

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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### **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

**AMMCO:** African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization MPA: Marine Protected Area SG: Secretary General **CAMNET:** Cameroon Marine and Coastal Network **EJF:** Environmental Justice Foundation **GFW:** Global Fishing Watch **MoU:** Memorandum of Understanding **ONG:** Non-Governmental Organization **RFLO:** Ossa Lake Fauna Reserve **CSS:** Control and Surveillance System **UICN:** International Union for Conservation of Nature **NGS:** National Geographic Society **INN: Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing MINEPIA:** Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries, and Animal Industries **MINFOF: Ministry of Forests and Fauna MINRESI:** Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation **CSO:** Civil Society Organization **UICN:** International Union for Conservation of Nature **NEWF:** Nature, Environment, Wildlife, Filmmaking **OMI:** International Maritime Organization

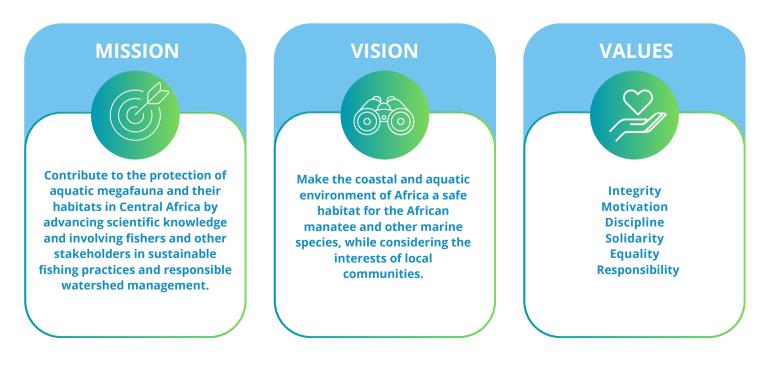
## PRESENTATION

**African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization (AMMCO)** is a Cameroonian non-profit organization established in 2012 and officially recognized in 2014 (Declaration No. 086/RDA/C18/SAAJP, Prefecture of Sanaga Maritime). AMMCO's mission is to contribute sustainably to the conservation of aquatic megafauna and their habitats while also enhancing the livelihoods of local communities living around these habitats.

To achieve its mission, AMMCO's strategy is centered on four key areas:

- Developing synergies for marine wildlife conservation;
- Enhancing knowledge about marine fauna and flora;
- Reducing the economic vulnerability of fishing communities;
- Advocating for the enforcement of marine wildlife laws and regulations.

AMMCO has set a goal to achieve a 10% reduction in major threats to aquatic megafauna and their habitats, and to improve the living conditions of local communities in Cameroon by 10% by 2025.



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### **OPERATING MODE**

AMMCO's intervention approach is based on four pillars:

- Scientific Research;
- Awareness-Raising;
- Training;
- Advocacy.

These areas of focus enable the mobilization of all stakeholders (the general public, communities living near marine megafauna habitats, political actors, and the private sector) around efforts to mitigate threats—both direct and indirect—to these species, aiming to foster greater commitment to conservation.

Since its creation, AMMCO has contributed to the protection of aquatic megafauna and their habitats in Central Africa in several ways:

- The organisation of 03 editions of the "Street Whale";
- The fight against the invasion of the Salvina Molesta in Lake Ossa;
- Publishing and supporting the publication of several studies on aquatic megafauna and their habitats;
- Carrying out several environmental education campaigns;
- Identification and dissemination of responsible and innovative conservation practices.

During 2023, AMMCO continued its action for the conservation of aquatic megafauna and their habitats in Central Africa through activities in several areas. This report describes the main achievements of the period under review, the difficulties encountered and the measures taken to mitigate them, as well as the main challenges.



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"Together to save our aquatic wildlife"

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() African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization (AMMCO)

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AMMCO enjoys the trust of the Cameroonian government. This is reflected in its cooperation with state institutions and decentralized local authorities.

