoring, GPS use, camera-trap deployment, data collection and entry. During my internship, FFI's South Sudan programme has seen a significant increase in activities and positive developments, such as patrol numbers, establishing ranger posts, discovery or range extension of endangered species, and an overall improvement in the protected area management of focus sites. Enabled by this internship, I have contributed to these developments and have benefited myself professionally from the opportunity.

INTRODUCTION

Following decades of civil unrest, South Sudan faces an economic, social and political crisis. It also contains rich but little-known biodiversity and habitat, with wide tracts of untouched wilderness holding globally important populations of threatens species including African elephant, chimpanzees, pangolin, bongo, giant eland and wild dog, all found in FFI's areas of operations. Despite the country's impressive protected area estate of 13.7%, its wildlife populations are at the risk of disappearing due to near complete absence of conversation management and wildlife protection in its parks and reserves. Through FFI's programme activities, I have been actively involved in contributing to the conservation of these areas and wildlife. During this internship, I was involved in practically all aspects of FFI's operations and in all three focus areas: Bire Kpatuo (BK) and Bangangai (BGG) Game Reserves and Southern National Park (SNP). I helped raise awareness and support from community and government stakeholders on the importance of protecting the country's natural resources and assisted in FFI's move to realise the sustainable benefits possible for present and future generations. I have been engaged in providing essential training to Wildlife Service (WLS) rangers and community members on best international practises of protected area management, particularly on biomonitoring procedures. I helped in the boundary demarcation process of Bangangai Game Reserve, ultimately affording this area better protection through widespread recognition and support.

FFI maintains a key partnership with the Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism (MWCT), encompassing the national WLS. Besides supporting this government body in protected area management, FFI puts much focus on involving the local communities in its conservation initiatives, including employing Community Wildlife Ambassadors (CWAs). My local knowledge and networks contributed to maintaining and improving these relationships during the internship.

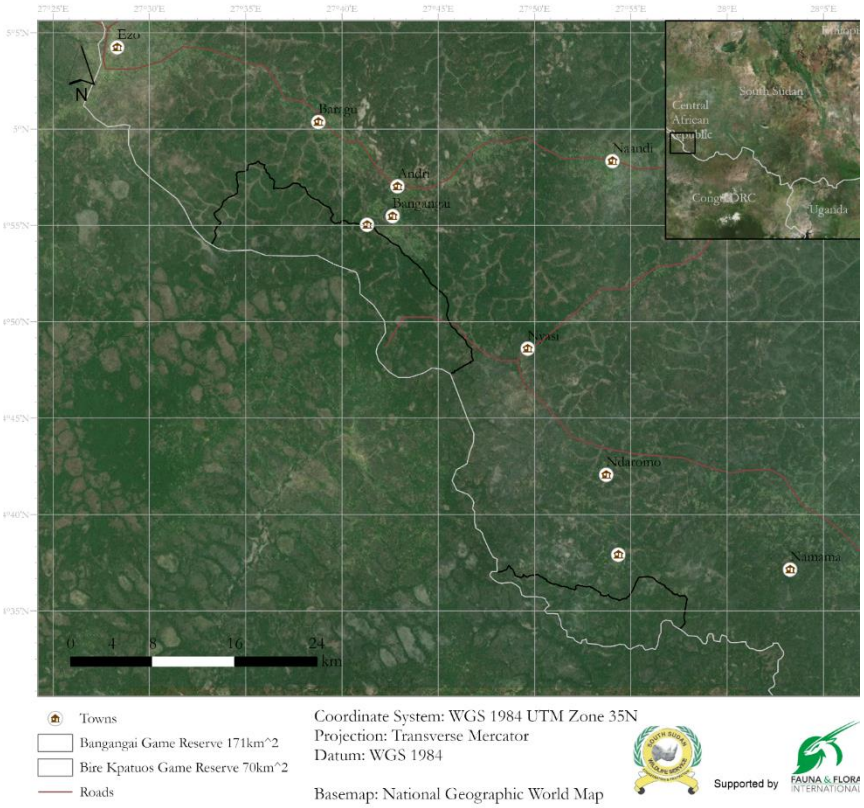

Figure 1 *- Map of Bire Kpatuo and Bangangai Game Reserves - two of FFI's areas of support*

