



Tropentag, September 14-16, 2010, Zurich

“World Food System —
A Contribution from Europe”

The Sustainability of Bushmeat Hunting in Central Gabon and the Implications for Local Food Security

JUDITH SCHLEICHER

University of Oxford, School of Geography and the Environment, United Kingdom

Abstract

Bushmeat hunting, the hunting of wildlife for human consumption, is an activity integral to many rural forest communities throughout the humid tropics, often providing a high proportion of household income and protein requirements. However, bushmeat hunting is also considered a major threat to the persistence of biodiversity in tropical forests: in Central Africa alone annual wildlife harvest is estimated to be 1 to 3.4 million tonnes. This raises concern about the survival of hunted species, ecosystem functioning and thus, the future food security of rural communities, especially in the face of expanding human populations and decreasing habitat availability.

Hence, assessing the sustainability of current hunting levels is key to species conservation and people's livelihoods. Unsustainable wildlife harvesting has widely been reported in the literature. However, given the paucity of available biological data and the difficulty in collecting such data, previous sustainability assessments have been based either on (i) models incorporating highly simplistic sustainability indices or (ii) snapshots in time of levels of wildlife offtake. An assessment of sustainability instead requires empirical research on whether and how hunted population levels and/or offtake change over time.

This study therefore investigates bushmeat hunting through interviews and hunter follows in two villages in central Gabon in 2004 and 2010, in particular reporting on the spatial distribution and characteristics of bushmeat catches over time and their contribution to household food intake and income. This talk will outline (i) whether key ecological and socio-economic changes related to hunting took place in the two Gabonese villages during the study period and (ii) the implications for bushmeat hunting sustainability and local food security.

Keywords: Bushmeat, Central Africa, food security, Gabon, hunting, livelihoods