

BCTF FACT SHEET

May 2002

The primary goal of the **Bushmeat Crisis Task Force (BCTF)** is to facilitate the work of its members in identifying and implementing effective and appropriate solutions to the commercial exploitation of endangered and threatened species.

Bushmeat Focus Issue:

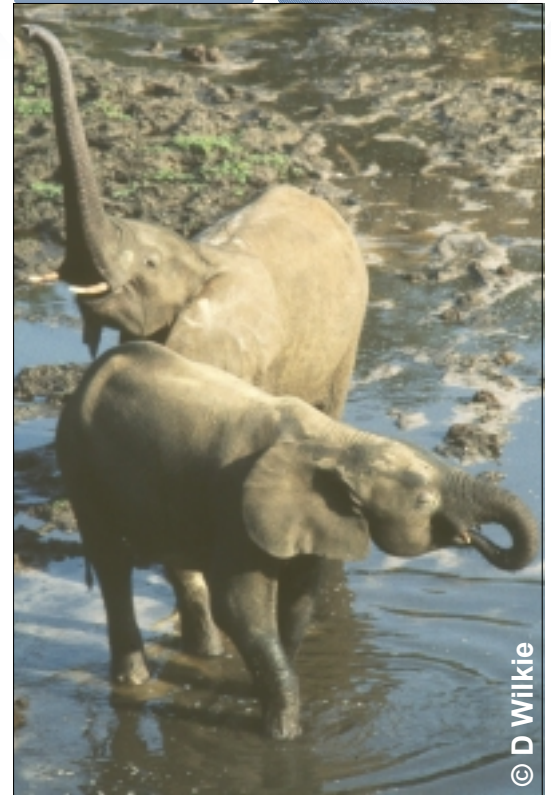
AFRICAN ELEPHANTS AND THE BUSHMEAT TRADE

Species Involved: Both species of the African elephant, *Loxodonta africana*, the savannah elephant, and *Loxodonta cyclotis*, the forest elephant

Stakeholders Involved: Rural & Urban Communities, Hunters, Traders, Market Sellers, Farmers, Safari & Trophy Hunters, the Eco-Tourism Industry, Community Based Conservation Projects, International Logging Companies, International Conservation Organizations & their Constituencies

Key Concepts

- ◆ African elephants are considered keystone species because of the pivotal role that they play in structuring the plant and animal communities where they reside.
- ◆ The continental decline of the African elephant and the contraction of its range have historically been associated with the ivory trade as well as habitat fragmentation due to human population expansion, and desertification. However, elephants are increasingly targets of the illegal market in bushmeat.
- ◆ Currently the majority of the elephants' range in Africa is outside of protected areas, particularly in Central Africa, where elephants are increasingly vulnerable to human encroachment and illegal hunting



Forest Elephants at a bai (forest clearing) in Dzanga-Sanga, Central African Republic.

Summary: Despite the growing consensus and recognition that elephants are being killed illegally not only for ivory, but also for their meat, there is a lag in the research focus on this issue. Most likely this is because illegal poaching for ivory has overshadowed investigations of the poaching of elephants for bushmeat. It is important to delineate this gap in the bushmeat research knowledge base in order to identify and prioritize critical habitat, threatened elephant populations within these regions, and the still un-asked research questions before it is too late. By defining the gap in the current knowledge conservation organizations will be better able to direct future field research and conservation projects, and to help potential funders of these projects to prioritize and allocate scarce research monies.

Background: Following from the 10th meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1997, MIKE or Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants was developed for measuring and recording current levels and trends of illegal elephant hunting and trade in ivory in African range states. MIKE was designed with the aim of determining real trends in illegal killing of elephants, and of measuring changes in these trends over time in order to assist decision-making by range states and other parties to CITES.

What is the Bushmeat Crisis?

In Africa, forest is often referred to as 'the bush,' thus wildlife and meat derived from it is referred to as 'bushmeat' (in French – *viande de brousse*). This term applies to all wildlife species, a number of which are threatened and endangered species used for this meat. Though habitat loss is often cited as the primary cause of wildlife extinction, commercial hunting for the meat of wild animals has become the most immediate threat to the future of wildlife in the Congo Basin in the next 5-10 years and has already resulted in widespread local extinctions throughout West Africa.

At the 11th Conference of Parties of CITES held in Nairobi in April of 2000, several important facts regarding illegal killing of elephants emerged. The first was that elephant poaching in Central and Eastern Africa is very likely linked to the increased presence of illegal weapons following political unrest in the region. MIKE was also able to confirm that illegal elephant killing was associated not just with the ivory trade, but with a growing trade in bushmeat, and that this trade, especially in Central Africa, was increasingly international. In certain instances raw tusks appeared to be no more than a secondary by-product of the meat trade.

Current Understanding and Activities: Eves and Ruggiero (2000) estimated that 273 elephants were killed over a four-month period from 1995-1996 in three Forest Management Units in northern Republic of Congo. These researchers found that on average, about US\$400 in profits were reported per elephant, a figure that includes money derived from both meat and tusks. Eves and Ruggiero concluded that the commercialization of meat provided a strong incentive to hunt elephants, despite the decreasing tusk size that results from overexploitation of the population. In fact, it may be possible that reduced profits from the ivory trade due to decreasing tusk size are creating an incentive for the hunting of elephants specifically for meat. Biologists agree that species such as elephants, which tend to exhibit slow maturation and reproduction rates relative to other species, are especially vulnerable to commercial hunting, and may even drive populations to local extinction.



Savannah elephant with trunk severed by poachers' snare, Maasai Mara, Kenya.

Currently the majority of elephant range in Africa is outside of protected areas, particularly in Central Africa, where elephants are increasingly vulnerable to human encroachment. Even within protected areas the protection afforded is often on "paper" alone as the parks have little management capacity or resources for protection. Increasing numbers of humans, whether they are refugees from political or religious persecution, soldiers, farmers, or employees of international logging concessions, are moving into elephant range which was previously only lightly occupied by humans. Political instability, war and civil strife contribute to poaching and the hunting of elephants for meat across their range. In Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, displaced refugees reduced elephant families from 350 down to about three. In addition, international logging concessions, while providing a significant source of revenue for the densely forested countries of West and Central Africa, can often have negative effects on the elephant populations within and around their concessions. Road construction associated with selective logging dramatically increases local demand for meat in logging camps, increases hunter access to previously remote areas for bushmeat hunting, and provides a mechanism for the transport and sale of illegally killed meat.

Solutions: Elephants face increasing pressure from the illegal bushmeat *and* illegal ivory trades, human encroachment, flow of arms, and fragmentation of range. At the same time the political, financial and administrative capacity to protect and manage elephants is not guaranteed. Effective elephant monitoring must be put in place, and it should be linked to increased support for enforcement and protection. In addition, the fundamental causes of any range state's elephant management problems often extend beyond its own borders. In this regard, the increasingly regional approach to elephant monitoring and management being taken by some of the range states is certainly a positive sign. However, the truly global engagement needed in response to the realities of elephant conservation has not yet occurred.



www.bushmeat.org

For a summary report including a full list of references used in preparing this document, please contact BCTF: info@bushmeat.org

For additional information on species affected by the African bushmeat trade please see the following BCTF Fact Sheets:

[Duikers \(Forest Antelopes\)](#) ♦ [Forest Carnivores](#) ♦ [Great Apes](#) ♦ [Rodents](#)

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