

Logistics report – Benin 2012 – Exploration Board

Pre expedition planning pre expedition support

Planning for the project began in February 2012 after contacting Severin Tchiboza about potential projects on edible insects in Benin. After the first discussions with our field contact we started writing a project proposal and thinking about the logistics of organising an expedition in Benin.

Very early on in the project, members of the team were given official roles to be able to manage simultaneously the writing of the project, the budgeting, logistics and the fundraising. This allowed tasks to be split up and achieved more quickly. Regular group meetings have taken place to ensure thorough planning by all group members. We advise the use of social media sites (we used facebook groups), email, and face to face meetings if possible throughout the planning process.

It is important to recognise that making an expedition work will require the help of other more experienced contacts. For us, communication with Professors at Imperial College London and UCL on the feasibility and the scientific/sociological methodologies of the project was carried out throughout the project development to make sure that what we were aiming for was realistic. We were also invited by the Exploration Board of Imperial College London to discuss our project, which proved to be extremely useful for planning logistics and refining our aims to be realistic within the time frame of our expedition. Different universities have different set ups to approach student-led projects, and ideally it is best to contact them early in the planning process to gain the maximum from their input.

We recommend students wanting to pursue an expedition to join the “exploration student society” (EXPED) if possible and definitely attend the EXPLORE conference run by the Royal Geographical Society (RGS). Explore 2008 was attended by two of our team members. There we gained invaluable insight into the complicated process of preparing an expedition, especially in such aspects as risk assessment, medical provisioning, and team morale and communication. It is also a great opportunity to advertise your project, and gain enthusiasm from other people setting up their own projects. In addition, we advise taking a first aid medical course before setting up on

an expedition. Two members of our team had attended the RGS Wilderness Medical Training weekend, which gave a good first aid background, and practical workshops to deal with most common situations when abroad or in a wilderness situation. For travel medical advice, we used NOMAD Travel Company, who are experienced in dealing with travellers going to all corners of the world. The training also gives helpful advice on how to prepare a medical kit adapted to your expedition as well as tips for writing the Risk Assessment Form and information on travel Insurance.

We recommend people who want to set up their own expedition to get their hands on a copy of Winser S (ed.) 2004. RGS-IBG Expedition Handbook, Profile Books, London, UK. This book offers a great place to start and gives you great tips on what you need to think before setting out into the wild and how to go about writing budgets and reports!!

Within country transport and logistics

Travel: The group flew from London Heathrow to Cotonou airport via Air France on the 1st of October 2012. Transport within Benin, from Cotonou to Tanguieta, was mainly by bus (ATT transport), the bus leaves at 6.30 am and arrives in Tanguieta between 4 and 6pm every day (£12 one way). For the duration of our work time in the field we rented a driver/guide and his vehicle, this was arranged by our field contact. Travel to our field site in Kosso and Kotiakou from Tanguieta was only 5-6km and took 10 minutes by car each way. In Tanguieta, all places are within walking distance. In Cotonou, the best and cheapest way to get around is by bus, followed by taxis (green and yellow) although they are quite expensive. If you managed to get a good rate with a taxi driver, you might want to take his number and call him when you need to catch a ride, since finding one from the street is not necessarily easy in some places.

Accommodation: The cheapest arrangements would be to rent a house in Tanguieta. However, as it was our first visit in the country we opted for the easiest and still relatively cheap arrangement of renting two rooms at the Nuns of Tanguieta (Les Sœurs de Notre Dame des Apôtres) whose accommodations are right in front of the main church of Tanguieta. Twin rooms are available with exterior toilets and bucket showers for £3/night. The advantages of staying Tanguieta are, firstly, that it is at 5-6

km from the Kosso village, the field site. Secondly, Tanguiéta is served by buses and taxis, allowing easy travel and local connections, and homes the regionally recognised hospital, Hôpital Saint Jean de Dieu de Tanguiéta, in case of any medical urgency. Accommodation in Cotonou is a bit more expensive; however we found a very practical and accessible hotel near the ATT bus station with nice rooms and good coffee at The Place de l'Etoile Rouge: Hotel de l'Etoile (Twin rooms from £13) (Rue 560 Place de l'Etoile Rouge) .

