



NEWS RELEASE

- For immediate release -

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Saving Species One Community at a Time

Calgary, AB – The work of a team of Calgary Zoo researchers has been published in a special issue of *Environmental Conservation*, a leading international research publication, proving that collaborative community-based conservation efforts can succeed.

"The nations of the world have just gathered in Nagoya, Japan for the international Convention on Biological Diversity to grapple with the monumental question of how to save the Earth's endangered plants and animals, and further to determine how we know when we achieve success," said Kevin Strange, Head of Conservation Outreach at the Calgary Zoo. "At Wechiau in Northern Ghana, we have a small community-based initiative where it has now been demonstrated scientifically that community-based conservation can work."

The research paper entitled: "Ten years of adaptive community-governed conservation: evaluating biodiversity protection and poverty alleviation in a West African hippopotamus reserve" was published in the October issue of *Environmental Conservation* 37(3): 270-282 © Foundation for Environmental Conservation 2010.

Dr. Axel Moehrenschlager, Head of Conservation Research at the Calgary Zoo was one of the four co-authors of the published scientific paper. The focus of the research paper was to determine with scientific evidence if nature broadly benefits when the habitat of a key species, such as hippos – or by hypothesis grizzly bears or snow leopards – is protected.

"At Wechiau we discovered that hippo protection zones definitively support more bird species than unprotected areas; we can extrapolate that finding to almost certainly include other species such as plants, fish, and invertebrates. The research shows that protecting a key and revered species through partnerships

with local people can lead to the broader protection of biological diversity,” said Dr. Axel Moehrenschlager.

The challenges faced in the region are significant as noted in the paper’s introductory summary, “. . . this initiative has attempted to conserve an imperilled large mammal, protect biodiversity, and alleviate abject poverty amidst a bush meat crisis and complex ethnic diversity.”

"Imagine how heavily the odds of success were stacked against success at Wechiau. Over 10,000 poor people representing four tribes with distinct languages and religions live in this area; many frequently go hungry, surviving on less than a \$1 per day. In a country where wild animals are regularly killed for food, it is stunning that it has been possible to protect an animal that weighs several tons and could feed so many. We conclude that the secret to this success has been learning to understand and respect the local people, help them, empower them, and never lose sight of the desire to protect nature," continued Moehrenschlager. "The story is deep, but this project demonstrates an approach that has yielded improvements in income, sanitation, education, employment, and pride through crucial linkages with the protection of biodiversity."

The Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary has been supported from its conception by the Calgary Zoo and is a flagship project for the zoo’s global conservation efforts.

"This project has seen success after success over the past ten years including winning the United Nations Equator Prize in 2008," said Strange. "It is now being used as a model for other community-based conservation initiatives in developing countries."

But Kevin Strange is quick to point out that this has been a collaborative effort involving the Calgary community.

"Calgary service clubs, faith groups, school children, individuals, and businesses helped create an internationally significant example of how conservation and poverty alleviation can go hand-in-hand and it was accomplished together – one community helping another a world away - without government support. We should be very proud of that," said Strange.

Media Information:

Interviews are available upon request with Dr. Axel Moehrenschlager or Kevin Strange. See also background summary attached.

The paper in its entirety is forwarded with this release or may be found at: www.calgaryzoo.com at Research/Publications.

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The Calgary Zoo is part of a professional, accredited association and member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA) comprised of caring, trusted experts committed to ensuring that many endangered and threatened species are part of the world's future. AZA and CAZA advocate on behalf of animals with a unified and consistent voice, and collaborate with others committed to their long-term survival. The Calgary Zoo participates in many Species Survival Plans (SSP), a network among accredited institutions designed to breed endangered species in captivity to ensure the best possible genetic diversity and maintain healthy populations in human care. Through our conservation, education and research programs, many animals in our care play an essential role in the survival of their species in the wild.

The Calgary Zoological Society is a charitable organization. Charitable Registration #118824192 RR0001



Background on WCHS

- ♦ The Sanctuary was established in 1998, as a response to government pressures to protect one of the last remaining hippo populations in the country.
- ♦ WCHS lies in the far NW corner of Ghana along a section of the Black Volta River. This area is culturally diverse, but unfortunately in an area which has little land protection, the bush meat trade is a huge concern and the flagship species of the sanctuary, the hippo, is in decline.
- ♦ Building upon traditional belief systems, the WCHS initiative had a goal of alleviating poverty, helping local communities to flourish and support ecosystem sustainability.
- ♦ Wechiau area is split into two zones. Core zone prohibits farming, burning, hunting, harvesting of flora and has restrictions on seafood collection/fishing.
- ♦ Surrounding zone is a wooded savannah dotted with human settlements and agricultural land.
- ♦ There are 10, 268 people in 17 communities with a total of 720 dwellings.

Background: Community-Conservation and Role of Research Paper

- ♦ Community-based natural resource management hasn't always worked, failing for social, economic or ecological grounds.
- ♦ Around the globe areas which require biodiversity protection are usually in areas of high human development and density; many of these areas are plagued by poverty.
- ♦ Community-based conservation might be the key to alleviating poverty and conserving natural areas.
- ♦ Over the last ten years, many community conservation initiatives around the world have failed to provide sustainable benefits to either biodiversity or humans. However, humans and the natural world are too intertwined in these areas to pursue each goal independently
- ♦ This paper looks at the last ten years of community-governed environmental management in Wechiau.
- ♦ The paper concludes that to be successful, these community conservation initiatives must help improve the lives of the local people and the local ecosystem in both the short and long term.
- ♦ Sustainability in the long term requires several mechanisms to be in place, including: income diversification, equal distribution of benefits, improving problem-solving capacity within the communities, creating empowerment among the local people, and supporting ecosystem connectivity
- ♦ The goal – for other potential sites to learn from the experience of the WCHS and provide recommendations for planning, implementation and evaluation of future community-based conservation initiatives.
- ♦ Paper Co-authors: Donna Sheppard, Conservation Outreach, who lived in Wechiau for several years and continues to support the local community on a daily basis; Dr. Axel Moehrensclager, Head of Conservation Research for the Calgary Zoo; Jana McPherson, Centre for Conservation Research - analyses and interpretation of complex data; John Mason, Executive Director, Ghana's Nature Conservation Research Centre.