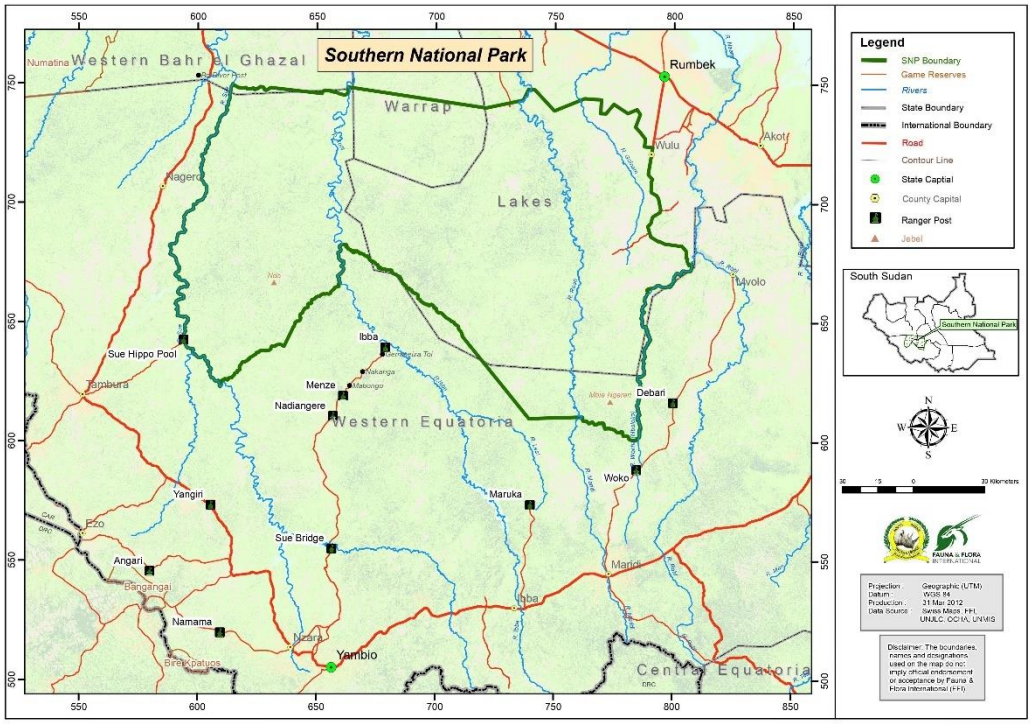

Figure 2 *- Southern National Park*

SECTION 2

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

By providing the opportunity for hands-on experience in all aspects of applied conservation, protected area management and the best international practices associated to these, the primary objective of this internship was to build the capacity of a future local conservation leader. Secondary objectives included supplementing the FFI South Sudan team with a proficient individual and thereby increase the teams to ability implement its conservation activities. Additionally, by virtue of the establishing the internship itself and with my local knowledge and networks, there was the objective of increasing awareness of conservation activities amongst community stakeholders.

ACTIVITIES AND METHODOLOGY

FFI's South Sudan programme activities have continued almost unabated despite the upset caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. FFI provides essential support to the Wildlife Service (WLS) rangers and Community Wildlife Ambassadors (CWAs) through the provision of rations, equipment and salaries, enabling them to patrol the three protected areas; Bire Kpatuo, Bangangai and Southern National Park. This critical support is the foundation on which FFI aims to improve the protected area management of these reserves and park. Together with the rest of the FFI team, I have been heavily involved in coordinating the purchase of rations, preparing and supplying the ranger posts and patrol packs as well as paying their patrol wages.

I also trained rangers in Bandala Ranger Post on how to use the GPS so they could be used during the biomonitoring and law enforcement patrols in Southern National Park. I was involved in awareness raising activities with local communities, specifically with a nomadic pastoralist group the Ambororo, and helped facilitate several stakeholder meetings with the chief and CWAs in Ndoromo, bordering in Bire Kpatuo. FFI's approach to these activities is standardised across the organisation's programmes and follow best international practise.