Food: In Tanguiéta we sometimes cooked our own in the accommodation courtyard. We had bought pans and basic cookery on site, the coal burner was given by the Nuns. Tanguiéta has a daily market where you can buy fresh vegetables. There is also a small supermarket where you can find basics. However most days we ate out in the street where food is delicious and cheap (Yam pilé or fries, maize paste with guinea fowl /chicken, freshly grilled meats were all on offer). However vegetarians may suffer as it is hard to find greens if you eat outdoors; in that case there is always the market!

Internet/communication: Tanguiéta has a Cyber space not too far from the hospital. However internet works very poorly and we recommend you forget the idea of having a connection every day. For faster internet you can go to the closest city of Natitingou, this might take a bit of time to find a bush taxi but it is worth to go and see the museum there and have a taste to some of the local restaurants! In Cotonou, and likely the other large cities of Benin the connection is reasonable, however do not expect connections as fast as in Europe. For contacting people within country it is fairly cheap to buy a local simcard, which are easily available in street kiosks (but then need to be activated – this can usually be arranged with the seller of the SIM card), or at the MTN or other operator's main shops if you are in Cotonou or Natitingou (in this case they will already activate your card). However, calls abroad are quite expensive.

Advice: Meet people, get out! People in Benin are very friendly and helpful! Although it seemed daunting to our group at first, getting out and meeting people in the village allowed us to complete and expand our work in the area easily. It is always sensible to carry little money and valuables on you when in any foreign country, however, our group did not experience a single issue relating to theft or aggressive behaviour

towards us. If you are in Tanguiéta ask for Sedou's coffee and take an omelette with some bread, or Sedik's bar to have a mint tea on Friday evenings. Momo will give you a tour of the arts/crafts and the culture of the area, Julie's restaurant is also comfy and nice place to have a Beninoise Beer or a Star and refresh! In Cotonou people tend to be a bit less friendly than in the North, and you might want to watch out a bit more. If you ever have an argument with somebody try to maintain a non-aggressive behaviour. However, Cotonou can still be considered a very safe city – except for the traffic ! If you have difficulties crossing the road, ask somebody on the street if they can help you – they'll usually be more than happy to take up this task.

Within country contacts and support

Within country host contacts are a vital part of making a project successful, particularly if you are in an unfamiliar country or culture. In addition, when securing funding, host country participation is often a requirement for the project. During our project we identified host country collaborators during the planning and preparation period before the expedition. This can be particularly helpful when assessing the costs and feasibility of logistics within the country. In addition, a number of in country contacts were made when we were in Benin, and many were very interested in continuing links with the UK. Below is a summary of our contacts within the country.

Centre de Recherche et de Gestion de la Biodiversité, CRGB, COTONOU



Séverin Tchibonzo, helped us setting up this expedition, welcomed us in Benin and supported this project from its planning to its completion.

We contacted Severin Tchibozo in February 2012 following his presentation on entomophagy at the FAO meeting (January 2012, Italy) on “the Potential of Insects as Food and Feed in assuring Food Security”. Severin Tchibozo is the manager of the CRGB (www.crgbbj.org). The CRGB is an NGO founded in October 2010. Over the years, the centre has accumulated a wealth of experience in entomology, the preservation of cultures, integrated pest management programs, sustainable agriculture and environmental protection. Severin had previously worked on edible insects in a number of communities in Benin. We contacted him to enquire about

potential projects, and he informed us that entomophagy in the North of Benin was understudied and that is where the project started!

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), COTONOU



Once in Benin we had the chance to meet with researchers at the IITA Institute in Cotonou via our contacts with the Hospital of Tanguieta. In particular Dr Razack Adeoti (IITA Agricultural economist) and Dr Rousseau Djouaka (IITA Coordinator agro-eco health platform for West Africa), who are currently setting up a project on the use of edible insects in Food security programmes, were interested in our project ; we started discussing and working together on the potential of developing entomophagy in Benin. While working together with the IITA we also met Dr Georg Goergen (IITA Biosystematics) who helped us identifying the collected insects specimens.

University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC), COTONOU



Before setting out to Benin, we got in contact with researchers at the UAC to discuss the state of agriculture and food security in Benin, as well as examining the potential benefits of entomophagy. We met with Dr Gbangboche Armand Bienvenu (Faculty of Agronomy) and Dr Polycarpe Kayode (Department of Food Sciences and Nutrition) who are currently leading a pilot project on the rearing of *Rhynchophorus* larvae for food in the South of Benin.

