

## **Food for thought: Bushmeat utilization and protected areas in Eastern and Southern Africa**

*Tom Milliken, TRAFFIC Eastern and Southern Africa*

TRAFFIC has conducted research on bushmeat in Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Bushmeat use spans a wide variety of species, from insects to elephants, and has direct impacts upon the ecological integrity of most protected areas in the region. Some bushmeat comes from legal sources such as licensed hunting, culling and cropping schemes, and from game ranching. However, illegal acquisition and trade are the norm.

Bushmeat is used by a broad cross-section of society, ranging from hunter and gatherer communities to rural farmers to urban professionals. In every country surveyed:

- demand for bushmeat is increasing;
- supplies of bushmeat are decreasing;
- bushmeat prices are increasing.

This combination spells disaster for the future of populations of many species across the region.

Other trends include:

- hunting techniques have been revolutionized to increase yields and make the harvest more commercially viable;
- as larger species decline, consumers turn to smaller, more prolific, animals. This can be characterized as being an increasing trend to the use of “snack fauna”;
- bushmeat is increasingly seen as representing money, and incentives to harvest bushmeat commercially have grown. People’s financial needs are met more readily through selling bushmeat than through livestock;
- urban centres are increasingly turning to bushmeat, creating lucrative markets and country-wide demand structures.

### **What is being done?**

State authorities are generally unable to exert effective management, including protection, outside protected areas, and often within them as well. Many enforcement officers, courts, and society at large do not perceive bushmeat to be a priority. An additional problem is that wildlife is essentially a free resource, with no clear ownership.

One solution which is being applied within the region is community-based natural resource management. Under this scheme, user rights are transferred to local communities, and wildlife benefits devolved to them. This often leads to improved local wildlife management. The best case scenario is when illegal bushmeat demand is cancelled out by legally-derived benefits from wildlife.

### **TRAFFIC’s involvement in the issue**

The core relevant activities of TRAFFIC within the region are:

- conducting ongoing research and monitoring;
- promoting awareness, particularly with potential cross-sectoral partners;
- developing better law enforcement tools;
- addressing important policy issues.

### **What can be done?**

Harnessing cross-sectoral action is key to finding successful solutions. Areas in which positive actions could be conducted include:

- enhanced regulation. This involves developing effective methods for identifying meat; providing law enforcement training and assistance; and building awareness within the judiciary and public prosecutors;
- meeting the demand for bushmeat, by replacing illegal bushmeat with sustainably harvested bushmeat from ranches. This requires effective production and marketing policies, and increased monitoring and regulation of licensed outlets

### **Conclusion**

The bushmeat issue in Eastern and Southern Africa is:

- a human issue with deep social and cultural dimensions;
- an integral part of the struggle for food and livelihood security by the region's people;
- an escalating trend producing profound ecological consequences.

Now is the time to act.