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### **AMMCO IN FIGURES**

**11 years** of activities



**PB** Intervention sites in Cameroon

Douala Dizangué Limbé Kribi Ebodjé Yaoundé



**Collaboration with** 

2 Ministries 6 Universities











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- 28

local residents assisted

4

+ 200 KM of beaches patrolled in search of turtle nests and stranded animals

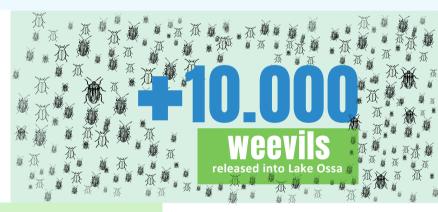
# **90 %**

less Salvinia molesta cover on Lake Ossa thanks to biological control



## **TRANSFORMENTS**











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### **OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023**

PROTEME

Le Monument de la liberté a few hours before its inauguration at Street Whale 2023.



 Fisheries management and combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in Cameroon.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in Cameroon is driven by three main factors: the inadequacy of the legal and regulatory framework, which is not fully in line with international standards; insufficient cooperation between the authorities responsible for vessel registration and licensing; and weaknesses in the monitoring, control and surveillance system for the fishing fleet. As a result, Cameroon received a red card in January 2023, designating it as a non-cooperative country in the fight against IUU fishing.

To address these issues and support the conservation of Cameroon's marine biodiversity and the well-being of the local communities that depend on it, AMMCO launched the Stop IUU Fishing in Cameroon project in 2022. This project, funded by the NGO OCEANS 5, brought together the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA) and the NGOs Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) and Global Fishing Watch (GFW).



Group photo taken after the consultation workshop on the draft law regarding fishing and aquaculture regulations in Cameroon.

In 2023, the project refocused its activities on improving the legal framework for fisheries in Cameroon. To this end, we organized several internal consultation meetings with key stakeholders, including meetings in Mbalmayo and Mbankomo. In addition, an inter-ministerial working group was created to address IUU fishing issues, involving the Ministries of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industry (MINEPIA), Transport (MINT), Forests and Fauna (MINFOF), and Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED).

In November, a retreat was held in the Central Region to incorporate feedback from EJF and the European Union into the new fishery's law. Finally, an inter-ministerial workshop in Douala facilitated the final revision of the draft law before its submission to the Office of the Prime Minister.

During the year, the project completed two major milestones: First, the Ministry of Transport suspended the registration of vessels operating outside Cameroon's territorial waters. Second, the establishment of an interministerial consultation platform strengthened cooperation between the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries, and Animal Industry (MINEPIA) and the Ministry of Transport (MINT). This initiative facilitated the introduction of key legislative revisions, including an ecosystem-based approach, the precautionary principle, continental artisanal fisheries, and provisions on transshipment and criminal sanctions.

In 2024, the project aims to finalize and implement the new fisheries law by submitting the revised draft to the presidency for approval and raising awareness among parliamentarians about the impacts of IUU fishing. We also plan to strengthen local advocacy and action capacities of local stakeholders, civil society organizations and fishing communities to effectively combat IUU fishing. In addition, improving monitoring systems is a priority, which should lead to the mandatory assignment of IMO numbers to all fishing vessels and the equipping of the entire fleet with geolocation identification systems. These measures will improve the management and transparency of the fisheries sector in Cameroon.

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### Citizen science is expanding on an international scale through the Siren Network app.

In response to the challenges posed by limited knowledge of marine wildlife in Cameroon, particularly due to high costs and a lack of qualified marine biologists, AMMCO launched the SIREN Network app in 2015. This citizen science tool allows users to report and record marine animal sightings through their phones, facilitating data collection such as photos, geographic locations, and detailed descriptions. To date, the SIREN Network has recorded over 19,000 sightings of more than 350 species.

In 2023, despite ongoing logistical and financial challenges, AMMCO intensified its efforts in training, partnerships, and education to promote and expand the use of the SIREN app for marine wildlife data collection. This initiative has strengthened local and international capacity for marine conservation.

