

## **MID-TERM REPORT**

**PROJECT:** Strengthen Education for the Conservation of Migratory Waterbirds on Lake Nokoué in Benin

### **Introduction**

The degradation of the natural environment is taking on a worrying scale which still persists today and one of the obvious consequences of which is the regression of biological diversity. Benin in general and its southern part in particular is no exception to this phenomenon of degradation. Wetlands, ecosystems endowed with important resources, are concentrated in the southern region of Benin and are home to a large population of birds.



Given the density of the human population in the wetlands of southern Benin and the high demand for meat from urban populations, the exploitation of game is one of the main conservation constraints. Nowadays, several species of resident and migratory birds are in decline in Benin and even more so in the wetlands of the south of the country.

The pace taken by the degradation of biodiversity and the hunting of birds is far from satisfying the principle of sustainable use. It is with the aim of contributing to the protection of migratory waterbirds that the project "Strengthen Education for the Conservation of Migratory Waterbirds on Lake Nokoué in Benin" is initiated with the financial support of Cape Cod Bird Club, in order to overcome the problems and contribute to meeting the expectations of the protection of birds and the conservation of biodiversity

### **Reminder of the problem addressed by the project**

Lake Nokoué, an integral part of Ramsar site 1018, is a habitat and migration area for bird species in Benin. In addition to resident birds, the lake hosts each year a diversity of migratory waterbird species that come to stay in the wetlands of Benin often in the period from October to February to protect themselves from the cold of the tropics.

Several of these bird species are endangered and are rare today; this is mainly due to various anthropogenic pressures such as:

- Hunting: a long-standing traditional activity in Benin, birds are not hunted only for their meat but also for cultural and ritual purposes. This hunting activity is growing and is a real threat that is widespread in this wetlands of Benin. Faced with the growing impoverishment of local populations, birds are under increasing hunting pressure following the virtual eradication of large fauna. Almost all species are hunted as game birds. Thus, certain species that are already vulnerable or of heritage interest are the subject of national and international commercial hunting, as evidenced by the markets for the sale of live or dead animals in the large cities of Benin.

- Forest or marshy surfaces which are destroyed each year by the intense search for timber, firewood and charcoal, and for agricultural, hunting, pastoral purposes, or even the installation of “acadja” fish traps »On bodies of water. This degradation of bird habitats continues even inside community protected areas.

- The use of pesticides (insecticides and herbicides), especially organochlorines, which accumulate in the food chain, is widespread across the country, especially in this wetland. Especially insecticides used in agricultural production are dangerous for humans, livestock and the environment in general. Thus each year, Benin deplores many cases of human mortality due to these chemical poisons. These pesticides also represent a threat to birds, especially raptors, insectivores and seed eaters. In addition, the destruction of insects, both beneficial and predatory, destroys considerable food resources for birds.

These threats have already reached such a level that some species risk disappearing from Benin's wetlands if nothing is done to protect them. To compensate for this erosion of avian biodiversity, it would be necessary to act quickly on the conscience of the populations. However, to achieve this, children and young people must first be educated on the knowledge of their environment and on the economic and ecological values of birds, and on the urgency of their protection.

The project will sensitize the communities of Lake Nokoué, in particular the populations of the Municipality of Sô-Ava, to the protection of resident and migratory waterbirds, in particular those threatened and endangered. The project wants to use the school, in particular the environmental education of 300 schoolchildren from the Public Primary School of “Sô-Ava Center” to reach a large segment of the population (in particular the 13,347 inhabitants) of the district of Sô-Ava, to sustainably solve a problem of environmental degradation and reduce threats to resident and migratory bird species. In addition to improving children's knowledge of ecology, the project will achieve a certain level of community environmental awareness and education.

The purpose of the project is to strengthen the ecological awareness of teachers and schoolchildren to protect migratory waterbirds on Lake Nokoué, an integral part of Ramsar site 1018 in southern Benin.

The project received financial support from Cape Cod Bird Club and technical support from FADE ONG, SONAGNON ONG and the Town Hall of Sô-Ava.

## Practical phase

In total, two main activities have been carried out to date:

### 1- Training of 14 teachers and school directors on ecology as knowledge multipliers

This training encouraged and strengthened the capacities of fourteen (14) teachers and principals of the public primary school of Sô-Ava Centre on ecology, particularly in the concept of environmental education and community monitoring of biodiversity. The latter are the main actors in terms of multiplying knowledge for future generations.

This training, divided into two sessions, resulted in three main modules:

- Introduction to the concept of Environmental Education: Forms of anarchic use and occupation of the mangroves in Benin ;
- Proposal for a new response to the conservation of birds and biodiversity and ;
- Technique of surveillance and denunciation of acts of destruction of mangroves and capture of birds.



Given that conservation has now become a major concern insofar as birds play an important role in climate control and the natural balance of environments, it is important to undertake conservation actions that could be beneficial.

## 2- Commemoration activity for World Migratory Bird Day (WOMB) with schoolchildren in school

This commemoration of World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) focused on an environmental education session through which school children from the public primary school of Sô-Ava Center and their teachers were educated and made aware of the ecological and social values of the conservation of birds and their habitats as well as their economic values. It made it possible to maintain and evaluate the children's knowledge of the natural resources of their environment and of birds in particular.

During this session, several testimonies were made by children and teachers on the massive exploitation of mangrove ecosystems, hunting and massacres of birds, otters, the African manatee and other species present in the region.

Participants received good advice on what to do when they see again cases of destruction of resources and hunting of birds.



Also, during this session, three important points were raised :

- What bird species were encountered in the area 20 or 10 years ago? This point made it possible to assess the abundance of avifauna in the project region over the past two decades.
- All the bird species encountered in the area 20 or 10 years ago are still found there today? This point made it possible to assess the state of degradation and/or disappearance of birds in the project region and the causes of this degradation and/or disappearance.
- What arrangements or measures should be taken? This point made it possible to gather the opinion of each other on the roles to be played by each person in their home and in their locality to change behaviors and reduce pressures and threats on natural resources and birds in particular.

## **Next steps of the project**

The next phases will be devoted to:

- Information and awareness campaign, which will be based on community radio broadcasts and the media, and the production of a brochure (leaflet) in which the value of birds is highlighted ;
- Organization of an advocacy workshop to bring local authorities to the application of Communal Decree No. 045 of 25 November 2011 relating to the protection of species of flora and fauna;
- Organize the monitoring and evaluation of project activities.