

CENTRAL AFRICAN REGIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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Issue Brief #23

#23 — Bushmeat Crisis Causes, Consequences and Controls

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Key Concepts

- Hunting wildlife for meat is a greater immediate threat to biodiversity conservation than is deforestation. Habitat loss through forest clearing is the most important long-term threat to wildlife conservation in tropical forests.
- People in the Congo Basin eat as much meat as Europeans and Americans; approximately 80% of this meat is derived from wildlife.
- As much as 1 million metric tons of bushmeat is eaten each year in the Congo Basin.
- Meat consumption may increase by 3% or more per year as human populations continue to grow and household incomes increase. This rate far exceeds the natural replacement of wildlife hunted for meat.
- Working with logging companies to curb export of meat from concessions is essential to

conserving wildlife.

- Helping countries to make wildlife laws more locally appropriate and to enforce these laws is central to effective wildlife conservation.
- Securing long-term support for protected areas and buffer zones will be the only solution for many species' survival.
- Promoting access to cheaper alternative sources of animal protein may reduce demand.
- Rural families eat bushmeat nearly two days per week while families living in logging communities eat it two to three times more often.
- A significant percentage of animals being hunted are classified as threatened or endangered and protected by international agreements (e.g. CITES).
- In other parts of the world, poor people initially tend to eat more bushmeat as incomes rise. Consumption begins to drop when families become wealthy enough to switch to eating meat of domesticated animals. If this is true for Central Africa, then, depending on where people are along the income axis, changes in livelihoods may either increase or decrease their consumption of bushmeat.

What Is Driving the Bushmeat Trade?

Wildlife has been hunted for food throughout human evolution. Only recently has bushmeat become an important source of income in Central Africa. In rural areas, people once made money growing and selling rice, cotton, cacao, coffee, and peanuts. Over the past 20 years, livelihoods have suffered as increasingly poor road systems make it more difficult and costly to transport goods to markets. With farming unprofitable and almost no off-farm jobs available, many rural people have resorted to commercial hunting and trading of bushmeat because high returns can be made from a relatively small investment, and wildlife are free-for-the-taking. Urban populations fuel the demand for bushmeat; these populations have grown substantially since the 1960s and their buying power has declined with the weak economy. Families that were once able to afford to eat beef, chicken, and pork have now shifted to typically less expensive wildlife as their meat of choice. Bushmeat is relatively inexpensive because hunters do not pay the costs of producing wildlife as do farmers who raise livestock. Moreover, logging companies have opened up once-isolated forests, providing hunters with easy access to abundant wildlife and traders with cheap transportation, which in turn reduces bushmeat production costs and increases supply to urban markets.



What Are the Ecological Impacts?

Though habitat loss is often cited as the primary cause of wildlife extinction, commercial bushmeat hunting is now the most immediate threat, over the next 5–10 years, to wildlife conservation in Central Africa. The scale of commercial hunting to supply large, rapidly growing urban populations with meat is now exceeding levels that can be tolerated by most large-bodied, slow-reproducing forest animals. At current levels of exploitation this will result in the progressive depletion and local extinction of most species of apes and other primates, large antelope, and elephant from hunted forests. Only small, rapidly reproducing animals such as rodents and the smallest of antelope are likely to survive the pressure from commercial hunters.

Moreover, hunting indirectly impacts the forest by (1) threatening the survival of forest carnivores such as leopard, golden cat, crowned eagles, and snakes that rely on bushmeat species as prey and (2) significantly reducing the number of seed dispersing animals, thus changing tree species regeneration rates and forest structure and composition. The direct and indirect impacts of unsustainable hunting will have both immediate and long-term adverse impacts on the structure and function of the forest. In addition, bushmeat consumption may place people in increased jeopardy of contracting and transmitting animal-derived (epizootic) diseases such as Ebola or other emerging pathogens.

Why Is It a Crisis?

Today, bushmeat continues to be an economically important food and trade item for as many as 30 million poor rural and urban people in the Congo Basin. Animal parts are also important for

their role in ritual, and bushmeat has become a symbol for urban elites trying to retain links to "the village" often commanding high prices in city restaurants.