Regarding my administrative activities, I have been translating the patrol reports from Bire Kpatuo, Bangangai Game Reserves and Southern National park and other written documents from Zande to English and verbal discussions. I was also involved in the deployment of camera traps in both game reserves and deep into Southern National Park which, after retrieving the SD cards, have revealed exciting discoveries such as wild-dogs and red colobus monkey. These images are being analysed and show the wildlife populations that exist and as well as the threats faced by exposing the illegal activities and presence of poachers. I was heavily involved in the boundary demarcation of Bangangai Game Reserve, which was completed through a FPIC, participatory process and has received the agreement of all stakeholders. I led data-gathering patrols during this process and helped facilitate the numerous community meetings throughout.

The WLS rangers and CWAs collected biomonitoring data and GPS coordinates during patrols. I was taught how to enter this data into SMART and BASECAMP and now lead on this activity. Basic analysis of this information results in improved planning and protected-area management. I have assisted in FFI's reengagement in Southern National Park this year, through assisting in establishing ranger posts in key locations and developing basic infrastructure such as clearing roads and building bridges. I was

involved in an annual household survey which contributes to FFI's understanding of local communities and WLS rangers' knowledge of wildlife, use of and relationship with natural resources and measures the impact of our livelihood activities.

OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

The activities of the internship described above were carried out in and around Bire Kpatuo and Bangangai Game Reserves and Southern National Park. These protected areas are host to globally important, endangered species such as chimpanzee, elephant, pangolin, African golden cat, wild dog and leopard. By virtue of FFI's support and my involvement, the internship has contributed to improved protected area management and the conservation of these species. During the time of my internship, FFI has supported a significant increase in patrols from 2 patrols per month in Bire Kpatuo and Bangangai to at least 4 per month in both reserves, 3 per month in the buffer zones surrounding them and 3 per month in Southern National Park.

Additionally, as shown through analysis of the annual household survey conducted in the local communities surrounding Bire Kpatuo and Bangangai, FFI's conservation and livelihood initiatives in and around the 3 protected areas have had an impact on an estimated 3,000 beneficiaries, directly or indirectly.

With FFI South Sudan's small team, my contribution to the implementation of activities has increased the impact of the programme. Additionally, the senior international programme staff were out of country for an extended period of time due to COVID-19 and were coordinating work remotely. This required myself and my colleagues to take on more responsibilities, testing our communication, capacity and leadership skills, to ensure activities were still implemented.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS

The internship has had a positive impact on conservation by, firstly, contributing to the improved protected area management of Bangangai and Bire Kpatuo Game Reserves and Southern National Park, all which contain important biodiversity. Patrols are well-provisioned and are going out regularly to enforce law and monitor wildlife. Through wildlife monitoring patrols and camera-trap deployment, various species of wildlife have been identified, quantified and efforts to protect them are being developed. Through FFI's activities and trainings like GPS, we have improved the capacity of Wildlife Service rangers and Community Wildlife Ambassadors (CWAs). We have also bettered their social-economic standing through employment and provision of working equipments like gumboots and raincoats and medicine for a better working atmosphere. We have raised awareness in local communities, making them understand the benefits that conservation and natural resource management can render to them individually and the society at large. The boundary demarcation process in Bire Kpatuo and Bangangai, the latter which I was heavily involved in, has allowed for better protected area management and will assist in the development of the country's first Community Conserved Area acting as a buffer zone to the both reserves.

Through FFI's participatory and community-led approach to conservation initiatives, my contact with local stakeholders helped elevate awareness and garner support. I helped design and dissemination of awareness-raising materials, including the signposts put out on the boundary of Bire Kpatuo and Bangangai following the demarcation process. In the demarcation of Bire Kpatuo in 2019 and

Bangangai in 2021, 240km2 of habitat is now under stronger conservation management, with local women and men better informed about biodiversity and engaged in decision-making.

Through our continued support of biomonitoring efforts and the information gathered through patrol reports and camera-traps, we are attaining presence of certain vulnerable species. We have contributed data to IUCN by confirming the presence of eastern chimpanzees, forest elephants, giant pangolin, tree pangolin, red colobus monkey, wild dog and African golden cat. Further data collection and analysis is necessary to calculate an occupancy rate for these animals. Many of these sightings are range extensions and a few of the programme's early discoveries were unknown to science, such as the badger bat. We will continue to collaborate with the IUCN and relevant authorities.

