Bushmeat

Bushmeat (calque from the French viande de brousse) is the term commonly used for meat of terrestrial wild animals, killed for subsistence or commercial purposes throughout the humid tropics of the Americas, Asia, and Africa. However, originally the term was usually used to describe the hunting of wild animals in West and Central Africa. To reflect the global nature of hunting of wild animals Resolution 2.64 of the IUCN General Assembly in Amman (October 2000) referred to wild meat rather than bushmeat. A more worldwide term is game; see that article for a fuller description. The term bushmeat crisis tends to be used to describe unsustainable hunting of (often endangered) wildlife in West and Central Africa or the humid tropics (rainforest), depending on interpretation. African hunting predates recorded history; by the twenty-first century it had become an international issue.[1]

Hunting

Bushmeat hunting is common in many parts of the world where hunting of animals from the wild is performed. The bushmeat trade refers to the sale of any wild species, though Western sources tend to focus on the trade specifically involving great apes. Though some bushmeat hunters have been targeting the gorilla, chimpanzee, and bonobo, as well as other primate species, great apes constitute less than 1% of bushmeat from all species sold on the market. The number of non-human animals and great apes killed has distressed many conservationists and advocates of animal rights and great ape personhood.

The issue of bushmeat hunting is highly politicized, with little support for the practice outside the forests and cities where it is conducted. International efforts to stop it have been launched, especially in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. In the countries where the hunting occurs, orphaned apes (deemed unable to survive on their own, but also deemed too small to be worth shooting and cutting up, to the hunters) are raised and returned to the wild as part of these efforts.

In Cameroon, where gorilla populations are especially endangered, the Wildlife Protectors Fund launched an education campaign to teach children about Koko the gorilla, who is part of a long-term psychology experiment in an American research sanctuary.

Factors

Logging concessions operated by European and Malaysian companies in African forests have been closely linked to the bushmeat trade. Because they provide roads, trucks and other access to remote forests, they are the primary means for the transportation of hunters and meat between forests and urban centres. Some, including the Congolaise Industrielle du Bois (CIB) in Republic of Congo, have partnered with governments and international conservation organizations to regulate the bushmeat trade within the concessions where they operate. Numerous solutions are needed; because each country has different circumstances, traditions and laws, no one solution will work in every location.
Many conservation organizations have come together to address the bushmeat crisis through the formation of the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force \(^2\), whose mission is to build a public, professional and government constituency aimed at identifying and supporting solutions that effectively respond to the bushmeat crisis in Africa and around the world.

Effect on great apes

Some species are legal to hunt and not endangered, and some are not. Only about 1% of the bushmeat trade is in ape meat. However, the apes’ small numbers and the attractiveness of hunting them (being a large animal, a gorilla can offer a good "payoff" for each cartridge) means the impact on hunting them is considerable. Orphans of the bushmeat trade are often sold as pets, as young apes do not have enough meat on them to eat. The Pan African Sanctuary Alliance \(^3\) (PASA) is a member organization of sanctuaries that provide care for bushmeat orphans and education for local communities.

Armed conflict has a direct impact on the killing of great apes for bushmeat. This is largely because of the breakdown of law and order. A well documented case was the killing and eating of mountain gorillas during the military insurrection around Virunga National Park in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in January 2007.

Apes reproduce relatively slowly, at about one-fourth the rate of most other mammals. A study in Gabon, the wealthiest country in the region with 80% of its forest cover still in place, showed that it had suffered at least a 56% decline in its ape population over seventeen years.

Role in spread of diseases

- Apes may harbour pathogens that can in theory affect humans. Ebola for instance may also be found in chimps and gorillas and bonobos, and might spread to humans by handling the meat and consumption of such great apes.
- African squirrels (Heliosciurus, Funisciurus) have been implicated as reservoirs of the monkeypox virus in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and their use as bushmeat may be an important means of transmission to humans.
- Research has shown that Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), the virus which causes AIDS originated from a similar virus in chimpanzees called Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV); researchers believe that HIV probably initially jumped into humans after people in Africa came into contact with infected bush meat.\(^4\)

Efforts at eradication

The bushmeat trade is considered by some anti-globalization activists to be one of many ways in which globalization affects life on the planet, due to the lumber trade (as described in the Factors section above). There is no way (other than by researching the corporations involved, or their countries of origin) to tell which lumber has been produced in a way that assists the hunting of apes, and which has not. It has been suggested that the only way to eliminate the bushmeat trade might be industry-specific protocols, along the lines of the Cocoa Protocol. Although some argue against Western interference with African culture, claiming that the West should take a value-neutral perspective on eating apes, many African cultures greatly respect or fear apes, and frown on their consumption. Some have suggested that the economic incentive to hunt bushmeat has led to an erosion of these traditional values, and that Western interference is therefore appropriate.\(^1\)
It has also been proposed by Dr. Peter Arcese, an associate professor of forest sciences at the University of British Columbia, that farming infrastructure needs to be created and the international exploitation of African fisheries needs to stop. The fisheries are being overfished by mainly EU-subsidized fleets and could collapse within a few decades. Reduced fishery landings in Africa increase demand for bushmeat, which is leading many species to face extinction, and a humanitarian crisis could easily follow. In some locations the biomass of mammals in parks has been reduced by 70% since 1967 because of bushmeat harvesting. Since wildlife monitoring is limited to a few countries, the full extent and future outlook of bushmeat is not currently known.[5]

**Causes of wildlife decline**

Small villages and indigenous communities in Amazonia, sub-Saharan Africa, and other tropical areas still rely heavily on plants and animals for life's necessities (housing, food, fuel) as they always have. The free availability of forest products has long been a sustainable buffer against poverty in tropical forest communities. But as human populations expand, populations of non-human animals diminish, biodiversity decreases, and this relationship grows less sustainable worldwide. "The sad reality is that those who most depend upon wild sources of food are usually the ones who pay the heaviest price for biodiversity loss," says Dr Susan Lieberman, Director WWF's International Species Programme.TRAFFIC: The Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network [6]

A major factor in the decline of tropical wildlife species is the harvesting of wildlife for sale, especially by outsiders. This practice flourishes as transportation to markets becomes easier. Modern firearms mean easy hunting. New logging roads and motorized boats provide quick transport from deep forests to city markets. Markets in cities along the Amazon and other tropical rivers offer a bounty of forest and river animals, alive and dead, for meat, medicine, pets, or for blackmarket traders who will smuggle live animals into wealthy countries such as the United States for the pet trade or medical research.

**See also**

- Africa
- Ape extinction
- Bushfood
- Cane Rat
- Country food
- Endangered species
- Gambian pouched rat
- Greater Cane Rat
- Hunter-gatherer
- Illegal logging
- Overfishing
- Poaching
- Gorillas
External links

- Bushmeat Crisis Task Force [7]
- Blog on bonobos and bushmeat in Congo [8]
- Bushmeat Trade - Threat of Primate Extinction : Save The Primates [9]
- The Bushmeat Research Programme of the Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London [10]
- Ape Alliance - Bushmeat Working Group [12]
- Pan African Sanctuaries Alliance [3]
- BBC News article about trying to prevent the illegal import of Bushmeat to the UK [13]
- Bushmeat Briefings [14]
- Photographs of bushmeat from KarlAmmann.com [15]
- Oil and Bushmeat [16]
- Bush Meat Campaign [17]
- Bushmeat is commonly taken back to the towns after rural visits in Africa [18]
- The wildlife trade monitoring network [19]

References


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