Hôpital Saint Jean de Dieu, Tanguieta



Before coming down to Benin, we also contacted the director of the Hospital Saint Jean de Dieu of Tanguieta, Dr Priuli G.B. Fr. Florent, who has been working there since the 1970's and who gave us essential information on the history and urbanisation in the region of Tanguieta in the last decades. He presented us to Dr Aouanou Guy Basile, Medical Director of Paediatrics and of the Centre for Nutrition, who gave us reports and information on the state of malnutrition in the region.

Financial planning and cost breakdown

Our expedition developed a planned budget prior to leaving (Table 1.) that was based upon details provided by our host country contact, alongside research into the costs of travelling through Benin. This is a vital part of the planning process and aids with considering all required expenditures, as well as being required for almost all grant applications. As advised by the RGS-IBG Expedition Handbook, we built in a 10% contingency on all of our expenditures. This allowed flexibility for the inevitable change in costs for unexpected circumstances. Building a budget before hand also allowed our group to identify sources of funding to suit our projects needs. In our case we used a combination of University and Society grants (£1500), personal contributions (£2100), and an online fundraising campaign (£3050) to cover the expenditure of our trip. Although our initially raised money did not cover our trip cost with the ten percent contingency, our group agreed any costs above the allocated money would come from personal funds.

Table 1. A breakdown of cost estimates created in the early planning stages of the trip.

Area	Item	Est. Cost	Sub total	Cum. total
Transport	Flights	£1,860.00		
	Intercity busses	£150.00		
	Vehicle rental	£1,000.00		
	Fuel	£200.00	£3,210.00	£3,210.00
Documentation	Visas	£320.00		
	insurance	£150.00	£470.00	£3,680.00
Medical	Mariangela Vaccination	£305.00		
	Rudi Vaccination	£180.00		
	Laura vaccinations	£250.00		
	Craig vaccinations	£305.00		
	Antimalarials	£240.00	£1,280.00	£4,960.00
Field Equipment	Moquito bed nets	£130.00		
	Medical kit	£35.00		
	Insects boxes	£60.00		
	Insect repellent/sun screen	£20.00	£245.00	£5,205.00
Field costs	Food	£500.00		
	Accomodation	£700.00		
	Field guide	£600.00	£1,800.00	£7,005.00
Total			10% contingency	£7,705.50

Throughout the project in Benin, we kept note of our expenditure, even if collecting receipts was not possible, as is the case in certain areas of the world. For example our group calculated an average daily spend for various categories such as food, transport, and group activities. This allowed us to identify if our budget was still reasonable overall, and within the original plan which areas were costing more and which were costing less. It also allowed us to assess if there were alternative cheaper options we could find during the trip. Later, upon the return after the

expedition, it is important to evaluate the costs of the trip and produce a summary budget for any funding bodies. This process is made considerably easier by keeping tally of spending in country during the expedition. Below is our final table of expenditure (Table 2.)

Table 2. A breakdown of expenditures of the expedition and eventual total costs.

General	Detail	Act. Cost	Sub total	Cum. total
Transport	Flights	£1,856.00		
	Intercity Busses	£179.00		
	Vehicle rental + local transports	£419.00		
	Fuel	included	£2,454.00	£2,454.00
Documentation	Visas	£220.00		
	Insurance	provided	£220.00	£2,674.00
Medical	Vaccinations (combined)	£531.00		
	Antimalarials	£178.00	£709.00	£3,383.00
Field Equipment	Moquito bed nets	Gifted		
	Medical kit	£17.00		
	Insects boxes	£12.00	£29.00	£3,412.00
Field costs	Food	£1,290.00		
	Accommodation	£770.00		
	Cooking, hygiene, communication	£110.00		
	Welcome gifts	£138.00	£2,308.00	£5,720.00
Publicity costs	T-shirts	£100		
	Microphone rental	£60		
	Video editing	£300	£460	£6,180.00
Group events	Pendjari visit, Tabaske festival	£370.00	£370	£6550.00

Overall our eventual spending came out to be lower than our estimated costs. The main differences in costs were made by savings from gifts of equipment (mosquito nets etc), university provided insurance, savings on vaccinations already received, cheaper transport options in the field, and no costs of field guides. However, our estimate of accommodation costs, food, and cooking cost were lower than eventual costs. Mainly due to increased numbers of nights spent in more expensive accommodation in Cotonou than first planned, as well as underestimating the price of food and water in the North of Benin. There were also unanticipated costs in the field for gifts to the people we were working with in Benin. The slight underspend did allow us to redirect resources to video editing and report production after our return from the expedition.