- In Cameroon: We trained 3 agents of the Manyangue Na Elombo-Campo Marine Park Conservation Service and the teams of our partner organization TUBE AWU working in the area. In addition, 10 new members joined our network of local fishermen, which now consists of 80 members. The data collected locally was used to support our environmental education program, which is conducted in over 25 primary and secondary schools.
- In the United Arab Emirates: Provided training and support for the Sir Bu Nair Island project.
- In Ghana: training and support was provided to the Keta Ramsar Project.
- In Senegal: Collaboration with the AGIRE projects and the Directorate of Community Marine Protected Areas resulted in the collection of 5,755 lines of data that now enrich the Siren database. The app was highly appreciated during its presentation at the Marine Megafauna Week of the Atlantic Coast of Africa and was included as a reference tool in the Marine Mammal Toolkit.

However, the year was not without its challenges. We had to overcome significant logistical and financial obstacles, as well as difficulties in coordinating with these international partners. Growing pressures on marine biodiversity, including the poaching of manatees and sea turtles, and continuing problems in the fishing sector with non-compliance in closed areas, required constant vigilance and an increase in awareness campaigns.

For 2024, AMMCO aims to stabilize and improve the effectiveness of the SIREN application, while expanding its monitoring network to new regions and strengthening collaborations with local and international organizations. The organization also plans to use the scientific data collected through the app to advocate for the establishment of new marine protected areas.



Workshop with Senegal's Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO DOWNLOAD THE SIREN NETWORK APP.



iOS



ANDROID



Our ray and shark research and conservation program was initiated in response to alarming findings. Data collected through the Siren Network app shows that elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) are among the most commonly landed marine megafauna species along the coasts, including IUCN-listed critically endangered species such as the guitarfish *(Glaucostegus cemiculus)* and hammerhead shark (Sphyrna lewini). With the support of the Save Our Seas Foundation and the Manta Trust in 2023, the program has carried out numerous activities with significant results.

From January to March, scientific surveys were conducted along the coasts of Limbe, Douala and Kribi. These surveys documented species landed, fishing characteristics, morphometric and biological data (sex and maturity), and collected samples for genetic analysis.

In March, AMMCO, in collaboration with Manta Trust, launched the Gulf of Guinea Elasmobranch Network, an initiative to develop a regional conservation strategy for sharks and rays. In June, AMMCO and Manta Trust organised the network's first workshop in Cameroon, alongside the Street Whale event. This workshop brought together international stakeholders such as the IUCN Shark Specialist Group, the Wildlife Conservation Society in Gabon and the Convention on Migratory Species.

In August, AMMCO presented its conservation and research efforts at the West Africa Marine Science Symposium (WAMSS) in Ghana. In September, a draft strategy for the Gulf of Guinea was presented at the Marine Megafauna Week organised by the Convention on Migratory Species, extending the network to the whole of West Africa.

From October to December, socio-economic interviews were conducted with fishing communities along the Central Coast (including Youpwe, Cowet, Essengue, Manoka and the fishing port) and the South Coast (including Londji, Mbouamanga, Lolabe, Ebodje, Campo and Campo Beach) of Cameroon. These interviews provided important information on fishing gear <u>characteristics, fishing</u> locations and target species.



Monitoring of Kribi landing stages.

Throughout the year, 2,301 individuals of sharks and rays were recorded, including 786 observations through the SIREN app and 1,515 through dedicated surveys. A total of 45 species were identified and 200 interviews were conducted with fishermen and coastal communities, bringing the total number of individuals recorded since 2015 to nearly 7,097. All of this valuable data was shared with the IUCN to contribute to the development of their global report.

However, AMMCO continues to face significant challenges. Producing an atlas of artisanal shark and ray fisheries remains difficult due to the need for expert review and validation. In addition, studying the seasonality of sharks and rays requires data collection over a full year with regular frequency. Finally, the 12 critically endangered elasmobranch species are still not protected in Cameroon. To overcome these obstacles, AMMCO plans to secure additional funding, collaborate with international experts and include threatened species in national and regional action plans.

In 2024, we plan to launch a reintroduction project for guitarfish and hammerhead sharks, collect data throughout the year and develop a regional shark and ray conservation plan. We will also focus on writing scientific articles, conducting a thorough stock assessment to measure populations and their health, determining fishing effort and accessing data from industrial fisheries.

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### • Street Whale 2023 leaves an indelible mark on Kribi.

