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The Indiscriminate Trapping of Wildlife for Consumption and Economic Interest in Korup National Park, South West Region, Cameroon

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Abstract

This study was carried out in Korup National Park (KNP) to examine the impact of trapping on the conservation strategies and management plan of the park ecosystem. Trapping was largely a rainy season activity and was carried out at a high level for five or six months of the year. The average trapper sets approximately 130 traps of different designs, all of which uses stare wire to construct the snare or noose. Most men are actively involved in trapping because it is easier to perform and requires little financial investment. Trapping has a crop protection function but is mainly carried out as a money earning activity. The average trapper earns approximately 75,000 CFA which accounts approximately 18% of the total village income. The most important species of wildlife for trappers are duikers (*Cephalophus* spp.) which accounts for approximately 60% of income. Primate account for perhaps 20% of cash income, with Red Colobus (*Colobus badius preussi*) and drill (*Papio leucophaeus*) accounting for 7% each. Over 80% of the animal off-take from the KNP (estimated at a minimum of 217kg/km^2) was made up of terrestrial mammals. This revealed that wildlife exploitation is non-sustainable which supports the conjectures of local experts and the statements of half of the trappers interviewed. A probable consequence of a fall in income as a result of law enforcement might be due to conflict between local communities and conservation authorities. However, this compromised the integration of the KNP into regional development in such a way that it is surrounded by communities that actively support its existence.

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Introduction

Historically, African societies had a stable coexistence with wildlife, a function of the intrinsic value attached to ecological conservation in African culture. However, the institution of colonial centralized governments undermined customary laws as well as the authority of traditional African leaders who enforced them. As the colonial governments were unable to provide an effective alternative means of wildlife conservation, the result was a trapping "gold rush" for many species of wildlife (Milner-Gulland, 2001). Following independence; most African states maintained the colonial structure of centralized game departments and national parks systems. In most cases, wildlife management has been based on the adoption of punitive measures designed to maintain barriers between wildlife resources in protected areas and local residents living in or around such areas (Robinson and Bennett, 2000).

This study was undertaken in villages situated within and on the periphery of the Korup National Park (KNP).

Trapping is emerging as one of, if not the most severe, threats to wildlife in several countries in the savanna biome. Ecological consequences of trapping include overall wildlife population declines, reductions in biodiversity, local disappearances of many species from both within and outside protected areas and associated loss of ecosystem functionality, reductions in the effective sizes of protected areas due to edge-effects and, in some cases, complete collapse and disappearance of wildlife populations (Nielsen, 2004). Notably, wildlife populations in the savanna of West and Central Africa appear to be collapsing in many areas, though the phenomenon is not restricted to those regions. Large carnivores are particularly affected by trapping because they are wide-ranging (and thus particularly vulnerable to snaring), are killed as by-catch in snares set for other species, specifically targeted for body parts in some cases and affected by the loss of prey populations. Furthermore, they occur at low population densities and even low levels of anthropogenic mortality can drive severe declines and local extinctions (Milner-Gulland and Bennett, 2003).

However, all wildlife species are affected by trapping (Wilkie and Carpenter, 1999). The impacts of trapping are likely to increase in future as demand for bushmeat is increasing and supply is declining in many areas, resulting in elevated pressure on remaining wildlife populations. In addition to severe ecological impacts, trapping can confer serious negative economic and social impacts. Economic consequences include major negative impacts on wildlife industries which can preclude the option to develop wildlife-based land uses. Social consequences include negative impacts on food security in the long term through the loss of a potentially sustainable supply of meat protein through legalized trapping, the loss of tourism-based employment and the loss of wildlife heritage. The scale and severity of the threat is such that without urgent intervention, one of Africa's most valuable resources will be lost across vast areas of the continent (Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000).

The drivers of trapping for wildlife are varied, and the phenomena tend to fall somewhere on a continuum, from that done to obtain meat for direct consumption (subsistence) and/or immediate community trade, to commercial trade in urban centres or even international markets. There are indications that trapping is increasingly commercial in many areas in response to increasing human populations, and increasing demand for bushmeat both in rural communities and in growing urban areas (Milner-Gulland and Bennett, 2003). In rural areas, often close to wildlife source populations, bushmeat is preferred because it is normally cheaper than alternatives. In urban areas, demand for bushmeat is driven by preference for its taste and is commonly more expensive than other types of protein.

