

Wildlife Justice

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AFRICAN TRADITIONS AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



“Traditionally, wildlife was regarded as a valuable community asset, which was used and protected by customs and taboos”

Yaa Ntiamao-Baidu



“The shooting and hunting of such animals are highly regulated and people who violate traditions are sanctioned spiritually and traditionally”

Fon Abumbi II of Bafut

“The rationale behind modern wildlife activities is greed, the hunt for money. This contradicts the way things were run in the traditional African societies”

“Wildlife laws that existed then were roundly kept and respected by a society that understood that its own survival depended on wildlife”



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Africa's Ancient Conservation Wisdom

Much of what I know of nature protection I learnt from Africa. In my years in the bush, living with communities still leading a tribal life, I discovered the respect humans can show to their environment, the co-existence of animals and man, and old wisdoms that keep the communities from destroying the nature surrounding them in favour of a fast gain.

Whenever I asked - why is this animal not hunted? Or - why did you let this one go, while we are still hungry? The answers I got were never technical but opened an entire spiritual world full of meaning, values and heritage that give a people its identity. I absorbed all I could with great admiration.

It was only later when I found myself in the conservation field that I discovered, to my surprise, that conservation in Africa has not been based on African traditions, or its peoples' rich cultures, or their spirituals connection with nature.

This paradox is the subject of this issue of *Wildlife Justice* examining how African traditions protected nature, and how respecting African cultures can lead to better nature protection based on moral values. In the battle against wildlife crime we discovered ancient traditions - our ally and our common enemy - modern greed.

In this issue of *Wildlife Justice* we showcase different traditions and their contribution to wildlife protection and gives a window to beliefs, legends, and customs that protect wildlife. From the Baka pygmies and Bafut people in Cameroon to the Vili in Congo from the Mitsogo and Pouvi People in Gabon to the Madja of the Central Africa Republic - each people explains its traditional protection measures. Articles and interviews contain contributions from a verity of chiefs and jurists, traditional leaders, government officials and conservationists.

This issue is designed to encourage a long awaited discussion - should we continue to base conservation in Africa on ideas from the outside? Or are there other opportunities shaped by Africa's strengths?

Is Africa ready to invent wildlife conservation that is African?

Ofir Drori





The African Conservation Dilemma: Ancient Tradition vs Modern Greed

Eric Kaba Tah

Since the mid 1970s, endangered wildlife species have attracted increasing concern from many quarters following early warning of their extinction and in trying to understand how we arrived at such high levels of extinction, a look at the rapid destruction of African traditional conservation practices and the role they played erstwhile in maintaining the ecosystem at equilibrium is fundamental. While we understand that the problems connected with the decline in species today are found principally in illegal trade, the trade itself is a result of the change in values and belief systems which existed hitherto and prevented a sustained destruction of nature. The rationale behind modern day wildlife activities is greed, the hunt for more money. This contradicts the way things were run in the traditional African societies.

African traditional conservation practices have evolved over the years and the worth and value given to wildlife yesterday, are being diluted with new motives, new incentives and new behaviours. Money dictates the killing of wildlife species as opposed to what obtained. One of the principal canons of African traditional conservation was the rational killing of wildlife species. In this system, when the village for instance decided to kill an elephant, it was aimed at providing meat to a whole village for a considerable period of time. What happens today, for example, is that a villager is employed by wildlife dealers to shoot and kill an elephant just to pluck off the tusks for sale to an even richer dealer who makes his money in an Asian market.

African traditional conservation practices were focused around the culture of the people and whoever says culture says values, beliefs and norms shared by a group of people. This means that peoples' perceptions of activities surrounding them are conditioned to follow particular patterns. For example, in Africa, some ethnic groups do not eat meat from apes at all. Today, we live in a world of great socio-ethnic conglomerations of people. People who have very little in common are obliged to live together in our towns and villages. The very nature of these conglomerations have favoured the emergence of a new culture, that of greed and lust for money.

The elephants, the gorillas, the chimpanzees have been paying the price for this unreasonable greed. Nothing is respected anymore, even nature, the base of our existence. A fundamental element of the traditional practices of wildlife conservation was the killing period. There were

African traditional conservation practices were focused around the culture of the people

restrictions and taboos as to the killing of animals and according to specified periods. Knowingly or unknowingly, the villages by so doing allowed these species sufficient time to reproduce and replenish in numbers which is something being applied by governments today with the idea of hunting periods. The government, in order to recreate these periods which disappeared with



the weakening of traditional rules and values, instituted hunting periods but the problem is how effectively respected is the government's hunting period. In the traditional setting, nobody could dare kill any animal species if it went against the traditional restrictions imposed on all. This takes us back to law enforcement because even if governments create hunting periods, the hunters must be controlled to ensure that they do not shoot out of the range of their permits, the hunting period or do not kill species they are not allowed to kill. And even more important is the fact that wildlife traffickers do

not launder their products through the mechanisms of lawful hunting.