Street Whale is much more than an event: it's an invitation to understand and protect our marine heritage. This gathering provides a platform for different stakeholders to discuss and explore solutions to preserve our precious marine resources. Combining the emotion of art, the rigour of science and the energy of sport, Street Whale enlightens minds and inspires concrete action for a sustainable future. Now in its 3rd year, the event provides a platform for concerted action to tackle the growing challenges of overfishing, pollution and destruction of marine habitats. These crucial issues are often ignored or misunderstood, both by those responsible for the sustainable management of fisheries in our countries and by the general public. This situation leads to inappropriate measures that are not very effective in responding to today's pressing environmental needs.

This year, the Street Whale was held from 7 to 10 June to celebrate World Oceans Day and bring together stakeholders in the protection of the oceans for discussions crucial to their sustainable management. The 2023 symposium was marked by significant achievements: 17 nationalities represented, over a million people reached through artworks, public performances and the media, over 120 participants in scientific activities, and 1,000 people taking part in sporting and artistic activities.

Scientific activities were structured around four main themes: the governance of marine protected areas (MPAs), the blue economy, the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and the conservation of marine biodiversity and coastal habitats. Round tables explored coordination between sectoral bodies to protect biodiversity, the role of communities in the management of MPAs, the balance between development and conservation of marine resources, and the involvement of journalists in the fight against IUU fishing.

On the artistic front, a unique monument has been installed on the Wamié bridge: the Monument of Unity. The first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa, it incorporates augmented reality. By using the Artiveapp application and pointing your mobile phone's camera at the monument, you can discover captivating animations and awareness-raising messages. The application is available on the main download platforms.



The << Monument de l'unité >> built at the entrance to the town of Kribi.

In addition to the scientific and artistic sessions, the event offered exciting sporting opportunities. The region's crystal clear waters provided the backdrop for competitions in beach volleyball, canoe racing, sprinting, arm wrestling and dancing. Participants from the local communities competed in these events, creating a dynamic and stimulating atmosphere to promote the message of ocean conservation. In addition, in collaboration with the South African organisation NEWF (Nature, Environment, Wildlife, Filmmaking), a virtual reality workshop allowed participants to immerse themselves in the wonders of marine habitats. Using VR headsets, they explored the seabed in 3D, swimming alongside endangered species and enjoying a unique immersive experience.

For more details on Street Whale 2023, please consult the report by scanning the QR code.





Environmental education: Inspiring the younger generation today, for tomorrow's ecological solutions.

In line with the 1977 Tbilisi Declaration, environmental education has become a global priority, with the aim of raising awareness of environmental challenges, developing the skills needed to address them, and promoting responsible attitudes and actions. In this context, AMMCO has developed an environmental education programme covering several sites: Limbe, Dizangue, Kribi-Ebodje and Douala (Nkam). Over the past three years, this programme has undertaken various initiatives to raise awareness of environmental issues among school children. The main themes are biodiversity, waste management and ecosystem conservation. In 2023, the major innovation in our environmental education programme was the integration of virtual reality, thanks to our partner Nature Environmental Wildlife Filmmaking (NEWF), to allow students to immerse themselves in the ecosystems they are learning to protect, in order to better understand them.

In Limbe, 1704 pupils from 17 schools participated in the initial tests, which showed that 624 pupils scored below 4 and 1080 pupils scored 4 or above, demonstrating the positive impact of the educational programmes. Over 500 students participated in the biodiversity workshops, with 80% expressing a better understanding of ecosystems. Lectures attracted an average of 200 participants per session, and field trips with the children identified 15 bird species that are rare in the region. However, the programme faced significant difficulties. Lack of funding has limited the scope of the projects and some activities have had to be scaled back due to lack of resources.

Apart from Limbe, where our programme is operating at full capacity, there are still many difficulties in other areas such as Kribi-Ebodje, Dizangue and Douala-Nkam, which have recorded little or no activity for the first half of the 2023-2024 academic year.



A primary school pupil wearing a virtual reality helmet.

In Kribi-Ebodje, despite the collaboration with Tube-Awu, no educational activities were carried out during this period. In Dizangue and Douala-Nkam, educational activities have not yet begun, although sessions are planned for the second half of the school year in three primary schools and two secondary schools. These delays and lack of activities are mainly due to the lack of funding, which has limited the scope of the projects and forced some initiatives to be reduced or postponed. The reluctance of some schools to integrate environmental education into their curriculum has also contributed to this situation.

