



Review

The bushmeat trade in African savannas: Impacts, drivers, and possible solutions



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ABSTRACT

The bushmeat trade, or the illegal acquisition and exchange of wild meat, has long been recognised as a severe problem in forest biomes, but receives little attention in savannas, perhaps due to a misconception that bushmeat hunting is a low-impact subsistence activity. Though data on impacts are scarce, indications are that bushmeat hunting is a widespread problem in savannas, with severe impacts on wildlife populations and wildlife-based land uses. The impacts of the bushmeat trade in savannas vary from edge-effects around protected areas, to disproportionate declines of some species, to severe wildlife declines in areas with inadequate anti-poaching. In some areas, bushmeat contributes significantly to food security, but these benefits are unsustainable, and hunting is wasteful, utilising a fraction of the wildlife killed or of its financial value obtainable through tourism, trophy hunting and/or legal game meat production. The bushmeat trade appears to be becoming increasingly commercialised due to elevated demand in rural areas, urban centres and even overseas cities. Other drivers for the trade include human encroachment of wildlife areas; poverty and food insecurity; and inadequate legal frameworks to enable communities to benefit legally from wildlife, and to create incentives for people to desist from illegal bushmeat hunting. These drivers are exacerbated by inadequate wildlife laws and enforcement and in some areas, political instability. Urgent efforts are needed to address these drivers and raise awareness among local and international governments of the seriousness of the threat. Failure to address this will result in severe wildlife declines widely in African savannas, with significant ecological, economic and social impacts.

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