



Report on the ARRC Task Force’s visit to Rio Tinto/SIMFER Simandou iron ore mine in Guinea

July 2, 2024

The IUCN SSC PSG SGA/SSA ARRC Task Force¹ was invited by Rio Tinto/SIMFER to conduct a site visit at its Simandou iron ore mine in Guinea. This was a first step to assess the potential for re-engagement with the Task Force. The site visit was conducted between May 27 and 31, 2024. We are grateful to the environmental team for organizing and making our time on site as efficient as possible, and for being transparent about issues they face regarding the implementation of the different biodiversity-related management and monitoring plans. We found a dedicated team on site that is motivated and well-intended, and our comments are meant to help the team achieve its goals.

General observations

Rio Tinto/SIMFER has produced many documents and management plans over the last ten years, but we found that their actual implementation is lacking. The lack of continuity in their presence on-site has also hindered the effectiveness of mitigation measures. The project should ensure a long-term vision and capacity to respond to emergency, or unforeseen situations, which does not seem to be the case at present. Here are some of our observations:

- We noticed a lack of communication between the social and environmental departments. This should be improved considering the substantial linkages between the project’s biodiversity and social impacts, and the potential joint mitigation measures to be implemented to address some of the main impacts of the project. There is also a potential crossover between some of the monitoring indicators that could benefit both departments in better understanding their effectiveness. For example, the environmental team should gather data on hunting signs, number of patrols, etc. as indicators of hunting pressure and share this data with the social team. The social team is then better equipped to provide alternative revenue generating activities with the aim of reducing hunting pressure. Thus, it would be beneficial for both departments to either have joint indicators or to better communicate their management and monitoring plans.
- The environmental team is not using indicators with thresholds to monitor their activities and to apply adaptive management.

¹ International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission (SSC) Primate Specialist Group (PSG) Section on Great Apes (SGA) and Section on Small Apes (SSA).



- The local communities seem to have a poor understanding of the Pic de Fon (PdF) Management Plan and some villagers, other than those who attended the Seredou workshop, do not have a good grasp of the physical limits of the different zones and the activities that are permissible (usage rights) within each.
- There is also confusion as to who leads the management of the PdF and the role SIMFER plays in this regard which causes some villagers to blame SIMFER for the loss of their agricultural lands or artisanal and small-scale mining activities within the boundaries of the PdF.
- The Centre Forestier de N'Zérékoré (CFZ) needs technical assistance, as well as equipment (e.g. motorcycles). Some training has taken place, e.g. with SMART; however, it has not been capitalized upon as equipment was not available, and there was no follow-up.
- The project needs to better understand and anticipate all potential impacts on chimpanzees, e.g. potential increase in negative interactions between humans and chimpanzees. We found that the project did not have all of the needed protocols and mitigation measures in place. For example, no protocol is in place in case a dead chimpanzee is found or if a live one is reported in a village.
- The western side of the PdF has been less studied and is less visited by the project. For example, the PIM (Project In-Migration) team does not have any data on human in-migration for villages located to the southwest of PdF within the area of interest (Aoi) of the project (e.g. Danano). Similarly, SIMFER's employment strategy and plans for the development of alternative revenue generating activities do not extend to the entire Aoi of the project. SIMFER has prioritized villages on the eastern side that are perceived as most impacted by the project, but unless there is a wider roll out across all villages surrounding the PdF such a strategy could readily risk fueling social discontent. Although the villages to the West may be less impacted at the moment, they play a key role in the success of the implementation of the PdF Management Plan which is critical for SIMFER's biodiversity mitigation strategy.
- There is variation across villages in terms of who they approach within SIMFER to express their grievances, and some villages that are lacking a SIMFER community liaison officer within their village seem to lack trust that their message is getting through to SIMFER via the local officer in charge of their locality.
- Some members of the village's Comité de Gestion Forestière (COGEF) and the Association de la Confrérie des Chasseurs Mandent Mory du Pic de Fon (ACCM) expressed that there are obstacles impeding their involvement in monitoring activities alongside the CFZ. This includes lack of adequate field equipment for such outings and financial compensation for their work, especially when it impinges on their ability to conduct their normal agricultural activities.



- The rail spur has been subcontracted but SIMFER could have better control over its infrastructures. For example, erosion did not seem to be well mitigated and movement of people along access roads is not being well controlled.
- It is considered best practice to implement the offset before project impacts are noticeable. Impacts have already started and the offset selection has not been finalized.

Recommendations

1) *Pic de Fon Management Plan*

- We are now in the second iteration of the PdF Management Plan and there is still no technical partner and no proper implementation of the management plan. The technical partner needs to start as soon as possible, without delay. We noted frustrations among villagers which is a risk to the project and the effective implementation of the PdF Management Plan.
- Any community-level development plans need to be shared with the environmental team who should assess any potential risks that such projects could have in exacerbating negative interactions between chimpanzees (and other wildlife) and people, such as crop foraging. For example, any agricultural developments should take care not to attract wildlife species, including chimpanzees, to areas near villages.
- A standardized system for grievances and complaints should be put in place that is well understood by all villagers around the PdF. This is in addition to the placement of a SIMFER community liaison officer in each village within the AoI to ensure a level of trust in communications between villagers and SIMFER.
- Any sign boards for the PdF should not include the Rio Tinto logo to avoid confusion as to who has management responsibility for the PdF.