We will devote 2024 to strengthening partnerships with local and international NGOs for financial and logistical support, organising awareness-raising campaigns in schools and communities, and training more teachers in environmental education to overcome current reluctance. These initiatives aim to strengthen the impact of the programme, broaden its reach and ensure that environmental education is more fully integrated into school curricula, inspiring younger generations to act responsibly for the environment.

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Protecting sensitive aquatic habitats

Freshwater habitats.

#### **Biological control of Salvinia molesta on Lake Ossa: a great success.**

Freshwater habitats are low-salinity aquatic environments that generally form rich and diverse ecosystems. They play a crucial role in the water cycle, climate regulation and the provision of essential resources for local communities, such as drinking water, fishing and tourism. For example, Lake Ossa, one of the largest lakes in Cameroon, is the natural habitat of the African manatee, an endangered species, and is a vital centre for the socio-economic activities of the people of the commune of Dizangué and the surrounding area.

From 2017 to 2022, Lake Ossa suffered from the proliferation of Salvinia molesta, an invasive floating plant that covered almost 50% of the lake's surface in 2021. The presence of this plant has led to the obstruction of shipping lanes, a reduction in fish catches and a reduction in the living space of the African manatee. The animal found it difficult to surface to breathe, and the plants in its diet were competing with the Salvinia molesta. To deal with this situation, AMMCO, in collaboration with the local authorities and communities, and with the support of Louisiana State University, IUCN, Save Our Species and PBNF, initiated biological control of the Salvinia. Biological control involves introducing Cyrtobagous salviniae (Salvinia weevil), an insect that feeds exclusively on Salvinia Molesta, into the lake. Following its importation and the construction of a breeding centre in DIzangué in 2021, the weevils were released and dispersed in Lake Ossa in several waves. The effect was almost immediate. Today, less than 10% of the lake's total surface area is covered by the plant, and the economic activities of local residents have resumed with renewed vigour.

Our activities continued in 2023 with the aim of identifying and treating the causes of this invasion. This involved collecting water samples along the Sanaga catchment to study its physical and chemical parameters. To this end, two sampling campaigns were carried out during the year, with more than 95 samples collected and 50 analyses carried out, revealing high concentrations of phosphates and nitrates, nutrients that favour the proliferation of salvinia. In addition, awareness-raising campaigns and posters on the activities carried out in the lake and their impact on the environment reached no fewer than 4,623 people.



Water sampling campaign along the Sanaga watershed.

However, this work was not without its challenges. Throughout the year, we faced numerous coordination problems due to the slowness of certain administrative procedures and the cooperation between the Dizangué Conservation Department and the Town Hall. Our work was also hampered by technical difficulties, particularly the lack of suitable equipment for collecting and analysing samples. We also had to overcome obstacles in order to raise awareness of the good practices to be followed in order to limit pollution of the lake and contribute to the conservation of this habitat.





#### Protecting sensitive aquatic habitats

Marine and coastal habitats.

Marine and coastal habitats. like freshwater habitats. provide vital resources for local populations. However, their lack of recognition in Africa, and particularly in Cameroon, makes it difficult to protect them. Available data shows that mangroves in Cameroon have lost almost 40% of their surface area as a result of human activities such as fish smoking, sand mining, the construction of ports and tourist infrastructure in Kribi and Limbé, and oil activities. These pressures increase environmental risks and threaten biodiversity and marine ecosystems.

To remedy this situation, we have launched a research programme to establish a reliable database and comprehensive inventory of Cameroon's marine habitats. The programme will identify priority areas for action and develop effective management and conservation strategies. Our aim is to ensure the sustainability of marine ecosystems and biodiversity, while supporting the livelihoods of local communities.

