

CERCOPAN visit , Nigeria April 2008



CERCOPAN

CERCOPAN works to conserve primates, including **two of the most endangered primate species in Africa**. Alongside environmental education, community development, forest protection and research the charity rescues and rehabilitates primates, the vast majority of which have been orphaned by the illegal bushmeat trade.

The number of orphans means that the organisation is rapidly outgrowing its Calabar site, and it is therefore planning to re-locate. The move means that there is an opportunity to develop a new and improved veterinary service for the centre.

A request for veterinary assistance

Some veterinary facilities existed at the main site in Calabar for the last 10 years staffed by local and volunteer veterinarians. A one-week visit, funded by The Balcombe Trust made a review of the current facilities possible.

WVI were requested to:

- Assess the current veterinary facilities in order to help to establish a planned program for improvement
- Provide training to veterinary staff in more specialised primate techniques such as gas anaesthesia and disease screening.



Outcomes of visit

During his initial one week visit, our vet was able to review the existing facilities, resources and protocols for the veterinary provision at CERCOPAN's two sites. His findings are summarised below:

- Training in gas anaesthesia, major surgical techniques and sterilisation of equipment would be beneficial for the veterinary team.
- Quarantine protocols need tightening, and new surgical facilities

need to be kept separate from other veterinary uses, such as post mortem examinations and preparation of hand-rearing feeds.

- Infectious disease screening, post mortem exams, and preventive health programmes would all benefit from expert review and improvement.
- Sourcing some basic equipment would greatly increase the capabilities of the vet facility to better care for their animals.

There is a clear need for WVI's continued assistance with this project to improve the veterinary facilities and staff expertise.



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Disease screening and research

During his visit, WVI vet Nic Masters was able to explain, demonstrate and train the veterinary team in blood sampling techniques allowing previously untested juvenile animals to now be screened for viruses at an earlier age. This will greatly assist the disease management protocols at the centre.

Further research is needed into a syndrome noted at the centre over the last 10 years, referred to as 'shuffles'. Treatment with high energy and protein foods seems to improve this debilitating condition, and it is thought to be diet-related. However, more research, including pathology is required—something which WVI could assist with on a future visit.



Veterinary assistant training

The assistant to the resident veterinarian, Austin Igbebor, has worked for CERCOPAN for over nine years. He has a superb knowledge of the primates, and is showing huge potential and aptitude for veterinary work. At the moment, CERCOPAN relies on volunteer veterinary nurses, however Austin is more than capable of fulfilling this role long-term. He simply lacks theoretical training.

WVI would like to assist the training of Austin by helping to source and fund his training as a veterinary technician via a correspondence course (probably with a US university).

Having a fully-trained, permanent veterinary technician on-site will greatly improve the veterinary capabilities of CERCOPAN for years to come.

Preuss's and Sclater's guenons are considered two of Africa's most endangered primates. Indeed, up until 1988, the Sclater's guenon was thought to be extinct. Happily, a handful of isolated populations are now known to survive, however they continue to face a risk of extinction due to habitat fragmentation, population isolation and hunting for illegal bushmeat.

Due to their endangered status, every individual animal is important to the survival of the species. The only way to truly conserve these species in the long-term is through forest conservation and anti-poaching, and this can only be achieved by involving and educating the local community. Very little is known about these species, and so the importance of rescue and rehabilitation is two-fold—not only are individual animals maintained as part of the gene pool, the data collected whilst the animals are being cared for is vital to help better inform the protection of the natural resources they need to survive.

