

Bushmeat is sold in trendy restaurants and markets in many of the world's largest cities, where it is considered a luxury food item—including cities in the U.S.

Bushmeat trade expert Dr. Justin Brasheres of the University of California Berkeley has reported that a minimum of 15,000 pounds of bushmeat is illegally imported and sold in the U.S. each year, yet only about 1 percent of illegally imported bushmeat is detected and seized, according to wildlife inspectors at U.S. airports.

In addition to the animals killed directly for the bushmeat trade, an incalculable number of animals are orphaned because of the practice. The more fortunate ones are rescued and placed in sanctuaries, but others either die from neglect or predation, or are captured and sold in the pet trade.

The ecological impacts of bushmeat hunting are also significant. Researchers have coined the phrase "empty forest syndrome" to describe forests devoid of wildlife following unsustainable hunting. As wildlife populations decline, prey for the remaining predators becomes scarce, forcing them to relocate or perish.

Finally, humans who trap, transport, trade, handle and consume bushmeat risk contracting a bevy of viruses, parasites and other disease organisms carried by wild animals, such as Ebola, yellow fever, and HIV.

While it is difficult to condemn those who hunt to feed their families, those who hunt commercially must be forced to reform their practices to protect the world's biodiversity. Otherwise, our wildlife legacy may one day exist at the bottom of a pot.



Jan Reinmond

Logging and development of rural areas to build roads creates easy access to wildlife, which facilitates the bushmeat trade.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Contact the U.S. Department of the Interior to show your support for full funding of efforts to combat the illegal bushmeat trade, both here and abroad, and projects to educate consumers about the ecological, welfare, and public health risks of the trade. Write to: U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of International Affairs, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Engage in ecotourism. Tourists who travel abroad to observe wild animals show local people that wildlife is more valuable alive than killed and sold as bushmeat. When traveling or when shopping or dining at home, if you eat meat, don't eat any exotic animal meats and tell your friends and family to abstain.

Ask about the source of the raw materials of souvenirs, how they were obtained, and whether the company that harvested the raw materials bans the hunting and consumption of wildlife by its employees on the job site.

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Dennis and De La Harpe Photography

The nocturnal armored pangolin of Africa and Asia is killed for its meat and scales, which are used in traditional medicines.



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B U S H M E A T

ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE



cover: Steven Tilston

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Subsistence use of wild animals for food has been practiced for millennia, but the current escalating demand for wild meat—commonly referred to as “bushmeat”—is emptying forests of wildlife and threatening the very existence of some species. Meanwhile, the line between subsistence and commercial hunting is becoming increasingly blurred due to political instability, economic collapse, rising human populations, an increase in demand and a lack of proper law enforcement. The commercial hunting of bushmeat is illegal in most countries, yet with poor policing and weak penalties, it continues to flourish.

As the bushmeat hunters profit, the funds finance additional supplies such as guns, ammunition, snares and flashlights, thereby increasing their killing efficiency and escalating the pace of wildlife loss. From rodents to elephants, few species have been unaffected by the illegal bushmeat trade.

BUSHMEAT AROUND THE WORLD

A million metric tons (2.2 billion pounds) of bushmeat is removed from central African forests each year, according to the Wildlife Conservation Society. This figure corresponds to an estimated 500 million animals. Ironically, more than half of the fresh bushmeat taken from African forests and savannahs

becomes rancid before even reaching the market.

In Central Africa, the consumption of rodents in the eastern portion of the Democratic Republic of Congo has resulted in the localized extermination of the giant pouched rat. The country’s common hippopotamus population, which used to number some 30,000 animals, has suffered a documented 95 percent decline attributable to hunting for meat.

In West Africa, larger mammals have been so overhunted that rodents have become the most commonly consumed wild animals. Between 1965 and 1998, Ghana experienced a 76 percent decline in the biomass of wild mammal populations. During the same time period, 16 to 45 percent of species monitored in select parks became locally extinct. Not surprisingly, one species tripled in number over the same period: *Homo sapiens*.

Though perceived to be a problem only in Africa, the illegal bushmeat trade thrives throughout the world. In the Emerald Triangle—the border region of Laos, Thailand and Cambodia—boar, guar and deer species are routinely killed and sold to tourists and locals in the area as exotic delicacies. In Cambodia, soldiers responsible for patrolling the border have been implicated in hunting wild animals to sell their meat.

Increasing wealth in China has only added to the demand for wild animal meat at restaurants and in homes. Turtles, cobras and other poisonous snakes, pangolins and civet cats are all popular, with the last species directly linked to the outbreak of Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that afflicted China just a few years ago. In 2001, an estimated 20 tons of snakes

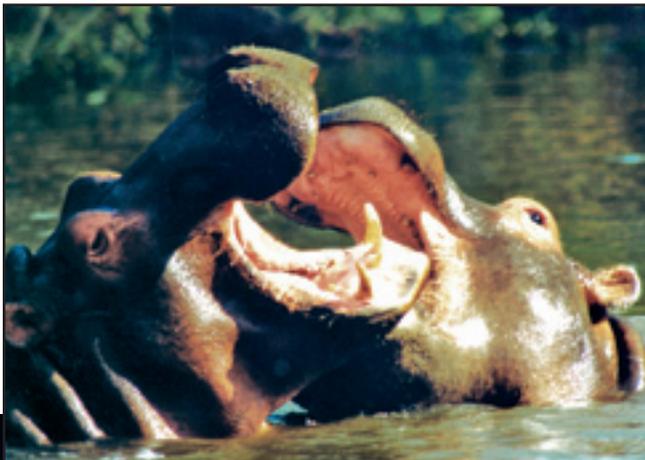
and 20,000 birds were consumed every day by diners eating at restaurants in Guandong—one single city in southern China. By 2004, cobra populations had declined by 90 percent, while populations of common rat snakes had been reduced by 75 percent. As China’s wildlife populations diminish, the demand is being met by an increase in the killing and import of bushmeat from India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Expanding human populations have caused a bushmeat crisis in South America as well. With increased access to the forests as a result of road construction and a low risk of apprehension, primate species are being devastated by the illegal trade. In Latin America, it is estimated that 10 million monkeys are killed each year for their meat, skins and teeth. In the Amazon basin, the number of medium and larger primates has declined by over 93 percent in the past 20 years, due primarily to the demand for their meat.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS

The illegal bushmeat trade is the product of a smorgasbord of political, social and economic factors. To satisfy increasing demand, hunters and trappers are traveling deeper into the world’s forests, facilitated by the constant construction of roads in Africa, South America and elsewhere for logging, mining and other extractive industries.

Though the majority of illegal bushmeat is sold in Africa, Asia and South America, it is not limited to the rural markets in villages across the developing world.



Karen Pezillo/Savethehippos.com

In 2006, a Congolese militia group killed more than 400 hippopotamuses for their meat, over half the species’ population in Africa’s Virunga National Park.



Karl Ammann/Karlamann.com

Carcasses of slaughtered spot-nosed guenons are transported from their forest homes for preparation and sale at a restaurant.



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Bushmeat hunting is not just confined to Africa and Asia; the industry thrives in Amazonia, serving local and international markets.