

WORKSHOP REPORT • PANGOLIN CONSERVATION

Workshop Report: Strengthening Local Capacity for Pangolin Conservation in Western Tanzania

TRCO brought together researchers, veterinary officers, protected-area personnel, local government representatives and local conservation organisations to strengthen knowledge, coordination and practical responses for pangolin conservation across the Gombe–Mahale–Moyowosi landscape.



Opening session of the workshop at the Gombe National Park Visitor Information Centre, Kigoma Town. Photo: © TRCO, 2026

1. Executive summary

The Tanzania Research and Conservation Organization (TRCO) conducted a training workshop titled “Raising Awareness and Building the Capacity of Local Communities and Conservation Practitioners for Pangolin Conservation in Western Tanzania.” The workshop was held on 18 September 2026 at the Gombe National Park Visitor Information Centre in Kigoma Town, and was supported by The Rufford Foundation through a Rufford Small Grant.

The workshop responded to the need for stronger practitioner knowledge, clearer reporting procedures and better coordination among the institutions whose responsibilities intersect when a pangolin is sighted, rescued or confiscated in the Gombe–Mahale–Moyowosi landscape. More than 30 participants took part, drawn from research institutions, protected areas, forest services, veterinary services, the district councils of Kigoma, Uvinza, Kibondo and Kasulu, and local conservation NGOs working with communities across Kigoma Region.

Sessions combined technical presentations on pangolin ecology, identification, distribution and threats with research findings from the Gombe–Mahale landscape and from TRCO's pangolin projects in other Tanzanian landscapes. Participants took part in facilitated discussions, group work, pre- and post-training assessments, a participatory review of TRCO's 2024 draft Standard Operating Procedures for handling, releasing and monitoring rescued or confiscated pangolins, and a participatory mapping exercise.

The main outputs were an exchange of knowledge among participating institutions, strengthened understanding of pangolin ecology and conservation status, a set of practical recommendations for improving the draft SOPs, priorities identified for reporting, awareness, monitoring and institutional coordination, and stronger professional connections among the participating professionals. The SOPs were reviewed, not formally approved; they require further technical review and institutional consideration before broader application.

Support from The Rufford Foundation made it possible to convene these institutions and professionals in one place and to carry the discussion from research evidence through to practical conservation procedure.

2. Workshop information

TITLE Raising Awareness and Building the Capacity of Local Communities and Conservation Practitioners for Pangolin Conservation in Western Tanzania	DATE 18 September 2026
VENUE Gombe National Park Visitor Information Centre, Kigoma Town	LANDSCAPE Gombe–Mahale–Moyowosi landscape
FOCUS Pangolin conservation and practitioner capacity building	ORGANISED BY Tanzania Research and Conservation Organization (TRCO)

SUPPORTED BY

The Rufford Foundation, through a Rufford Small Grant

3. Background and rationale

Western Tanzania provides important habitat for pangolins. Across the Gombe–Mahale–Moyowosi landscape, pangolins occur in areas that are also used and managed by a wide range of institutions and communities, which makes their conservation a shared responsibility.

Pangolins in the landscape face several pressures:

- Habitat degradation
- Illegal harvesting and trade
- Consumption and other uses
- Limited conservation awareness
- Weak or inconsistent reporting mechanisms
- Limited coordination when pangolins are sighted, rescued or confiscated

Addressing these pressures requires more than habitat protection. Practitioners and authorities need appropriate knowledge, clear reporting procedures and strong working relationships across institutions. This report does not identify specific pangolin locations, individuals or trade routes, in order to avoid increasing risk to the species.

4. Workshop goal and objectives

GOAL

The workshop aimed to strengthen the knowledge, practical skills and collaborative capacity of conservation practitioners, local government representatives and conservation organisations within the Gombe–Mahale–Moyowosi landscape so they can contribute more effectively to pangolin conservation.

Objectives

- Improve knowledge of pangolin ecology, identification, distribution and conservation status.
- Increase understanding of the threats facing pangolins.
- Share research findings from Gombe–Mahale and other Tanzanian landscapes.
- Strengthen the identification and reporting of pangolin sightings and illegal activities.
- Review procedures for handling, releasing and monitoring rescued or confiscated pangolins.
- Strengthen community engagement and collaboration among stakeholders.

