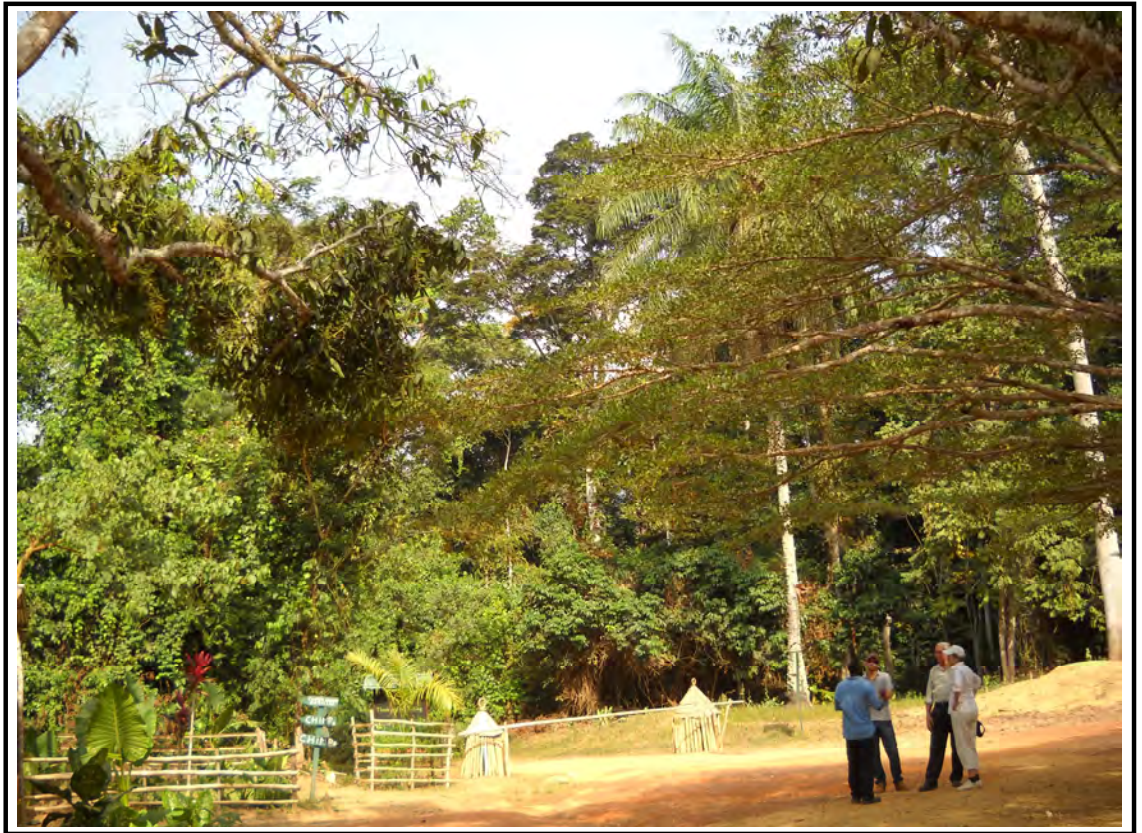


## THE MEFOU PRIMATE SANCTUARY

The Mefou Primate Sanctuary is situated at Metet village on the road to Mefou town 45-60 minutes drive from the centre of Yaoundé city through the Mbalmayo road. This sanctuary on a surface area of about 875 hectares is home to >250 primates.

The Mefou primate sanctuary was created to make a safe place for orphan primates. These primates came from people who were keeping them illegally, some are brought by people who realise they shouldn't have them, many were confiscated by Forest guards or gendarmes from homes where they were being kept as pets, or in bars and clubs for entertainment, or from hunters who after killing the parents of the animals collect the babies in order to sell. The primates at the Mefou primate sanctuary include chimpanzees, western lowland gorillas, mandrills, redcap mangabe, baboons and a variety of forest guenons. These animals are kept in the sanctuary with the aim of reintroducing them into the forest again after some time.



