

Critically endangered African forest elephants given collars to track cross-border roaming and reduce human-wildlife conflict

- **Two African forest elephants have been fitted with satellite collars to track their movements between Liberia, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire**
- **First time elephants have been collared in this region, giving farmers an early warning system, reducing risk of crop raiding and conflict with communities**

THURSDAY, 23 JUNE 2022 – Two African forest elephants have been successfully fitted with satellite collars to help monitor their movements and aid conservation.

It is thought to be the first time that forest elephants have been collared in Guinea and Liberia and represents a significant boost for efforts to protect the species, which was recently reclassified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, meaning that it is at extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. Studies estimate that fewer than 40,000 forest elephants remain in the wild, with only small, isolated populations remaining in West Africa.

The collaring was validated by the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development of Guinea, and carried out by rangers from the Centre Forestier de N'Zérékoré (Guinea) and the Forestry Development Authority (Liberia) and conservationists from Fauna & Flora International (FFI). The highly experienced South African veterinarian Pete Morkel ensured the anaesthesia of two elephants and fitted them with collars, providing training to rangers before the collaring took place. The initiative has been financially supported by the African Forest Elephant Foundation, an organisation working to highlight the fast decline towards extinction of the largely forgotten forest elephants.

Both individuals belong to a small and unique population of forest elephants that are known to roam across the borders of Guinea and Liberia, in an area known as the Ziama Massif ecosystem, as well as into neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire.

The collars will provide a new method of remote tracking, providing regular information about the location of the elephants. This could prove invaluable, providing an early warning system for farmers who live within the elephants' home range. Forest elephants have been known to eat and damage crops, a behaviour which can bring them into conflict with people.

Forest elephant populations have been severely reduced over many decades by poaching for the ivory trade. But human-wildlife conflict has also been a major factor in their dwindling numbers, as our population has expanded and animal habitats have shrunk. These forest giants require vast ranges so often criss-cross borders. A population of around 20 elephants has been recorded living in the Ziama Massif ecosystem.

Working with local communities, FFI is helping to find ways for people and wildlife to live alongside one another in ways that benefit both. This has included supporting farmers with measures that prevent elephants from eating and damaging crops by, for example, planting crops that elephants don't like to eat, including ginger, as 'buffers' to protect staple crops such as rice, as well as bee-keeping around the crops.

The elephant collars will help by providing information of the location of the elephants on a regular basis. Through geofencing, which uses the Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite network to create virtual boundaries, elephants' movements in village lands will be detected, telling conservationists and communities which farms are likely to require additional protection. The

geofencing will also send alerts to wildlife management authorities about the presence of elephants in a particular area, allowing communities to be informed ahead of time and given information about how to keep themselves, their farms and the elephants safe.

Neus Estela Ribera, Guinée Forestière Landscape Manager at FFI, said: “The forests of Ziama are a vitally important stronghold for these critically endangered elephants. If the species is to survive, we have to find ways for them to co-exist with the communities that they live alongside. This is the first time that elephants have been fitted with collars in this part of Africa; a landmark moment for our efforts to protect the species.”

“Not only will the data we receive from the collars help us mitigate human-wildlife conflict, it will also improve our understanding of how elephants use this landscape, allowing us to create more effective action plans to protect them into the future.”

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For more information or to speak to one of our experts please contact:

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About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and that enhance human well-being. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world’s longest established international wildlife conservation organisation and a registered charity.
<https://www.fauna-flora.org>



About the African Forest Elephant Foundation (AFEF) (www.forestelephants.org)

The African Forest Elephant Foundation (AFEF) was founded in response to the unprecedented and largely unreported decline of the critically endangered African forest elephants of central and west Africa. AFEF is working to induce an international shift in elephant conservation that highlights the fast decline toward extinction of forest elephants and aims to preserve their place along with their forest habitat into the future. Since AFEF’s inception in 2016 as a charitable incorporated organisation in the UK we have been supporting vital antipoaching & biomonitoring operations as well as the development of operational infrastructure in key forest elephant strongholds.
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