Traditionally, short stature has been defined as a height below the 2 standard deviation for age when compared with sex-specific standards. Short stature is generally not associated with hormonal defects and such cases are mainly designated as idiopathic, which identifies short subjects in whom the cause has not been detected. The Pygmies are one of the shortest populations worldwide with normal body proportions, although variability among ethnic groups exists, as evidenced by the finding that Pygmies living in the Ituri forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo are on average 8 cm shorter than West Pygmies living in the Central African Republic or the Baka Pygmies of Eastern Cameroon. The physiological basis for their extremely short stature is still a subject of speculation as well as of investigation since it may significantly contribute to our knowledge of human growth processes. Most studies have concluded that the Pygmy growth pattern is normal up to the time of puberty and that their short stature is primarily due to insufficient growth acceleration at puberty. On the other hand, Bailey has suggested that impaired growth in Pygmies occurs from birth onward, since in a longitudinal study it was shown that Pygmy children were also shorter than their neighbouring Bantu controls even at birth.

The aim of the present study was to determine whether or not a secular trend in height has occurred in West Pygmies and their Bantu neighbours during the period 1911-2006, using data from the literature as well as our own gathered during an expedition to South-East Cameroon in 2006.

**SUBJECTS AND METHODS**

Data on the adult height of West Pygmies and the Bantu (Table 1) of Cameroon were obtained from previous studies conducted from 1911 to 1996. The first study on the stature of West Pygmies living in Cameroon was carried out in 1911 by Poutrin. From 1938 and up to the end of the 20th century, there has been a significant number of studies on the growth of West Pygmies (Table 1). The first study on African Bantu height was carried out in 1943 followed by three others conducted in 1969, 1993 and 2009 (Table 1).

The most recent data on the adult height of these populations were gathered during an expedition to South-East Cameroon led by our research team in 2006. The expedition group reached West Pygmy villages near the boundaries of the Gabon and Congo and the Central African Republic, the Dja Reserve, at the edge of the forest near rural Bantu farmers. Little is known about this group of Pygmies. Very incomplete censuses are available and the local interpreter told us that Pygmies from the villages, with negligible contacts with other non-Pygmy populations, number a few hundred. Body weight and height were measured in a group of 81 Baka Pygmy subjects (33 males, aged 40±14 years; 48 females, aged 24±11 years) and in 79 Bantu (31 males, aged 30±10 years; 48 females, aged 24±8 years). The Bantu subjects were evaluated as controls. It was decided to consider as adults those subjects older than 18 to ensure that they have reached final height, some previous studies showing that Pygmy children enter puberty at about twelve years. The age of illiterate adults was obtained with the help of the camp chiefs and interpreters roughly calculated, in relation to important events and agricultural or gathering activities of the villagers. No information regarding births for any subject was available. Body weight was measured using electronic scales and height was determined to the nearest 0.5 cm against a vertical wall perpendicular to a surface on which the subject stood barefoot. Verbal consent from the camp chiefs and from all subjects was obtained prior