



# The MENTOR Program:

## Team training for Africa's emerging conservation leaders



*MENTOR-FOREST fellows conducting fieldwork.* Credit: Lauriane Besse-Streit / USFWS

Capacity development is a fundamental objective of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in Africa. The MENTOR Fellowship programs provide an important mechanism for achieving this objective. MENTOR programs combine rigorous academic and field-based training, mentoring, learning through experience, and project design and implementation.

This novel approach brings together teams of future African conservation leaders to act upon major threats facing wildlife populations. Since 2008, USFWS has invested about \$1.47 million in four programs that enroll promising professionals from different regions across Africa.

Through MENTOR, which stands for Mentoring for ENvironmental Training in Outreach and Resource conservation, trans-disciplinary teams work to solve challenging problems with multiple underlying factors. Collaborating with governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), fellows gain valuable insights into the threat they are learning to address while also expanding their professional networks to prepare for careers beyond the program.

In 2008, USFWS launched its first program, MENTOR/BEAN (Bushmeat-

free Eastern Africa Network) to tackle bushmeat consumption in Eastern Africa. The College of African Wildlife Management, in Mweka, Tanzania, and the Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group worked side by side on the 18-month program, which brought together eight Fellows from Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The Fellows conducted national-level bushmeat analysis and field assignments, and tested pilot projects for reducing bushmeat consumption through holistic awareness, livelihood alternatives, and law enforcement campaigns in their home countries.

Accomplishments by Fellows after completing the program include

### Why develop MENTOR programs?

Successful wildlife conservation requires that countries develop the capacity to effectively manage their natural resources in the face of numerous threats. The USFWS MENTOR Fellowship programs play an important role in capacity development by providing high-level training and field experience to teams of young African professionals who are committed to becoming conservation leaders. Graduating Fellows offer new skills and expertise to strengthen ongoing conservation efforts and help organizations achieve innovative results.



*MENTOR/BEAN Fellows conduct a meeting on bushmeat awareness with Maasai community members.* Credit: Evanson Kariuki.

## **MENTOR programs address major threats to wildlife**

While each MENTOR program has a unique focus, all MENTOR programs directly or indirectly address common threats faced by wildlife populations.

### **Commercial bushmeat trade**

Commercial demand for bushmeat poses the single greatest threat to the majority of animals in Africa. A thriving commercial trade often emerges around logging concessions and other work camps. Growing demand for preferred species such as pangolin makes the problem worse. MENTOR/BEAN tackled the bushmeat trade in East Africa, where it was an underappreciated threat. MENTOR-Manatee will conduct bushmeat awareness campaigns on manatees and other protected species in Central Africa.

### **Extractive industries**

Unregulated logging, mining, oil exploration and intensive agriculture threaten wildlife by destroying and degrading habitats. They create roads that attract poachers, new human settlements and conversion of forest into agricultural land. As the global demand for Central Africa's resources continues to grow, vulnerable wildlife populations and habitats will be placed at greater risk. MENTOR FOREST focused on promoting better management by extractive industries in wildlife areas.

### **Disease**

Frequent contact between wildlife and humans increases the odds that emerging infectious diseases will take a toll on humans and wildlife alike. Ebola, for instance, is a grave threat to both humans and apes. Apes are also vulnerable to diseases spread by humans, such as influenza and tuberculosis. MENTOR-PACE helps build the next generation of conservation experts who will focus on a range of threats to chimpanzees, including transmission of disease between humans and great apes.

### **Threats to freshwater systems**

Freshwater species such as manatees face significant threats from incidental capture in fishing nets as well as hydroelectric and agricultural dams that can isolate and trap individual animals. MENTOR-Manatee Fellows will contribute knowledge on this least-studied mammal in Africa about their distribution, behavior and ecology.

*From Fiscal Year 2008 to 2014, USFWS has provided \$1.47 million in support to MENTOR conservation projects, leveraging an additional \$384,000 in matching funds.*

### **MENTOR-FOREST Fellows conduct fieldwork in Gabon.**

Credit: Lauriane Besse-Streit / USFWS

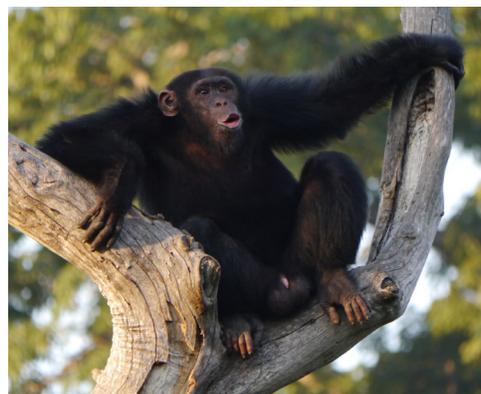


developing a national anti-trafficking NGO in Uganda and training rangers for anti-poaching patrols in Tanzania.

The second program, MENTOR-FOREST, focused on mitigating the negative effects of extractive industries on wildlife and forests. This program, launched in collaboration with Gabon's national park agency (ANPN) and the National School of Forestry (ENEF) in 2012, brought together nine Fellows from Gabon and the Republic of Congo to develop new approaches to forest stewardship in the Congo Basin.

The Fellows formed two teams that developed and tested best-practice guidelines with ANPN and private industries engaged in logging, mining and oil production. Guidelines and tools produced by Fellows are already in use by ANPN's Environmental Evaluation and Compliance Division. Accomplishments by Fellows completing the program include working for ANPN on environmental auditing.

MENTOR-Manatee, led by the Sea to Shore Alliance, officially begins in July



**Conservation of great apes is central to the new MENTOR-PACE program, hosted by Njala University in Sierra Leone.**

Credit: Dirk Byler / USFWS

2015 in Gabon. This two-year program will provide mentoring for eight Central African nationals. Fellows will enroll in separate educational programs based on their chosen areas of study and gather in teams for field work and additional on-the-ground training. These teams will collect data to document the extent of manatee hunting for bushmeat and will lead educational outreach activities for manatee conservation.

MENTOR-PACE (Protecting Apes and Conserving Ecosystems) will begin in fall 2015 at Njala University in Sierra Leone. The 18-month program seeks to strengthen conservation leadership in Sierra Leone and Liberia for addressing threats to the western chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes verus*) and the Upper Guinean forest ecosystem. This program will mentor 10 Fellows through a targeted conservation action and training program. It will also establish a foundation for chimpanzee conservation science and facilitate collaborative exchanges between the two countries.

USFWS plans to continue the MENTOR series with additional programs in order to develop new teams of African conservation professionals who can work together to address threats to wildlife and their habitats and implement effective conservation actions.

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