Data on the scale and economic value of the bushmeat trade in the savanna biome are scarce (partly due to the covert nature of the trade). It is clear that illegally sourced bushmeat contributes significantly to economies and to food security in many countries. However, due to the unsustainable nature of trapping, those social and economic benefits are unlikely to be sustainable. Furthermore, most forms of trapping for bushmeat represent an extremely wasteful and inefficient form of wildlife use which captures a tiny fraction of the value of the resource it destroys (Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000).

Cameroon used to have the strongest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa but the collapse of its export trade in the 1990s had a devastating effect on the entire country. The devaluation of Cameroon's currency provoked an unprecedented economic crisis, leading to trapping riots in 2008. People turned to the forest, trapping animals like monkeys or chimpanzees for food. But as Cameroon's population has exploded, the forest's resources are being exhausted. Trapping of wildlife for food (i.e., bushmeat) is today considered a significant threat to conservation of wildlife diversity in tropical forest (Milner-Gulland and Bennett, 2003). Particularly in Africa the available information indicates that trapping is often not sustainable and wildlife populations have shown consistent declines or become locally extirpated (Robinson and Bennett, 2000). Tropical forests have traditionally been an essential source of protein in Africa.

Illegal bushmeat trade is therefore developing fast in urban areas and is beginning to drive demand (Milledge and Barnet, 2000). Hence, unless bushmeat trapping becomes managed within sustainable limits, it will be an increasing threat to conservation of wildlife as human populations continue to grow. Harvesting of a population is sustainable when the rate of extraction does not exceed the population's rate of increase. Furthermore, because many of the species targeted by bushmeat trappers are highly frugivorous, depletion of these populations may have adverse effects on forest regeneration and long-term development (Topp-Jorgensen et al., 2001). Much current conservation planning in response to this problem rests on the philosophy of Integrated Conservation-Development Projects (ICDPs), referred to as Community Based Wildlife Management (CBWM) in

the case of wildlife in most nations. The concept originates from the idea that the long-term survival of wildlife depends on the goodwill and cooperation of the people who live adjacent to wildlife areas (Nielson, 2006). The legal basis is attained considerations to ensure that the population is not reduced by trapping to levels at which the species is vulnerable to local extinction or where ecosystem function is affected (Robinson and Bennett, 2000).

Materials and methods

Korup National Park is located in Mundemba, Southwest Region of Cameroon. It is situated between latitudes 4º54′ and 5º28′ and longitudes 8º42′ and 9º15′, with a surface land area of 125000 hectares as shown in Fig. 1. Adjacent to Korup National Park in the west is Cross River National Park in Nigeria. Data collection was done on questionnaire and check sheets in the study area.

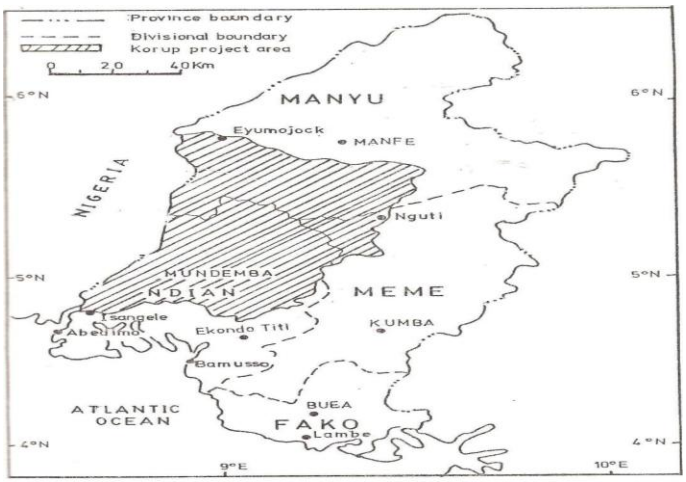

Fig. 1: The map of Korup National Park (Source: Korup Project, 1995).

The research was carried out in nine villages, five within the Korup National Park ,Erat, Ekundukundu (Korup villages), Bera, Esukutan, and Ikenge(Bakoko villages) and four situated close to its boundary, Ngenye, Mopako, Mokango and Masaka (Bima villages).The research team spent between one and two weeks in each village for survey.

Trapping was divided into two main forms. Some traps were laid in the forest, with intension to catch animals for meat and income, and other traps laid in and around farms, within tension to trap pest species reducing damage to crops. Naturally, the provision of meat was also a consideration. Three main designs of traps were used by the inhabitants: Necktraps,Waisttraps, and Foot traps. All were constructed from a mixture of natural and non-made materials. The most important item in trap construction was steel wire, universally used to make the snare or noose. Natural materials were used to make the trigger and spring device and to anchor the snare. The only exceptions observed to the use of wire snares was the use of natural snares employed in the construction of traps for the larger ground feeding forest birds. These were often set around oil palms and baited by young boys.