5. Participants and institutional representation

The workshop brought together more than 30 participants, including conservation practitioners, researchers, veterinary officers, protected-area personnel, local government representatives and local conservation NGOs representing communities across Kigoma Region. Participants represented the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute, Gombe National Park, Mahale Mountains National Park, Ugalla River National Park, Moyowosi Game Reserve, Tanzania Forest Services Agency, the Jane Goodall Institute, and the district councils of Kigoma, Uvinza, Kibondo and Kasulu.

INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED

- Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI)
- Gombe National Park
- Mahale Mountains National Park
- Ugalla River National Park
- Moyowosi Game Reserve
- Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS)
- Jane Goodall Institute
- District councils of Kigoma, Uvinza, Kibondo and Kasulu
- Local conservation NGOs working with communities across Kigoma Region

PROFESSIONAL GROUPS REPRESENTED

- Researchers
- Veterinary officers
- Protected-area personnel
- District game officers
- Natural resources officers
- Forest officers
- Conservation practitioners
- Representatives of local conservation NGOs

Local conservation NGOs brought community perspectives and practical experience from their work with communities across Kigoma Region. They participated as organisations working with communities and representing community-level conservation perspectives, rather than as formally elected community representatives.

Together, these institutions and professionals carry responsibilities for wildlife research, habitat protection, animal health and welfare, law enforcement, community engagement and responses to wildlife incidents. Bringing them together created an opportunity to exchange field experience, strengthen coordination and clarify who does what when pangolins are sighted, rescued, confiscated, injured or threatened by illegal activities.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE	
Participants: More than 30	Districts represented: Kigoma, Uvinza, Kibondo, Kasulu
Protected areas represented: Gombe, Mahale Mountains, Ugalla River, Moyowosi	Sectors: Research, protected-area management, forestry, veterinary services, local government, NGOs



Participants from research institutions, protected areas, veterinary services, local government and local conservation organisations during a plenary session. Photo: © TRCO, 2026

6. Workshop approach and activities

The workshop combined presentation, assessment and participatory work so that participants both received and contributed knowledge:

- Technical presentations on pangolin ecology, identification, distribution, conservation status and threats
- Presentation of research findings from Gombe–Mahale and other Tanzanian landscapes
- Facilitated discussions
- Pre- and post-training assessments
- Group work
- Participatory review of the draft pangolin SOPs
- Group presentations
- Participatory mapping
- Stakeholder discussion on conservation interventions and coordination

7. Research findings shared

TRCO presented research findings from the Gombe–Mahale landscape covering pangolin encounters, community knowledge, pangolin utilisation, reported illegal trade and local conservation threats. The findings helped participants understand the conservation challenges affecting pangolins in the landscape where they live and work.

TRCO also presented lessons from its pangolin projects in other Tanzanian landscapes, including Minziro, Burigi–Ibanda–Rumanyika, Kwakuchinja, Nyerere–Selous–Udzungwa and Amani–Nilo. Those presentations covered pangolin occurrence, habitat suitability, community knowledge and attitudes, utilisation, trade patterns, and conservation interventions developed in response to research findings.

Evidence from several landscapes allowed participants to compare conservation challenges and identify lessons relevant to western Tanzania. The discussions showed that threats differ among landscapes, but that common issues recur: pressure on important habitats, limited awareness of pangolin conservation status, demand for pangolins and their products, and the movement of products between rural areas, towns and, in some cases, across national borders.

Participants also discussed the value of combining scientific research with local ecological knowledge. Community reports, ranger observations, veterinary records and information held by local authorities all help identify pangolin occurrence, emerging threats and priority areas for conservation action.



Research findings from the Gombe–Mahale landscape are presented to participants. Photo: © TRCO, 2026



Findings from TRCO's pangolin projects in other Tanzanian landscapes are presented for comparison. Photo: © TRCO, 2026

8. Participatory review of the pangolin SOPs

TRCO initially drafted the Standard Operating Procedures in 2024 to help guide relevant professionals and authorities in handling, releasing and monitoring rescued or confiscated pangolins. During the workshop, participants reviewed the draft procedures using their professional knowledge and practical field experience.

The review covered:

- Safe handling of pangolins

- Immediate response after rescue or confiscation
- Veterinary assessment
- Animal welfare
- Selection of appropriate release sites
- Coordination among responsible authorities
- Release procedures
- Post-release monitoring
- Reporting and documentation

Researchers, veterinary officers, protected-area personnel, forest officers, district officials and conservation organisations contributed perspectives from their respective working environments. Participants reviewed the SOPs and proposed improvements; the workshop did not formally approve or finalise them.

