

# Caiman Conservation

*Mobilizing to maintain  
a local habitat in Mali*



**During a Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance/Pays Dogon (GSTA/PD) field visit to the remote village of Borko in northern Dogon country, Mali, threatening invasive plant species were identified in gardens, ponds, and waterways inhabited by sacred Caimans, a crocodilian reptile idolized in traditional beliefs.**



Previously, the community had mistaken the plants for a millet variety; however, after consulting GSTA field experts it was discovered that two plants were aggressive invasive species known as *Pistia stratioides* and *Typha angustifolia*. Simultaneous to the growth of these plants, villagers observed fewer fish in ponds leading to a lack of food for the Caimans.

After discovering the invasive plant species, GSTA/PD facilitated a meeting with the Service Conservation de la Nature (SCN) in Bandiagara. As a result, the Mission Culturelle of Bandiagara (MCB) invited local authorities, NGOs, the SCN, and the organization that built the road connecting Borko to Bandiagara and Douentza to discuss the problem. A joint field mission was organized between the MCB, GSTA/PD, SCN, and PRBP to collect additional information from the community, raise awareness about the plant species, and develop a strategy with the community to address the management and extraction from waterways and ponds.

Borko's chief convened a community assembly attended by elders, women, men, youth, and children. At the meeting, the Mayor, the Chief, and representatives from GSTA/PD and MCB discussed with the community the negative ramifications of the invasive

species. This enabled the community to mobilize and determine a strategy to remove the plants and restore Caiman grounds to their original healthy environment. An agreement was reached to organize rotating groups of community members to commence extraction of the plants and dates were scheduled for reconnaissance and removal groups. GSTA/PD has supported the community by advising on the prevention of plant proliferation by removing new plants in waterways and pond edges.

Today, villagers continue to extract the plants from local habitats. Due to the invasive plants' threats to Borko's biodiversity, DRCN, a local organization in Mopti, has expressed its commitment to collaborate with GSTA/PD. Field agents have been requested to continue working with GSTA/PD to raise awareness and provide support to the village. GSTA/PD is working to identify local partners to assist Borko's extraction efforts through the provision of required equipment and technical assistance to ensure that the Caiman are not harmed and that extraction of the invasive plant species is conducted in an environmentally sound manner. GSTA/PD continues to work with the community and identify alternative uses for the invasive plant species, such as compost.