### **Benefits Accruing from the Creation of the Mefou Primate Sanctuary.**

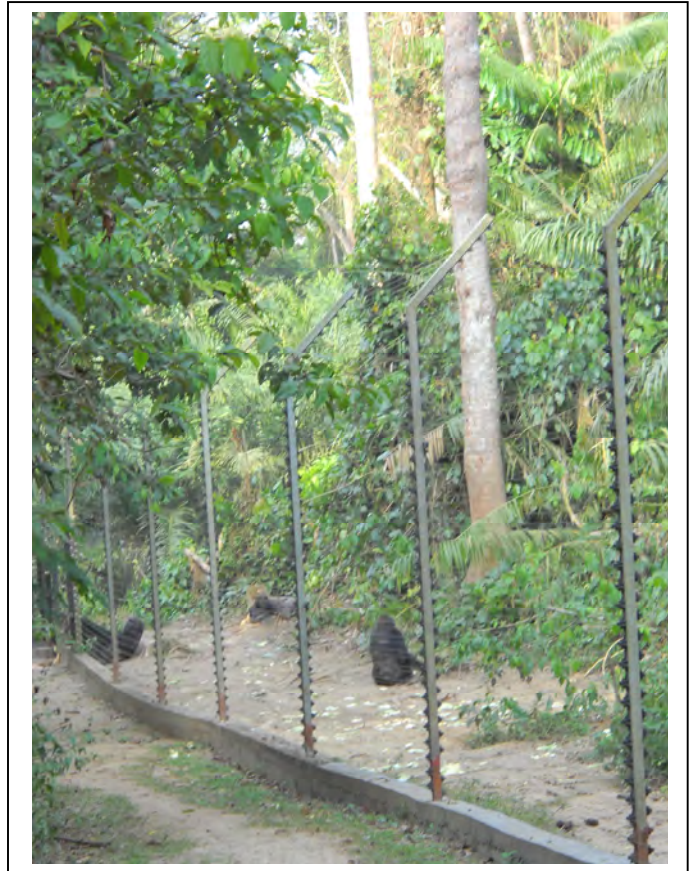
Pupils, students, teachers, villagers and tourists have benefited from the sanctuary in different ways. Some of these ways are discussed below:



### **Education**

The Mefou primate sanctuary is an education centre. At the sanctuary students and teachers can learn more about animals and plants.

**Animals:** In the nursery and primary schools in Cameroon animals and animal life are topics on the Environmental Education, General Knowledge, Moral Education and English Language syllabuses. The Mefou primate Sanctuary is a place to study these through observation and experience of live animals in a secure and conducive environment. Pupils, students, teachers and other interested persons can study the characteristics, physical and behavioural of these animals at the sanctuary. Differences like gorillas are generally calm while chimpanzees are generally noisy are worth taking note of. That the gorillas, chimpanzees, mandrills and monkeys are generally vegetarians and eat mostly fruits, leaves, roots and barks of trees could be of interest to the students. Teachers can also take advantage of the domestic animals, the sheep, goats, donkeys and cats kept by the villagers there. Teachers can also take advantage of the domestic animals, the sheep, goats, donkeys and cats kept by the villagers there.



**Plants:** In Geography students need to learn about the different types of forest – primary or virgin forest which is forest that is mature in terms of the number of species, and has grown naturally (that is they were not planted by man) and secondary forest that is growing back after some kind of disturbance, human or natural. The Mefou Primate Sanctuary has vegetation made up mostly of secondary forest, students can also see a remnant of primary forest, the last moabi tree in the area is in the sanctuary, it is a forest tree with red wood and seeds that are easily dispersed by elephants. Probably there were elephants in the Mefou forest that helped in dispersing the seeds that later germinated and grew to be these trees today. The rattan or cane plant which is the only palm that grows like a vine is also found in the Mefou forest, it can be seen scrambling up through the trees, often high into the canopy. The forest baobab is also present, it does not grow as big as the savannah baobab.

Often teachers in the Cameroon primary schools teach pupils about the different kinds of trees just by naming them, a few teachers bring some of the fruits to class to show the pupils but they do not show the children the trees. Children in the cities and big towns hardly know what many of our common plants look like. The Mefou forest is a place where pupils can see, touch, smell (and taste in some cases) the different plants, and parts of plants in order to know them properly. They can observe and write about, how they grow, the size, the leaves, the type of plant and learn how to identify the plants even when they do not have fruits on them. Domestic trees you can see in the sanctuary forest include coconut, banana, pear, mango, guava, plum, different palms and cocoa.

The Mefou Primate sanctuary is therefore not just an orphanage for wildlife but it is also a school and an education centre.