In Central Africa, over 1 million metric tons of bushmeat is eaten each year — the equivalent of almost 4 million cattle. A hunter can make U.S. \$300–\$1,000 per year — more than the average household income for the region and comparable to the salaries of those responsible for controlling the bushmeat trade. Traders, transporters, market sellers and restaurateurs also benefit from the commercial trade in bushmeat, and we must acknowledge that all of their incomes would decline if laws against the trade were strictly enforced. As demand for bushmeat increases, more people will be encouraged to become involved in the trade, increasing the pressure on wildlife populations, threatening the survival of rare species, and jeopardizing access of future families to the nutritional and income benefits from wildlife.

Not surprisingly, the high value of bushmeat as a source of food and income provides severe local, regional, and national disincentives to restrict bushmeat hunting and trade.



The commercial bushmeat trade is the most significant threat to wildlife in Central Africa today.

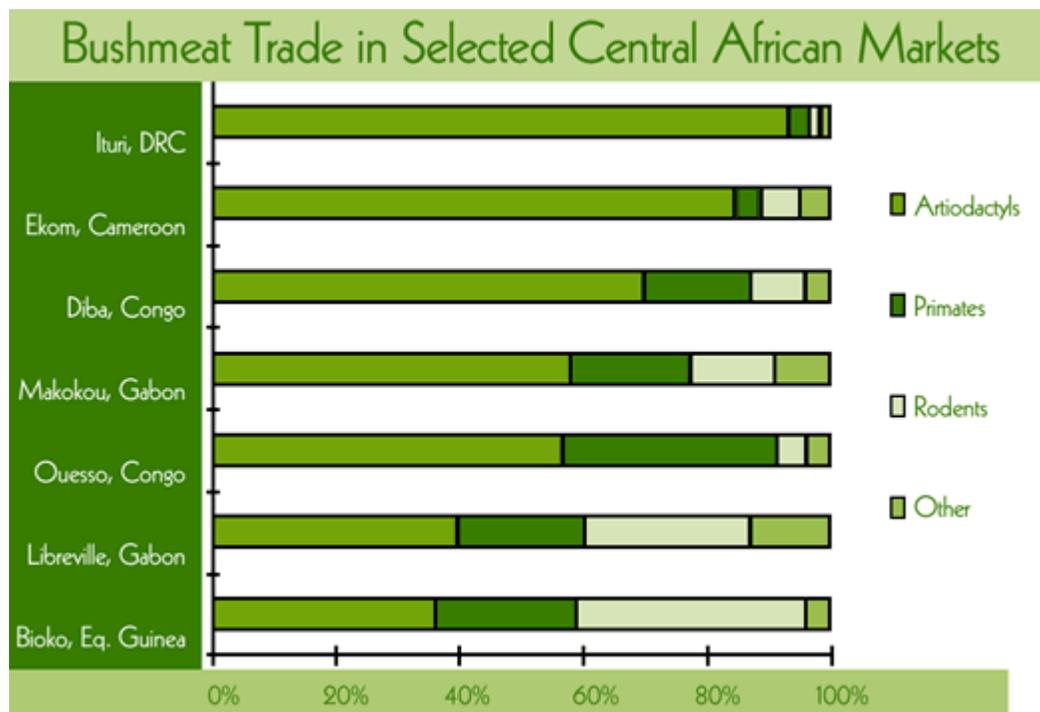
What Is Bushmeat?

In Africa, forest is often referred to as "the bush," thus wildlife and the meat derived from it is referred to as "bushmeat" (in French, *viande de brousse* or *gibier*). This term applies to all wildlife species used for meat including elephant, gorilla, chimpanzee and other primates, forest antelope (duikers), porcupine, bush pig, cane rat, pangolin, monitor lizard, guinea fowl, etc.

What Should Be Done?

Rising demand for bushmeat, lack of income — generating options for rural and urban communities, the absence of affordable and acceptable substitutes, the opening up of "frontier" forests by logging and mining companies, the complicity of government lawmakers and law enforcers, and the fact that almost anyone can go hunting anywhere without restriction — these are the most important factors driving commercial hunting and militating against wildlife conservation.