The participants' recommendations will help TRCO further refine the SOPs for practical application within Tanzania, particularly in western Tanzania. The revised procedures will require further technical review and appropriate institutional consideration before they can be promoted for broader application.



Facilitation of the participatory review of the draft Standard Operating Procedures for handling, releasing and monitoring rescued or confiscated pangolins. Photo: © TRCO, 2026

9. Participatory mapping and local conservation priorities

Participants mapped and discussed:

- Pangolin encounter areas
- Rescue and confiscation experiences
- Potential release areas
- Conservation threats
- Reporting challenges
- Priority areas for monitoring and awareness
- Potential conservation interventions
- Livelihood considerations relevant to pangolin conservation

The exercise demonstrated the importance of combining information held by communities, researchers, protected-area staff, veterinary personnel and government authorities. No single organisation holds all the information needed to understand pangolin distribution and threats, so cooperation among these groups is essential.

Maps containing sensitive pangolin locations are not reproduced in this public version of the report. They are retained by TRCO and may be shared with responsible authorities on request.

10. Key workshop outputs

- Participating institutions exchanged knowledge about pangolin sightings, threats and conservation responses.
- Participants strengthened their understanding of pangolin ecology, identification and conservation status.
- Participants reviewed TRCO's 2024 draft SOPs for handling, releasing and monitoring rescued or confiscated pangolins.
- Participants proposed practical improvements to the SOPs based on Tanzania's operational context.
- Stakeholders identified priorities for reporting, awareness, monitoring and institutional coordination.
- Participants contributed information through participatory mapping.
- Professional connections among researchers, veterinary officers, protected-area staff, district officials and conservation organisations were strengthened.



Group work during the workshop, where participants from different institutions compared field experience and drafted recommendations. Photo: © TRCO, 2026

11. Recommendations and next steps

- Consolidate the recommendations made during the SOP review.
- Revise the draft SOPs and submit them for further technical and institutional consideration.
- Maintain communication among participating institutions.
- Strengthen mechanisms for reporting pangolin sightings, rescues, confiscations and suspected illegal activities.
- Clarify the roles of relevant institutions when responding to pangolin incidents.
- Follow up on priority areas identified through participatory mapping.
- Continue targeted awareness and capacity-building activities.
- Strengthen collaboration with local conservation NGOs and communities.
- Support further research and monitoring across the Gombe–Mahale–Moyowosi landscape.
- Use future training assessments to measure changes in participant knowledge and capacity.

12. Conclusion

The workshop connected scientific evidence with practical conservation action. Participants examined findings from Gombe–Mahale, compared them with lessons from other Tanzanian landscapes, and contributed directly to improving the procedures that guide responses to pangolin incidents.

It also created a platform for institutional learning and coordination among professionals whose responsibilities intersect when a pangolin is reported, rescued or confiscated. Continued communication among these institutions, and further work on the draft SOPs, will determine how far that platform translates into consistent practice across the landscape.



Workshop participants at the Gombe National Park Visitor Information Centre, Kigoma Town, 18 September 2026. Photo: © TRCO, 2026

13. Acknowledgement

TRCO gratefully acknowledges the Rufford Foundation for supporting this workshop through a Rufford Small Grant. This support made it possible to bring together government institutions, conservation practitioners, researchers, protected-area personnel, veterinary officers, local government representatives and community-based conservation organisations to strengthen pangolin conservation in Western Tanzania.

TRCO extends its sincere appreciation to the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) for its participation and technical contribution to the workshop. Special appreciation goes to Dr Angel Mwakatobe, Director of the Western Wildlife Research Centre and Guest of Honour, for recognising TRCO's research and conservation work on pangolins—a critical species requiring focused research, protection and conservation attention. Her remarks encouraged participants and reinforced the importance of continued institutional collaboration for pangolin conservation in Tanzania.

TRCO also sincerely acknowledges the Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA), particularly Gombe National Park, for providing the Gombe National Park Visitor Information Centre in Kigoma Town as the venue for the workshop. The venue and institutional support contributed significantly to the successful organisation and delivery of the event.

Finally, TRCO thanks all participating institutions and their representatives for sharing their knowledge, professional experience and recommendations. Their contributions are helping to build a stronger and more coordinated foundation for pangolin conservation in Western Tanzania.



Tanzania Research
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Research, community engagement and species conservation across Tanzania's landscapes.

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