Another important aspect of the African culture was the imposition of sacred sites in the villages. This created some sanctuary for wildlife species. These areas were totally protected, feared and revered by all. No one was allowed to move into such areas to hunt. In the Western Regions of Cameroon today, the only areas left where there is some semblance of intact forests are the sacred forests around palaces of traditional rulers. These are areas where you can still find indigenous species of trees for example, but the problem is, they are empty forests, devoid of substantial wildlife. While the forests could be protected, the vegetation there protected, animals could never benefit from the same kind of protection as they would always stray away from the sacred area. Today, governments have created national parks and reserves which are protected by the law. But these parks lack the kind of control and protection that existed with sacred traditional forests. Today's parks are manned by armed ecoguards and law enforcement officials who constantly find it difficult to chase down elusive and seasoned traffickers who at times know the parks even better than the ecoguards.

African cultures were built around strong traditional institutions that would oversee and regulate the killing of animals and the purposes for which these animals were killed. The grassland regions in Cameroon do have strong and powerful «Fons» and sacred societies - the «Kwifons», the «Ngumbas» and the «Sambas» whose word was law and order at the same time. These institutions have lost some of their authority to the modern institutions of the State and so some of these matters are treated by State institutions. The State institutions are finding it very difficult to play the role inherited from African cultures. In traditional conservation systems, control was rooted deep inside the consciences of everyone and some of the fears of repercussions were so deep that no one dared go against any taboo, any law or regulation that was in place. Control today is external and exercised by the government, through laws, for example the 1994 wildlife law in Cameroon. This control has shown its limitations and the destruction of wildlife species has continued. This is fueled by a very determined and greedy mass of wildlife traffickers, who are products of the modern society.

With the extinction problem growing by the day and becoming even tougher to tackle, maybe we need to bring back African traditional practices that saved so many wildlife species for so many decades



The Compatibility of Local Community Practices with Government Policy in Wildlife Management

Dr. Chi Augustine Muam in Douala

The Cameroon wildlife law (see Article 2(14) of the 1995 Decree) provides for «participatory management» and defines it as any wildlife resource management approach which involves local communities and all other stakeholders as much as possible. How and where this participatory management is to be practiced is not clear.

Given that co-management in government game reserves in Cameroon does not exist, can it be in a ‘Community Hunting Zone’ or «Synergetic zone» which by definition are use- rather than management-oriented? As to whether local communities have any contributions to make in this context, can be inferred in their customary institutions and enforcement strategies, discussed below.

It should be noted that the concept of participation is recognised by the 2003 African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. The convention echoes Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration which requires, among other things, that individuals should have the opportunity to ‘participate’ as far as the management of environmental resources is concerned. A good example of a participatory management-oriented approach can be found in the 2002 Amendment to the 1972 Indian Wildlife Protection Act. It introduces two new categories of Protected Areas where community ‘participation’ was envisaged: Conservation reserves and Community reserves. Another example is the new Peru Wildlife Policy (1998) which allows communities to register Wildlife Management Areas, and so obtain rights to use and benefit from wildlife management. In many Latin American countries there are established indigenous-managed conservation reserves and co-management of protected areas are practiced.

Customary institutions

Local communities have valuable site-specific knowledge and practices that can complement that of natural resource ‘experts’. Above all, local communities, because of their greatest dependence on and historical connection with wildlife, their contribution in its conservation is demonstrated in the way species and their habitats (ecosystem) are managed.

Ecologically, to some local communities Protected Areas are believed to be the residence of spiritual agents and this can still be found throughout much of the continent. For instance

in Cameroon and some countries in the Congo Basin, sacred groves are highly protected and represent a significant incentive for community participation in biodiversity conservation and a link with local heritage. It is argued that the protection of sacred groves or other culturally protected areas be encouraged and given official status similar to those accorded government game/forest reserves. Species wise, the Boabeng/Fiema Wildlife Sanctuary in Ghana protects a local species of monkey. This sanctuary was established through the initiative of the local Boabeng and Fiema community who view this monkey as a representative of local forest and land spirits. Is this not synonymous to a government sanctuary under the Cameroon Wildlife Law?

Enforcement and sanctions

Some hunter/farmers in DRC conserve forest resources by forbidding hunting during the dry season to «let the animals rest» until the next

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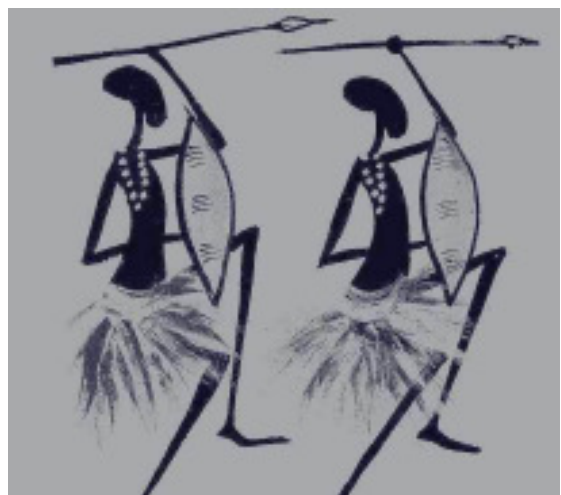
rainy season. They also rotate the section of forest in which they trap game during the hunting season, again explicitly so as to «let the animals rest» or to «let the animals give birth». Similarly in the Mount Cameroon areas in the South West Region customary laws exist that regulate trapping limits, respect of hunting season, species and methods. The Village Traditional Councils and Societies in the area were co-opted into the Mokoko Wildlife Management Association (MWMA) to enforce these rules. Sanctions involved destruction of traps beyond trapping limits and destruction of bush houses suspected to be poacher’s hideouts or bush meat smoking venues. Control teams are empowered to arrest hunters operating without gun or hunting permits and outside the quota.