The primary objective of the internship was to grow my capacity as an aspiring conservationist - this it has done. It has provided me insight and knowledge into all aspects of working in a conservation organization. Through my dynamic involvement, the internship has built on and improved the long list of skills required to work in this sector. With the mentorship of the senior programme staff, I am able to deploy camera traps, have a good understanding of GPS use and improved other practical skills such as data collection, entry and analysis. My bird and mammal lists are increasing thanks to the support of the programme's Technical Advisor, Jess Berndt. I have bettered my logistical, administration and reporting skills and other softer skills like accountability and transparency have also been positively impacted. My engagement with communities and government agencies has taught me diplomacy and has enhanced my interpersonal skills. These are all skills required to work in such an interesting sector and my internship has helped me improve as a person.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AND CHANGES TO INTERNSHIP

With the continued political instability of South Sudan, there were periods of time when the game reserves or national park were considered insecure with the presence of hostile or armed groups and some of the activities were slowed down or delayed. These events happened sporadically and are often stabilised quickly and reflect the nature of the prevailing conditions in which the programme functions. To mention one specifically, there was a security incident in Bangangai when an armed group was camped on the border of the reserve and for 4-5 weeks activities were discontinued until government forces captured and expelled the group. Advised by the Wildlife Service and other government authorities, as well as the UN and other international NGOs, FFI adjusted and adapted operations, accordingly, making sure to never endanger any of our personnel or the people we work with.

The global COVID-19 pandemic, of course, also upset plans. As mentioned above, the senior programme staff were out of the country for several months. This, however, had the unforeseen consequence of increasing my responsibility and ultimately benefitting my internship. FFI again adapted operations to follow government guidelines, as well as taking best international practise into consideration, to continue providing the essential support to the protected areas.

SECTION 3:

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this internship was to build the capacity of myself as a future local conservation leader by providing the opportunity for hands-on experience in all aspects of applied conservation, protected area management and the best international practices associated to these.

This and secondary Internship objectives were achieved through a set of varied methodologies which added to my conservation toolkit. These methodologies comply with international conservation strategies and methodologies allowing me to apply my new-found skills both on a local and international stage. Through the internship I was able to dedicate my time and new-found conservation toolkit to improve the conservation management of Bangangai, Bire Kpatuo game reserve and Southern National Park and all future FFI programme activities. Better conservation of these regions translated into greater conservation of globally important species hosted by these parks. Once the internship ends, I will become an employee of the host organization's South Sudan team and continue to aid in the conservation of these important parks, thereby adding to the overall conservation and conservation management of South Sudan's natural estates.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and far most, I truly appreciate this initiative of the Segre Foundation and Conservation Leadership Programme in fostering future conservation leaders. This initiative is indeed turning many into professionals who can protect nature.

I acknowledge and appreciate the invaluable contributions, support and guidance from Fauna & Flora International for giving me a chance to learn, develop and improve my capacity as a conservationist.

I am extremely thankful to my primary supervisor, Benoit Morkel, FFI's South Sudan Landscape Manager, and Jessie Berndt, FFI's South Sudan Technical Advisor, for their endless patience, guidance, encouragement, mentorship and constructive ideas to the success of this internship and teaching me skills that have made me have trust in myself. Thank you so much for all your expert help.

My sincere gratitude goes to my colleague, Clement Salvatore, FFI's South Sudan Programme Officer, for his encouragement and support during my internship.

I am thankful to those who contributed in diverse ways in brining my internship into realization, especially the local leaders for their support during stakeholder meetings and the South Sudan wildlife service for providing maximum security during our field activities, may Gods blessing pour on you that you all continue with the good work for the future of our country.

SECTION 4:

APPENDICES

List of published articles, internal and external, on FFI's South Sudan programme released during my internship.

1. https://apnews.com/d831355c52174fdc826375cc8235fdbd

2. https://www.fauna-flora.org/news/south-sudan-latest-images-reveal-global-hotspot-biodiversity

3. https://www.fauna-flora.org/news/mystery-monkey-rare-red-colobus-caught-camera-south-sudan

4. https://www.fauna-flora.org/news/hope-painted-hunter-endangered-wild-dogs-snapped-south-sudan

5. https://www.fauna-flora.org/news/new-protected-area-relieves-pressure-primates-pangolins-south-sudan