

Livelihood Hunting and Attitudes in Southeastern Nigeria

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My research focuses on the relationship between conservation behaviors and natural resource management. I am particularly interested in how different stakeholders (hunters, women, and children) perceive natural resource conservation and how their behavior aligns with their conservation ethic. I spent 9 months in 2011 conducting interviews (in the local languages of Iko and Agoi) and collecting ecological census data on species off-take in three communities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Nigeria was an ideal location for my dissertation because it has endangered monkeys (including the drill (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*, considered by International Union for Conservation of Nature as the highest conservation priority of all African primates), high human density (as many as 863 individuals per km² in the southern half of the nation alone), and limited natural resources (the clearing of forest for farmland and plantations combined with logging activities in this area threaten the remaining 10% of tropical moist forests).

The aim of my study was to document general patterns of hunter harvest in relation to spatial, temporal, and economic variation, assess if sustainable livelihood projects and employment with the local NGO -- the Center for Education, Research and Conservation of Primates and Nature (CERCOPAN) -- is alleviating poverty in this area. Does participation with an NGO influence support for wildlife and resource conservation? To what extent are hunter's game selection influenced by consumer preferences and/or local conservation laws?

Understanding the ecological and social ramifications of unsustainable resource use is a critical issue for wildlife conservation and human well-being. Determining local people's conservation attitudes and values is important because if the needs of a community are not met, then conservation goals are unlikely to succeed over the long term. My research on the bushmeat trade is unique because although many studies document quantity of bushmeat being sold in city markets or consumed by families these studies do not report the catchment area from which these animals are taken. Thus, we can infer the scale of bushmeat consumption from these studies, but we are unable to address the issues of sustainability because we do not know



if the bushmeat sold in an urban or rural market came from 1,000 ha or 1,000km² of forest.

My work in 2009 found a disconnect between hunters vocabulary and the local NGO's "don't shoot monkeys" campaign, resulting in the continued hunting of the endangered drill. In their language, drills were not "monkeys"—they are "drills." This situation highlights how lack of communication between stakeholders can result in ineffective conservation efforts. Preliminary results indicate that 79 individual primates were killed during the nine month study, including 19 drill, that people are mainly concerned about the ability to convert forests to agricultural lands, and that community members want local employment opportunities.

My research would not have been possible without the support

I received from the chiefs councils, volunteer hunters who would meet with me every week, my dedicated Nigerian research assistants, school officials, and CERCOPAN. As I work on writing my dissertation I look forward to traveling back to Nigeria to share my results with the communities.

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