

Bushmeat

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The term bushmeat, derived from the colonial use of the term “*bush*” to describe tropical forests or transitional zones between forest and farm, refers to any wild meat or game meat derived from wildlife species. The term is meant to include non-human primates, other mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians (Bushmeat Crisis Task Force 2000). However, large-bodied, terrestrial, and/or arboreal mammal species are most typically referenced. The representation of bushmeat and “the bushmeat crisis” as a primate-centered issue stems primarily from the fragility of targeted slow-reproducing ape species, specifically the African apes. Further, “crisis” representations are tied to not only the illegal and unsustainable nature of hunting, but also the increasing demand, wealth, and burgeoning global economies of wildlife beyond habitat countries (Brashares et al. 2011).

In the early 2000s, researchers used three terms to describe wildlife trade and consumption: wild meat, game meat, and bushmeat (Bushmeat Crisis Task Force 2000; Eves and Ruggiero 2002). Wild meat is meat acquired for noncommercial, subsistence purposes, hunted using legal means in open hunting zones. Game meat is defined as meat that is legally obtained as part of a commercialized operation that is overseen and regulated by authorized agents. Finally, the use of the term bushmeat implies that the meat was illegally and/or commercially derived from wildlife (Eves and Ruggiero 2002, 73). Given the difficulty in distinguishing between these categories when conducting research in primatology, current practice is to refer to all hunted wild animal meat for consumption as bushmeat.

Globally, bushmeat represents a major source of food and income for both rural and urban human populations. The trade in bushmeat is criminalized due to the prevalent use of illegal

hunting methods (e.g., guns, wire cable snares), unsustainable off-takes, and the hunting of protected species. Bushmeat is regularly documented as a substantial but invisible contributor to local economies (Bowen-Jones and Pendry 1999). While bushmeat hunting is primarily part of the commodity chain of food-driven consumption, it is also linked to illegal trafficking in wildlife (e.g., pet trade and biomedical research) and wildlife products (for medicinal or cultural purposes). It is difficult to grasp the scale and intensity of hunting that characterizes present bushmeat economies. Research points to regional transitions from subsistence to commercial hunting of wildlife as a prime mover in the loss of biodiversity. Levels of hunting vary across the globe but are greatest in West and Central Africa, followed by South America and Asia (Fa and Brown 2009; Milner-Gulland and Bennett 2003).

Research in primate studies, wildlife biology, and conservation management demonstrates that large-bodied mammals are the primary targets for both subsistence and commercial hunters. The desire for such species is influenced by the availability of specific hunting technologies, market prices, and cultural preferences. The most targeted species groups in African contexts include ungulates, primates, and rodents. Temporal shifts in the availability/presence of these prey groups in a specific region are evidenced in hunter off-take and market surveys. For example, research demonstrates that the declining presence of ungulates in the marketplace is coupled with the increased presence of other prey species, specifically nonhuman primates. The removal of small-bodied prey species from trophic systems has critical cascading effects for entire ecosystems, including humans and other large-bodied carnivores (e.g., leopards, jaguars).

The use of the term bushmeat is common in studies of primate conservation. However, local human communities in habitat countries have increasingly adopted the term bushmeat to refer to wildlife hunted for consumption. Interestingly, local interpretations of and the use of the term bushmeat reflect both the positive and negative influences of conservation management

in the creation of new forms of local knowledge regarding wildlife. In many locations with thriving economies in bushmeat, there are local words that refer to “animals” or animal-based proteins that are being replaced by the adoption of the term bushmeat.

The cultural significance of food, specifically bushmeat, to local diets results in greater challenges for sustainable development programs which must integrate complex sets of information across ecologies, economies, and cultures. In these cases, culturally mediated knowledge of food consumption, infrastructure, and physical space must be considered when working to provide communities with protein alternatives. While studies have identified possible alternatives to bushmeat hunting and trade at local levels (see Preston 2012), such strategies are unlikely to curtail broader regional hunting pressure. In many tropical forests, the hunting of bushmeat has already resulted in the local extinction of many species of wildlife, including Miss Waldron’s red colobus (*Procolobus badius waldroni*). Further, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2008 reclassified western lowland gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla*) as Critically Endangered, based upon the potential for remaining populations to be decimated by the Ebola virus, in conjunction with bushmeat market pressures.

SEE ALSO: Anthropogenic Landscapes; Primate Conservation Education; Cultural and Religious Aspects of Primate Conservation; Ethnoprimatology; Primate Conservation and Human Livelihoods; Humans as Primate Predators

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