### **A Research Centre (Institute)**

The Mefou Primate Sanctuary could be a research centre for people who have specialized or want to specialize in one field of study or the other, such as botanists, biologists, veterinarians. Also for researchers who want to develop special skills in areas such as understanding animal behaviour and communication, habitat, growth, feeding, reproduction, digestion and posture. In order to have and continue to keep these plants and animals in this world we must study them closely. There are some limitations when it comes to observing the animals in the wild because of fear of what may happen to us, expense, difficulty coming close to the animals and the amount of time needed. At the Mefou forest the animals and plants are always there, for there are guards who take care of them.

### **A Place of Co-habitation for Man and Wildlife**

Right inside the Mefou Primate Sanctuary is found a village with a population of about 30 people. These villagers are natives of the area, who lived there long before the place was made a park. The villagers have learned to live with the primates. Although the primates live in wired fences they have been known to escape from their enclosures and then they are frightened to move back. There are no reports of any one being hurt by the animals and all staff know the procedure should an animal come out.

### **A Source of Employment**

At the Mefou sanctuary many young people have been employed as guards, receptionists and care-takers of people coming into the sanctuary for one reason or the other.

### **A Source of Income**

About 100 people visit the sanctuary every day. Nationals pay a token sum of 2000 fcfa per person while non-nationals pay 7500 fcfa per person. This adds to the income of the country - the money is used for payment of staff salaries and for veterinary and general provision for the animals. The villagers have also opened small business units such as bars and foodstuff selling places as a service to the visitors and to make money for their daily use. They also make money from the sale of souvenirs that they make and traditional dance performances for visitors.

### **Touristic Site**

The sanctuary is a touristic site. Tourists from in and out of the country come into the park to see the primates and discover more about life at the sanctuary. The site is safe, secured and enjoyable.



### **Villagers in the sanctuary**

It should be noted that there are people living inside the park, a community of local people, several hundred in total, with about 30 (men, women and children) in the main village close to the animals and visitor centre. It has been their home since before the sanctuary was started, where their ancestors lived, died and were buried. Their graves are there till today. The villagers are involved in many economic activities. These include peasant farming, they produce tubers like cassava ( their main staple food ), cocoyam, and sweet potatoes. Cassava leaves are pounded and cooked as vegetables to be eaten with boiled cassava. They also grow grain crops like maize, and beans, plantains, bananas and fruit trees. They have mangos, pears, plums, guavas, palms and cocoa. Cocoa is the main cash crop of the area. The leafy vegetables huckleberry and amarantus are grown in small quantities. Sometimes they collect mushrooms, “eru” (a kind of vegetable) and bitter leaves. Some of the villagers are hunters and they hunt rodents such as rat moles and squirrels in and around the sanctuary. The villagers also keep some domestic animals like sheep, pigs, goats, and birds mainly chicken. Some of the young women sell in bars (such as the Bar de Chimpanzee and Bar de Gorille) opened by their husbands or other relatives. Some of the young men work in the park as caregivers. Caregivers are the people who feed the primates at the sanctuary. With these activities they earn a living.

### **Problems faced by the villagers who live in the sanctuary**

The sanctuary needs to be calm because generally animals do not like loud noise. It is not easy for the villagers to stay without making noise, when celebrating certain happenings in the village such as the birth of a new born baby, baptism, marriages and success of their children in school. Children may sometimes like to play and shout at the top of their voices but at the sanctuary everybody must learn to speak in low tunes.

The villagers are advised to keep away from the primates and to move away from the path of the animals should they ever meet them. For the sanctuary to be conducive for the animals the vegetation needs to either remain what it is or be allowed to grow more and more. This is only possible if no construction is ever done in or around the park. However the children of the villagers in the park need to go to school, the people need health care facilities such as a health centre and they at least need roads connecting them to other villages around. The children of the villagers attend school out of the village. The nearest school and health centre are at Ekali. Walking from the sanctuary to Ekali can take an adult one hour twenty minutes and children take longer. There is just one motorable road into and out of the sanctuary and the rest of the roads are footpaths.

### **Views of non-nationals about the sanctuary**

The sanctuary is nice, the entrance fee is quite high but generally visitors don't mind paying this as they know the money is used to cover running costs. Visitors, especially from Yaoundé appreciate Mefou as a retreat from the bustle and pollution of the city, it is relaxing to be in the countryside and amongst nature. Seeing the animals in a healthy environment, with lots of space is refreshing and inspiring.

Entrance Modalities:	Nationals	adults	2000 fcfa
		children	500 fcfa
	Non-nationals	adults	7500 fcfa
		children	2000 fcfa