International awareness and support for control of the bushmeat trade was virtually non-existent until the late 1990s. It is, clearly, urgent that concerned individuals and conservation groups must work with an expanded group of government personnel and other key decision makers to convince them of the significance of the bushmeat crisis, and to cultivate the political will to ensure the financial resources, and professional capacity to tackle the problem.



Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), governments, and industry are awakening to the challenge, and are currently seeking ways to address the bushmeat crisis at local, national, and international levels. Their pilot initiatives include working with logging companies to reduce or halt the flow of bushmeat from concessions and to minimize employee reliance on bushmeat as a source of food and supplementary income; convincing donors to increase their long-term support for protected area management; piloting projects to provide consumers with affordable and palatable alternatives to bushmeat; encouraging governments to develop legislation and law enforcement capacity appropriate to the local context; and facilitating collaboration among the numerous organizations and agencies working in the region.

What Can You Do About It?

Grassroots

Get involved! Educate yourself further about the bushmeat trade and keep informed about emerging activities involving local and national communities supporting biodiversity conservation in West and Central Africa. Contact your elected representatives to tell them that you are concerned about the unsustainable trade in wildlife for meat in West and Central Africa and that conserving wildlife in Africa matters to you.

Donors

Commit resources to (1) curb the export of bushmeat from logging concessions, (2) enhance the capacity of governments to legitimize and enforce existing wildlife conservation laws, (3) ensure that communities in Central Africa have access to alternative sources of animal protein, and (4) evaluate development projects to minimize potentially adverse impacts on forests and bushmeat species.

Government

Commit to financing bushmeat conservation initiatives and to legitimizing and enforcing existing wildlife conservation policies and legislation. Mobilize a G8 commitment to supporting Congo Basin countries in their agreement to conserve biological diversity, create and manage protected areas, and develop long-term capacity to manage wildlife collaboratively throughout the region, as stated in the Yaoundé Declaration of 17 March 1999, signed by the Presidents, or their representatives, of the Republic of Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Republic of Gabon, Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, and the Republic of Chad. Support bilateral and multilateral projects specifically designed to address the bushmeat problem in Central Africa.

NGOs

Commit to implementing, in collaboration with national governments, pilot activities to (1) curb the export of bushmeat from logging concessions, (2) enhance the capacity of governments to legitimize and enforce existing wildlife conservation laws, and (3) ensure that families in West and Central Africa have access to alternative sources of protein.

Private Sector

Concerned for-profit companies should commit to (1) financing wildlife monitoring and management programs within their concessions, including bushmeat control activities, (2) providing alternative protein sources for workers and their families, (3) allocating a percentage of capital investments for wildlife habitat restoration following harvesting (4) setting aside non-exploitation zones within their concessions, and (5) adopting low impact logging practices.

Quotes

Solving the bushmeat crisis is "going to need the full commitment of the range states, but the range states are going to need the full commitment of the United States, and other countries to provide resources so they can develop the kind of infrastructure, the knowledge and the expertise to deal with this problem."

– Congressman George Miller (D-CA)

".. it is terribly, terribly important that we find strength in the growing awareness of the problems that face these amazing creatures, and the problems that face the people that live in this rather sad, war-torn continent at the moment."

– Dr. Jane Goodall

"There are no easy solutions to break this downward spiral of loss, but a coordinated effort at both protection and substitution will work."

– Dr. John Robinson

"I think we have to put an enormous amount of pressure on logging companies so that they adopt best practices and become responsible global citizens."

– Dr. Russ Mittermeier

For More Information

Technical Reports

Bushmeat Crisis Task Force online Information Pack <http://www.bushmeat.org/docs.html>

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CARPE...What Is It?

Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE)

Launched in 1995, the *Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE)* engages African NGOs, research and educational organizations, private-sector consultants, and government agencies in evaluating threats to forest integrity in the Congo Basin and in identifying opportunities to sustainably manage the region's vast forests for the benefit of Africans and the world. CARPE's members are helping to provide African decision makers with the information they will need to make well-informed choices about forest use in the future. BSP has assumed the role of "air traffic controller" for CARPE's African partners. Participating countries include Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and São Tomé e Príncipe.

Web site:
<http://carpe.umd.edu>

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