

# Liberian camera trap survey captures rare footage of forest elephants

March 2 2015, by Sarah Rakowski

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A camera-trapping survey carried out by Fauna & Flora International (FFI) in north-west Liberia has yielded a number of interesting results, including the country's only footage of elephants filmed outside a designated protected area.

Among other footage is a crisp black and white video that shows a forest elephant heaving its massive body up a steep slope with surprising agility.

"The initial surveys found at least three [elephants](#) in the area, but we have barely scratched the surface – we suspect that a more intensive,

elephant-focused survey might reveal many more," explained FFI's Project Adviser, Josh Kempinski.

The camera-trapping activities were carried out as part of a wider biodiversity baseline study in Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area that aimed to gain a better understanding of the current health of the ecosystem and its wildlife.

As well as elephants, the surveys recorded a wide range of other species including chimpanzees, pygmy hippos and the zebra duiker.

This not only highlights the importance of the area for biodiversity, but also strengthens the case for formal protection and will likely prove an important step towards the official designation of Wonegizi as a protected area.

## **Urgent need**

Elephant poaching has escalated sharply in recent years, fuelled by a huge surge in demand for wildlife products – primarily in Asia.

Forest elephants are currently considered to be a rarer subspecies of their more famous savannah cousins; however some experts now believe they might be a separate species altogether.

According to Josh, "The continent-wide elephant slaughter touches every country, but so far Liberia remains one of the least affected. Populations of forest elephants could be among the highest in the region, but no doubt the poachers are coming.

"There is a genuine, though rapidly closing, window of opportunity to make a stand in Liberia, before it's too late."

## Keeping forests standing

On a broader scale, FFI is working with the Liberian Forest Development Authority and local NGO, Skills and Agriculture Development Services, to combine the designation of the Wonegizi Protected Area with a REDD+ project.

The latter aims to provide communities with financial incentives to keep their forests standing, and in so doing reduce carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation – one of the major contributors to climate change.

"As part of this project we will be carrying out regular biodiversity surveys, which we can then compare with this baseline study to evaluate our project's impact and ensure that Wonegizi's wildlife is really benefiting," said Josh.



The surveys recorded a wide range of species, including chimpanzees. Credit:  
FFI

Provided by Fauna & Flora International

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