2) *Monitoring*

- A clear state-pressure-response monitoring plan is needed, and indicators along with their thresholds should be developed by the environmental team using their knowledge of the area and the data collected to date.
- A central database is needed where data (including raw data collected by consultants) can be readily uploaded and accessed by the team to help with data quality control and to enable the team to produce monitoring and evaluation reports for adaptive management and reporting purposes.
- Monitoring in PdF should be done in collaboration with CFZ, COGEF and the ACCM. Villagers involved require necessary equipment and a 'prise en charge' for the days worked. If not, the opportunity costs of participating in monitoring activities will outweigh the benefits to villagers and they will have little economic incentive to be involved. A



sustainable system needs to be put in place by the technical partner to address this issue.

- It appears that hunters are familiar with the location of the line transects and are actively avoiding them. They may also be aware of when the CFZ is conducting a patrol. The CFZ needs to set up an additional 'mobile patrol', which could enter any location of the PdF at any time without the knowledge of local communities.
- All SMART data collected by CFZ should be shared regularly (e.g. monthly) with the environmental team as these will provide useful data for their monitoring activities, e.g. for the threat of hunting, artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and agricultural activities within the PdF, as well as bushfires. These will also serve as a way to monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the PdF Management Plan (other data and multiple indicators for the same threat will also need to be established).
- As long as Oueleba is the focus of construction and exploitation, monitoring of chimpanzees should be more intensified around this area with less intense monitoring in the rest of the PdF.
- There is currently no baseline data for diana monkeys (*Cercopithecus diana*) or the King colobus (*Colobus polykomos*), although both species are Endangered and reported in the Aol of the project. We highly recommend that the project use arboreal camera traps to monitor these species. This will require an initial on-site training to show the team how to safely set up cameras and retrieve data.
- There should be better collaboration between the fauna and flora teams to understand fruit phenology. Phenology surveys can be conducted along existing transects using traditional phenological approaches. We shared with the team a list of plants consumed by Bossou and Nimba chimpanzees, we hope this will be useful to the botanical team.
- Concerning deforestation and bushfires, we also recommend that the environmental team remotely tests out the usefulness of the Global Forest Watch [Forest Watcher](#) application (available offline) that is able to provide real time data and an alarm system. However, please note that this application may not be appropriate because of limitations on spatial and temporal resolution, but it may be worth testing its potential utility. The CFZ could also be trained to use this application if deemed useful within the PdF context.
- There needs to be careful interpretation of data. For example, the absence of chimpanzees on camera traps where they were previously recorded does not necessarily indicate that they have disappeared from the area. This will depend on the placement of the camera traps and camera trapping effort, but it could also be linked to i) seasonal patterns in chimpanzee movement and habitat utilization, ii) impacts of the project alone or iii) perhaps a combination of the two. Thus, it is critical to acquire a better understanding of chimpanzee behavioral ecology across seasons, altitudes and food availability.



- We recommend the project sets up an independent advisory committee that conducts an annual review of the monitoring results and implementation of the PdF Management Plan, along with a site visit to provide recommendations as the project progresses.

3) Offsets and additional conservation actions

- The project will necessitate a large offset to compensate for all its impacts on chimpanzees (including the mine and all associated infrastructures). We encourage the project to be innovative in its approach to ensure the long-term conservation of chimpanzees in Guinea.
- The ARRC Task Force recommends having up-front, long-term funding that can support conservation programs in perpetuity.
- We encourage the project to help build the capacity of Guinean primatologists through:
 - Creation of a primatology institute that could provide graduate level opportunities and thematic training.
 - Paying scholarships for Guinean students to study the impacts of the Simandou mine on chimpanzees. For example, a study on the impact of noise on chimpanzees has never been conducted and it would be extremely helpful not only for the project to better manage their impacts, but also more widely to help improve the management of mining impacts on chimpanzees.
- The project should support more initiatives for the conservation of chimpanzees in Guinea following the [National Chimpanzee Conservation Plan](#) and more broadly for the subspecies as a whole through support to the [IUCN Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Western Chimpanzees](#) (which include relevant themes, e.g. private industry).

Next steps

We will consider officially re-engaging with the Rio Tinto/SIMFER Simandou project if you can fulfill these requirements in the next six months (by the end of December 2024):

- Demonstrate the start of implementation of the most recent PdF Management Plan with the technical advisor;
- Secure all equipment for activities to be conducted for implementing the PdF Management Plan in its first year;
- Complete one round of sensitization with the technical partner about the PdF Management Plan in all the relevant villages East and West of the PdF;
- Award the contract for the monitoring of chimpanzees and other mammal species; and start collection of survey data on chimpanzees (especially urgent for Oueleba);



- Clarify indicators with thresholds to monitor activities and to apply adaptive management;
- Set-up a central database that includes all biodiversity data collected to date, which can be easily used to measure monitoring efforts against indicators;
- Start undertaking phenological studies along existing transect lines;
- Set up an emergency small fund for the environmental department that can be more quickly accessible and doesn't need to get approval for disbursement;
- Share chimpanzee survey data collected to date with the IUCN SSC A.P.E.S. database;
- Implement at least one alternative revenue generating project in a village located on the western side of the PdF; and
- Implement, in collaboration with local Guinean authorities, control posts for the main access roads along the Transguinean railway (for example in Kounoukan area where the railway access road is being heavily used by the local populations and is now also used to traffic charcoal coming from neighboring forests).

We look forward to hearing from you by the end of the year to hear the progress made and how you have addressed our recommendations. We would like to once again thank the team for their dedication and for working towards minimizing the impacts of the project on biodiversity, as well as for hosting us and taking the time to have open discussions during our visit. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like any clarification or would like to discuss further our comments and recommendations.

Best regards,

Dr Genevieve Campbell, Lead of the ARRC Task Force