In 2023, a pilot study was conducted on the beaches of Batoke and Bakinguili to assess the environmental characteristics associated with sea turtle nesting for the 2023/2024 season. The AMMCO team, in collaboration with local fishermen, used multi-parameter instruments to measure temperature, soil pH, sunshine and humidity on a weekly basis. Data loggers were also installed in the nests to monitor temperature every five minutes. Initial results show a reduction in egg laying activity compared to previous seasons, possibly due to biological rest or a gradual decline in egg laying by species. At Batoke, although the environmental parameters have been recorded, the hatchlings have not yet appeared.



In parallel, two benthic characterisation

campaigns were carried out in May and June 2023 in the Manyange Elombo National Na Marine Park. covering about 35% of the area. Sonar was used to identify rocky structures near the villages of Mbenje and Epinieje, and indications of possible habitats and seagrass beds were noted. However, future missions will be required to confirm this data using aquatic drones and specialist visual surveys. The activities provided a



Deep sea system cameras.

valuable database, but also revealed the loss of mangrove area, highlighting the need for continued research and conservation efforts.

From 11 to 14 October, a series of missions were carried out along the south-west coast of Cameroon, including the islands of Ndambé and Mondolie, Batoke Beach, Bakingili Beach and the offshore areas of Usongo I and II. The aim of these missions was to document marine biodiversity and assess the state of the seabed using underwater cameras (Deep Sea System) adapted to different depths. The cameras were submerged at depths ranging from 12m to 44m to capture images and video of marine ecosystems, providing vital data for scientific research and conservation efforts.

Tests at Ndambé and Mondolie showed that the cameras were effective, capturing clear images and withstanding pressure well. At Batoke Beach, the cameras recorded a rich marine life, although changing weather conditions limited the range of observations. At Bakingili Beach, adverse weather conditions led to the early termination of the dive, but the data collected prior to this interruption will provide valuable information for future studies. The deployment at Offshore Usongo I and II enabled images and video to be collected at depths of 40m and 44m, despite the difficulties encountered in locating and recovering the cameras. These results highlight the need to continue exploration, taking into account environmental conditions to optimise data collection.



#### Developing ecotourism in Dizangué

For some years now, our strategy to reduce the economic vulnerability of the communities around Lake Ossa has been taking shape through an ambitious ecotourism programme. This programme, which focuses on the observation of the lake's flora and fauna, contributes not only to the protection of the African manatee and the conservation of its habitat, but also to local economic development. Local people are encouraged to exploit the lake's riches in new ways, by participating in activities such as catering with Cameroonian dishes, guiding tourists and organising artistic performances.

In 2023, we made some important progress. We have started discussions on a Memorandum of Understanding with the main stakeholders of Lake Ossa, although it is still being consolidated. We have launched three ecotourism boat trips and built a wooden bungalow on the shore of the lake. We welcomed 32 visitors this year and have identified potential tourism partners, notably by establishing a partnership with the NGO Papaye Internationale, which runs a chimpanzee sanctuary on the Sanaga River. At community level, we trained five women to receive groups and prepare meals according to HSE standards, and seven fishermen to guide ecotourism tours. In addition, two farmers were supported to increase their broiler production.

However. we have also encountered difficulties. Collaboration with the conservation department of the RFLO remains inadequate, which is hampering the progress of activities. The lack of professionalism among AMMCO staff and members of the community is also hampering the project's progress. Our communication efforts have been limited, with only two publications on AMMCO's social networks and no advertising spots or leaflets distributed. To overcome these challenges, we are considering several solutions. We want to establish a clear and efficient working framework with the town council and the conservation department to achieve our common goals, continue to build the capacity of communities to improve the quality of our service, and improve our communications by relying on the media and strategic partners.



AMMCO bungalow on the shore of Lake Ossa.

In 2024, we plan to diversify our ecotourism offering by allowing visitors to stay on site and automating the management of bookings through an online system. These initiatives will enhance the visitor experience and support the economic development of the communities around Lake Ossa.



Tourist kayaking on Lake Ossa.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

At the end of a year of significant progress, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all our partners. Your unwavering support has been instrumental in achieving significant progress in the conservation and sustainable management of aquatic biodiversity in Africa. The results achieved this year are valuable milestones that lay a solid foundation for the years to come. This success is entirely due to your commitment and cooperation.

We thank you and look forward to continuing this fruitful collaboration in the years to come.

### **OUR PARTNERS**



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