Results and discussion

A high level of suspicion and distrust was invariably encountered in the villages with respect to the investigation of trapping. Though this generally declined through the stay,but there were always a number of individuals who avoided being interviewed and, if pressed to answer questions clearly gave false or distorted responses.

Trapping activity

The number of traps set by trappers varied greatly from as few as twenty to as many as 500. Mean number of traps set are given in Table 1. One record of 2000 traps being set by one trapper was considered to be dubious. Traps were generally inspected every three days. If the trapper himself was unable to inspect the traps he would delegate the task to another household member or a friend. Inspection of the traps was quite regular but began to tail of towards the end of the season. Consequently it was believed that considerable numbers of trapped animals rot in the trap before they were found, though most respondents denied that this occurred.

Table 1. The mean number of traps set in a season by trappers.

Village	Mean number of traps set
Erat	149 (n=12)
Ekundukundu	275 (n= 7)
Bera	52 (n= 3)
Esukutan	79 (n= 7)
Ikenge	111 (n= 8)
Ngenye	118 (n= 6)
Mopako	113 (n= 6)
Mokango	69 (n= 3)
Masaka	62 (n= 4)
Over-all mean	128 (n=56)
Standard deviation	267.389

Table 2 shows the number of potential trappers in the villages. It was suggested that approximately 80% were

active. In this case Erat village set around 7 500 traps during the season whilst Bera set only 550. However, the movement of trappers in and out of the village affected the total village trapping activity. The movement of school pupils had a particularly important effect. For example, it was estimated that Ikenge village had approximately twenty nine active trappers but during the fieldwork a relatively reliable figure of twenty was found it is believed that the discrepancy may in part be explained by the number of young men still at school who were classified as potential trappers. It should be noted that a number of these young men attended school in Esukutan and therefore were likely to increase the total trapping activity there.

Table 2. The number of potential trappers in the villages in and around Korup National Park.

Villages	Number of households	Potential trappers/ Household	Potential trappers/ Village
Ekundukundu	18	1.4	25.2
Erat	35	1.8	63.0
Bera	12	1.1	13.2
Esukutan	23	2.4	55.2
Ikenge	20	1.8	36.0
Bareka-batanga	7	1.6	11.2
Ngenye	14	1.1	15.4
Mopako	11	1.4	15.4

Trapping season

Traps were mainly set during the dry season, excepting those set around the farms for crop protection. During the rainy season thick vegetation growth on the forest floor constrained the free movement of animals and forced them to use well defined and easily identifiable paths. Traps were set on these paths. As the dry season progressed the forest floor vegetation dies back allowing animals to move freely over the forest floor. It thus become difficult to identify good sites for setting traps and setting them randomly over the forest floor is clearly not efficient. Trapping was also made easier during the rainy season as the soft ground made it easier to bury the end of the spring stick. Though most trappers discontinued trapping activity during the dry season, some continued to set traps throughout the year by removing them to the edges of streams where the vegetation remained thicker and where animals concentrated their movements on paths leading to crossing or drinking points. The numbers of traps set during the dry season were generally greatly reduced from the rainy season number.

As the duration of high level trapping was largely dependent on the thickness of the forest floor vegetation it was not possible to closely define a trapping season. The length of the season varies from year to year with the heaviness and persistence of the rains.

The relative importance of trapping earnings

As described above, trapping was largely confined to the rainy season. The results indicate that approximately 18% of village income was derived from trapping. This compares with a figure of approximately 13% calculated from data collected during the socio-economic survey. The difference between the two figures is much less than that found for the hunting earnings calculations. This supports that impression gained during field work that respondents were less concerned about answering questions related to trapping. Therefore the low figure for trapping given by the socio-economic survey was probably due to respondents' difficulty in estimating annual earning rather than attempts to under-represent the importance of trapping.

Trapping as a subsistence activity

The main focus of this report has been on the importance of trapping as a source of household and village income. It should be noted that these activities also play an important role in the villages' subsistence or non-cash economy. A considerable proportion of animals shot or trapped were not sold. These were consumed within the household and provide a large amount of protein. The majority of carcasses consumed were retained either because of their highly favoured meat (e.g. the pangolin), or because they were small and of little commercial value (e.g. the two-spotted palm civet. However, if there was no other meat in the house a species normally sold would be retained and consumed.

