

**ASSESSMENT OF BUSHMEAT TRADE  
DURING THE ANNUAL CLOSED SEASON  
ON HUNTING IN GHANA**

**(1<sup>ST</sup> AUGUST - 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2001)**



Prepared By



Conservation International Ghana  
(In collaboration with FAO Regional Office for Africa)

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# CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL GHANA

## **Conservation International Ghana**

### **Mission Statement**

*Conservation International (CI) believes that the Earth's natural heritage must be maintained if future generations are to thrive spiritually, culturally, and economically. Our mission is to conserve the Earth's living heritage, our global biodiversity, and to demonstrate that human societies are able to live harmoniously with nature.*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE BUSHMEAT CRISIS IN GHANA

### 1.1 Introduction

Bushmeat hunting has a long pedigree dating back to ancient times when hunting was done on subsistence basis and regulated by socio-cultural practices, i.e. norms, sanctions and taboos. Most of the various animal species were considered sacred, or totems and their exploitation restrained by taboos. Other animals were regarded as unclean and abhorred because of some misfortune in the past associated with those species or religious restrictions. Some animals were used as sacrificial or ceremonial animals for religious, cultural and festivals of some communities. Such animals or species were strictly protected by the various customary rites and practices.



*Fig. 1a: Royal Antelope being prepared for sale*

In the past few people were traditionally recognised as hunters by each community. Traditionally, hunting was carried out mainly in the dry season. This traditional hunting practice allowed animals to breed during the rainy season. Furthermore, there were certain days during the week when hunting was not allowed. Some forests and rivers were also considered as sacred groves and access to the public was limited, therefore, provided sanctuaries for the animals.

Bushmeat was harvested for meat, medicine and as major ingredient in local socio-cultural ceremonies or festivals, which were considered as part and parcel of the socio-cultural life of the people. In Ghana,



many traditional societies foster beliefs systems as well as social norms which encouraged or even enforced limits to exploitation of biological resources. This in effect ensured the sustainable utilization of all such natural resources. However, over the last three decades, economic change, population growth and other factors have brought far-reaching shifts in the sustainable traditional patterns of resource use (BSP, 1993) to an unprecedented increase in bushmeat hunting in the West and Central Africa to the extent that animals which were hitherto considered as sacred are now commonly sold in the markets.



*Fig.1b Bushmeat Retailer*

In recent years, there have been an increasing number of people, involved in the bushmeat trade, i.e. hunters, bushmeat traders, restaurants operators and exporters of wild animals. Hunting is now done in complete disregard to the age-old socio-cultural checks and balances which have promoted biodiversity conservation and enhanced food security of the local communities. The sizes of the animals are diminishing at a fast rate as dangerous methods of hunting, i.e. chemicals and sophisticated weapons are being used in hunting (Fig. 1a & 1b). The future of wildlife, food security and the sustainability of our ecosystems which support life in the Upper Guinea are in danger.

## ***1.2 Legislative Framework for Wildlife Management in Ghana***

The Wild Animal Preservation Act 43 of 1961 was enacted in accordance with Ghana's obligations as a party to the African Convention of 1900. The Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission (formerly Wildlife Department) is the government agency that was legally mandated to protect and conserve Ghana's

wildlife resources. This mandate has been facilitated through the enactment of various legislative instruments in respect of the following, among others:

- establishment of a system of protected areas that is aimed at ensuring that the fauna and flora of each vegetation type is well represented;
- prohibition of hunting and collection of plant materials in protected areas, except by permit;
- establishment of a closed season on hunting;
- species of animals approved for hunting;
- approved and outlawed hunting methods
- imposition of penalties; and
- control of harmful or dangerous animals.

The enactment of the Wildlife Reserves Regulation of 1971, Legislative Instrument 710, resulted in the establishment of six (6) wildlife reserves. This has since increased to sixteen (16) as at 1991, through a number of amendments (LI 1105, 1977; LI 1283, 1983; LI 1525, 1991). Two other proposed reserves, were under consideration. The regulations prohibited hunting and collection of plant specimen from the legally constituted reserves. It also outlined basic park management guidelines (WD, 1998).

The enactment of the Wildlife Conservation Regulations 1971, LI 685, in the same year, especially covered all other wildlife resources outside the protected areas. The following were the major issues outlined in the regulations:

- restrictions on hunting and offences
- issuance of game licences;
- export permit for game and trophies; and
- other general issues



Under the restrictions on hunting certain animals are designated as wholly protected, for which their hunting, capture or destruction at any time are prohibited. Also prohibited is the hunting at any time of any animal or adult accompanied by its young. Hunters are required to obtain a hunting licence for specific species while a permit is also needed to export animals out of the country. The regulation has since been further amended by LI 1284 of 1983, LI 1357 of 1988 and LI 1452 of 1989 (WD, 1999).

### 1.3 *The Annual Closed Season on Hunting Policy*

As part of the restrictions on hunting, an Annual Closed Season, covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> December of every year was imposed for which no person was allowed during the period to hunt, capture or destroy any wild animal except certain specified species.

The Annual Closed Season on Hunting was prescribed by the Wildlife Division based on the existing traditional knowledge of the reproduction of wild animals at the time. The purpose was to protect pregnant animals and those that were nursing their young during the period. It was supposed that the four-month period was long enough to enable most of the pregnant and lactating mothers, especially the large mammals, wean their young before 1<sup>st</sup> December of every year. This was to ensure that the



*Fig.2 Endangered Olive Colobus Monkey*

off-spring of such animals would be capable of escaping from all possible threats to their survival.

It would seem that currently, the socio-cultural, legal, biological and religious controls and management practices have broken down. For example, over the past five years, it has been observed that the bushmeat trade has continued unabated

during the Annual Closed Season on Hunting, covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> December. Almost all species are seen displayed openly in the markets, including endangered, rare and wholly protected species. (Fig. 2) Extensive bushmeat hunting operations and market centres have emerged. Bushmeat traders and hunters associations are now in existence and are now breaking established wildlife laws and management regulations with impunity. One scarcely sees any arrest by the Police for hunting restricted animals while the courts seldom prosecute offenders even when they are arrested. There are no reliable statistical information on hunting. This compounds decision-making and awareness program to address the problem. It is for this reason that CI in collaboration with FAO has carried out studies with the view to understand the threats militating against effective biodiversity conservation, food security and the implication of the extinction of wildlife resources on the socio-cultural life of Ghanaians

## **2.0 THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The main project objectives were:

- To carry out a market survey of the bushmeat trade during the Annual Closed Season on Hunting, so as to review and advise decision-makers on the appropriateness of the existing regulations and policies;
- To establish a database on the various aspects of the bushmeat trade in Ghana
- To organise a stakeholder validation workshop on the bushmeat trade during the closed season; and
- To disseminate information on the bushmeat trade during the 2001 closed season on hunting.