



## Somié Chimpanzee Conservation Project:

Protecting & Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Supporting Sustainable Livelihoods.

In northern Cameroon’s Adamawa Region, a 5,000-hectare forest in the Somié landscape sits at the intersection of two urgent realities: the survival of one of the world’s most endangered great apes, and the long-term security of Indigenous and local communities who depend on this forest for daily life.

The Nigeria–Cameroon chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes ellioti*) is the most endangered of the four chimpanzee subspecies, with an estimated 3,500–9,000 individuals remaining worldwide. In Somié, the forest supports a resident population of approximately 50 chimpanzees and plays a critical role as a habitat corridor, enabling movement, breeding, and genetic exchange across the wider landscape. Without continuous forest cover, this function collapses—isolating groups and significantly weakening long-term population viability.

This same forest is inseparable from the lives of people who have lived in and alongside it for generations. Indigenous and local communities—including the Mambila, Yamba, Tikars, and the Mbororos—rely on the forest for water, food, medicine, fuel, grazing land, and climate regulation. The forest stabilizes soils, protects water catchments, moderates extreme weather, and underpins livelihoods tied to farming and grazing in a region increasingly affected by climate variability.

Despite its ecological and social importance, the **Somié forest currently has no formal legal protection**. Across Cameroon, forests are under increasing pressure from land conversion, commercial agriculture, and logging. In unprotected landscapes like Somié, this pressure translates into forest fragmentation, degraded watersheds, and rising vulnerability for both wildlife and communities. Landslides linked to forest loss have already damaged the village's gravity-fed water system, underscoring how closely forest integrity and human well-being are linked.

For chimpanzees, the consequences of continued fragmentation are severe. As forest corridors break down, populations become isolated, genetic exchange is disrupted, and extinction risk increases. For communities, the loss of forest weakens the natural systems that sustain agriculture, water security, and resilience to climate extremes. Once these systems are lost, recovery becomes increasingly difficult—and in some cases irreversible. This project addresses that risk at its source.

**The core objective is to secure legal protection for the Somié forest by establishing it as a Community Forest under Cameroon's Community Forest Program.** This involves securing a 25-year legal lease that protects the forest from encroachment and external exploitation while placing stewardship and governance firmly in the hands of local communities.

This legal designation is foundational. It creates the conditions necessary for:

- long-term protection of chimpanzee habitat and a functioning wildlife corridor
- community-led land-use planning and enforcement
- restoration of degraded forest and soil systems
- sustainable, climate-resilient livelihoods that reduce pressure on remaining forest

With legal protection in place, communities can assume formal, long-term stewardship of the forest, supported by experienced conservation partners and clear management structures.

Securing the lease is not the end of the work, it is the beginning. Once protected, the forest becomes the anchor for a multi-year conservation effort focused on habitat restoration, sustainable agroforestry, community-led chimpanzee monitoring, and strengthened local governance. This approach is designed to ensure that protection is durable—ecologically, socially, and economically—and that both people and wildlife continue to thrive.

**The immediate funding requirement to secure the Community Forest is \$66,000, covering the legal, technical, and community processes required under Cameroonian law.**

Half of the required funding has been pledged, contingent on the balance being raised. **The Nancy-Carroll Draper Family Foundation has committed \$33,000, provided the remaining funds are secured by March 31, 2026**, and the Leiter Foundation has already contributed \$5,000 to help launch the effort. We are now seeking the remaining support needed to fulfil this condition, unlock the matching pledge, and secure the forest. Current progress toward this goal is updated in real time at the link below.

<https://ecowb.app.neoncrm.com/campaigns/cameroon-conservation>

This is a time-limited opportunity. If the lease is secured, a shared forest—vital to both endangered chimpanzees and the communities who depend on it—can be protected for generations. If it is not, the risks facing both will continue to escalate.

**Protecting the Somié forest is not about choosing between people and wildlife. It is about recognizing that their futures are inseparable—and acting while there is still time to do so.**