In addition to the quantity of meat provided by whole carcasses, each animal sold also provided a quantity of meat. The butchering of the carcasses for drying meant that the internal organs, and usually the head and neck were removed and were available for consumption. A large proportion of this meat will be consumed by the trapper, particularly as many carcasses were trapped during trapping episodes and were impossible to preserve the internal organs so that they can be carried home. It was estimated that approximately 451kg of meat were produced in this way by the average hunter per annum. Therefore, a total of almost 860kg of meat for consumption were produced by the average trapping per

year. Very approximately, therefore, trapping produces about 120kg of meat for each person living within the KNP.

Meat thus makes up an important part of the villagers diet, and although the majority is likely to go to the trapping and his family, traditional rules which govern the division and distribution of meat ensure that the majority of villagers benefit to some degree. Certain categories of animals may not be eaten by the trapper or his family but must be "donated" to the village. These animals are those that are classified as "big" and include buffalo, giant pangolin (*Manis gigantean*), and chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*). Formerly, bush pig (*Potamochoerus porcus*) was included in this category but now, due to its commercial values, only the head is given to the village. This indicates the way in which commercial aspects of trapping have begun to replace traditional and spiritual considerations.

Other animals were donated to the village because they contain substances that may be used to make poisons, dangerous magic. A trapper who kept one of these animals to himself would be immediately suspected of having taken the dangerous substance, the whiskers in the case of leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and the gall bladder in the case of python (*Python sebaes*).

Respondents frequently indicated that they expect to eat meat at least once a day, and although this may be an exaggeration, theses villages certainly would consume a lot of meat. Some respondents indicated that this played an important role in village life, enabling them to entertain friends, relatives and strangers.

Table 3. The relative proportion and actual numbers (in parenthesis) of different species trapped during observed or recorded trapping episodes.

Species	Erat	Ekundukundu	Bakoko village	Ngenye/Mopako	Mokango/Masaka
Blue duiker	38.0 (35)	25.0 (15)	26.5 (100)	30.1 (36)	22.2 (37)
Bay duiker	19.6 (18)	31.7 (19)	27.6 (104)	9.4 (11)	7.2 (12)
Ogilby's duiker	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	2.9 (11)	2.6 (3)	2.4 (4)
Yellow-backed duiker	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Water chevrotain	2.2 (2)	1.7 (1)	1.6 (6)	5.1 (6)	0.0 (0)
Bush pig	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.8 (3)	0.8 (1)	0.0 (0)
Red colobus	1.0 (1)	0.0 (0)	14.3 (54)	17.9 (21)	8.3 (14)
Drill	1.0 (1)	6.7 (4)	0.8 (3)	5.1 (6)	24.5 (41)
G. White-nosed monkey	8.7 (8)	3.3 (2)	3.2 (12)	0.8 (1)	2.4 (4)
Mona monkey	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	3.2 (12)	6.8 (8)	8.4 (14)
Russet-eared guenon	2.2 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.8 (3)	1.7 (2)	0.0 (0)
Collared mangabey	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.8 (3)	0.8 (1)	0.0 (0)
Crowned guenon	1.0 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.8 (1)	0.0 (0)
Bosman's potto	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.8 (1)	0.6 (1)
Brush-tailed porcupine	14.1 (13)	23.3 (14)	10.3 (39)	8.5 (10)	12.6 (21)
Long-tailed pangolin	6.5 (6)	3.3 (2)	1.6 (6)	6.0 (7)	7.8 (13)
Two-spotted palm civet	1.0 (1)	3.3 (2)	1.6 (6)	1.7 (2)	1.2 (2)
Black-footed mongoose	2.2 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.5 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Cusimanse	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	1.1 (4)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Emin's giant rat	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Cane rat	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Giant forest squirrel	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.6 (1)
Genet spp.	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.8 (1)	0.0 (0)
Monitor lizard	1.0 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Crocodile	1.0 (1)	1.7 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.6 (1)
Tortoise	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.6 (1)
Python	1.0 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)

Large mammals

Two large mammal species were clearly the most important to trappers. These were blue duiker (*Cephalophus monticola)*, which accounted for between 22 and 38% of the animals taken in the villages and bay duiker, which accounted for between 7 and 32% of the takes. It was estimated that blue duiker accounts for 16% of trapping income whilst bay duiker accounts for 44%, a very high proportion.

The level of exploitation of blue duiker was high and relatively constant in all areas studied which indicate that their distribution and population densities are also relatively constant. The level of exploitation of bay duiker was considerably more variable and it is argued that the low contributions to the total catch made by bay duiker in certain villages indicate lower population densities in these areas. Whether the low catch actually reflects lower densities was uncertain given the variable nature of the data, and whether low densities should be explained by over-exploitation or some other unknown variable is difficult to say.

The remaining four species of large mammal, Ogilby's duiker (*Cephalophus ogilbyi*), yellow-backed duikers (*Cephalophus sylvicultor*), water chevrotain (*Hyemoschus aquaticus*) and bush pig, were all recorded infrequently, making up a maximum of 8.5% of the take in the villages of Ngenye and Mopako, as shown in Table 3. These species were rarely taken by trappers and it would therefore be unwise to draw inferences from this data on differences in their distribution and relative population densities between areas. For example, only one record of yellow-backed duiker was made. Though this may indicate that they occur in low numbers it cannot be suggested that they were restricted to the forest around the Bakoko villages. Totally, these four species account for approximately 13% of total trapping earnings. This is because of their large body size or in the case of the water chevrotain, their high commercial value.

It is safe to say that Ogilby's duiker and water chevrotain also occurred at relatively low but constant densities in the areas studied. Water chevrotains were recorded in all villages excepting Mokango and Masaka whilst Ogilby's duiker was recorded in neither Erat nor Ekundukundu. The difficulty of drawing conclusions from this are demonstrated by comparing the ranking of respondent's own impressions of common animals with the actual take.

Conclusion and recommendation

In the absence of the provision of viable economic alternatives, the increased level of law enforcement is the major factor in the formation of attitudes towards the KNP. It is essential that the tangible benefits reach the villages if an appropriate environment for an increase in law enforcement is to be created. Without this it is unlikely that the required decrease in trapping will be achieved. If local communities do not cooperate with the Department of Tourism it is believed that the current small number of game guards can have no real impact on the levels of trapping in and around KNP. However, increased law enforcement has driven the trade in bushmeat "underground" so that it is now difficult to monitor current level of off-take.

The study revealed the need of flexibility of the law enforcement when dealing with villages still located within the park. To prevent alienation of these communities it may be necessary to informally permit trapping to continue until relocation has been carried out. The total lack of data on wildlife population trends within the Park needs to be remedied as this is essential for an understanding of the impact of trapping on the ecology of the KNP and is necessary for the development of scientific management. It will also be useful in countering trappers who maintain that there has been no reduction in wildlife populations.

To determine the population trends it is necessary to collect data over a number of years. Without the ability to compare population data between years no statements on population trends can be substantiated. The trapping survey was not intended to collect data on wildlife populations, but data was collected incidentally. Again, however, as there are no comparative data from previous years it is not possible to comment on population trends.

That said, the very approximate figure for wildlife off-take gives reason for some concern.. It is unfortunate that no comparative figures for African rainforests are available. For the non-selective off-take employed by trappers in and around the Park, approximately 10% of the standing biomass of exploited species could be harvested sustainably. Off-takes in excess of this would probably lead to population declines.

General decline in wildlife populations will have significant consequences for the villages at present heavily dependent on trapping. Although initially, higher off-takes can result from wildlife populations below carrying capacity (Robinson and Bennett, 2000), population declines below a given point will result in a decline in trapping success until it is no longer possible to earn a living. Economic hardship will result. The population is unlikely to recover dramatically, it is likely that sufficient pressure will be exerted to limit the wildlife populations to a low level. This is believed to be the explanation for the low level of trapping carried out in most villages in areas at some distance from the KNP. Over-exploitation has reduced wildlife to a very low

level (though it has failed to exterminate most species). The consequences of conservation would also be serious. Though most forest species are quite able to survive at low densities under heavy trapping pressure certain species are not. With respect to the KNP, the two species whose conservation is essential, red colobus and drill are both believed to be highly vulnerable to trapping pressure. Neither of these species was mentioned as occurring in the areas described above and is almost certainly locally extinct.

It is estimated that over half the income of villages in and around the Park comes from trapping. The main source of wildlife exploited is believed to lie within the Park, though there are considerable wildlife populations outside. The creation of the Park means that continued dependence on trapping will put villagers and conservation workers in permanent conflict. One way to reduce this conflict is to reduce communities' dependence on the wildlife resource. Equally important is the question of how long the present levels of exploitation can be maintained. Quite aside from the environmental and conservation implications of this, the local economic implications are grave. Should the wildlife resource collapse village incomes could be halved. By reducing dependence on the wildlife resource the dangers of a collapse in wildlife populations would be lowered and the chances that wildlife can continue to play a role in the local economy improved.

Conflict of interest statement

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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