Dr. Chi Augustine Muam

Such institutions, if legally recognised, can assist in ‘detective enforcement’.

The Village Traditional Council plays a leading role in sanctioning defaulters ranging from local fines by MWMA to court charges by the Ministry in charge of wildlife - MINFOF. Equally, if legally recognised, such institution are potentials in ‘suppression enforcement’ to liaise with the Legal Department of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), in prosecution matters. The ongoing decentralisation process which aims to transfer decision-making powers and resources to the regions and councils should bring opportunities for enhancing community participation in wildlife governance.





Exploitation of Africa's Wildlife: African Tradition vs. European Colonialism

Eric Kaba Tah in Yaounde

Gerald Durrell's *Bafut Beagles* is a well-documented evidence of Western exploitation of wildlife in Cameroon. This book is all about Durrell's animal collection trip in the late 1940's to the then British Cameroons. We may never have heard of the hairy frogs, the rock hyraxes, the dwarf mongooses but these species all existed in Bafut during this period. Durrell collected a vast array of small wildlife species in the area around Bafut and also around Mamfe where he picks up one of the most amazing rodents of all times, the flying mouse. But the most enduring introduction by Durrell to these areas maybe the commercial value of hunting because the Bafut people were paid to hunt. He finds himself with the whole village at the foot of his residence when they are told they will be paid for any «beef» they bring to «massa», as Durrell was fondly called. Needless to say «beef» represents wildlife species. Durrell's story aptly sets the example of western incursion, exploitation and disruption of the traditional African wildlife use standards as we see the intent and purpose for exploitation by the West at deviance with that of the Bafut people who worshipped their animals. The present day ruler of Bafut, Fon Abumbi III, says «It is a religion which leads us to worshipping these animals and therefore we also believe these animals protect us, the tribe, the king and it is therefore important to preserve these animals so as to preserve our religion and also to hand over these animals to future generations».

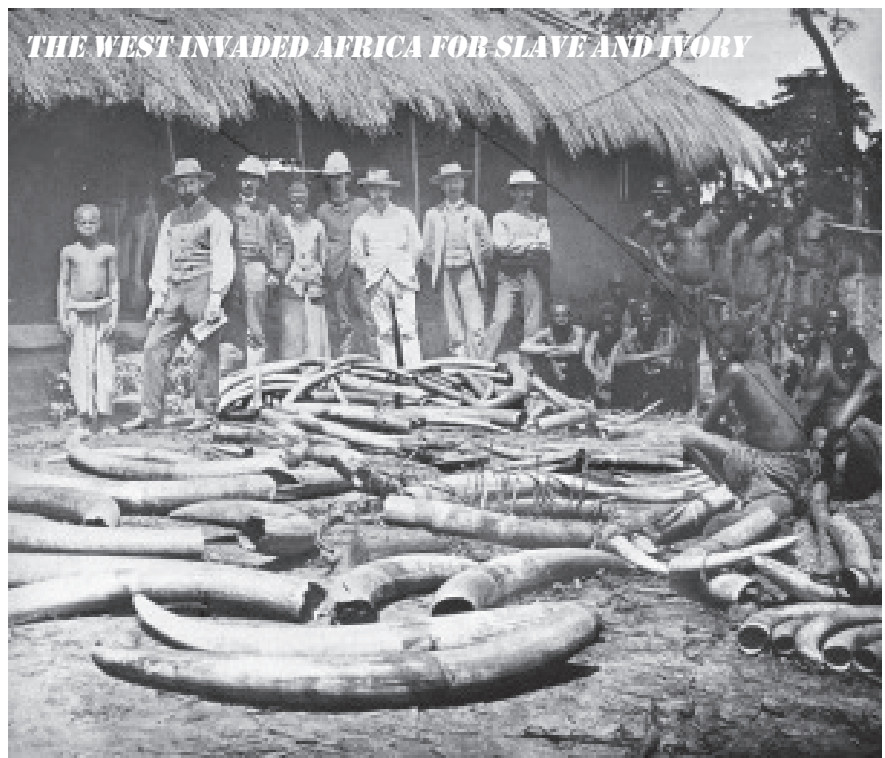
The exploitation of African natural resources by the West started during ancient times, long before Durrell started collecting animals in Africa, and this has continued right up to the post-colonial era. Wildlife exploited included the precious elephants (coming from North Africa) which were used in Roman Empires as entertainment and in some parts of the Middle East in wars. The African ivory has a remarkable story of exploitation. Due to its soft and easily sculpted material, it constituted a desirable and desirable commercial item during the slave trade era as the West invaded Africa for slave and ivory. Jane Carruthers and al. in *The Elephant in South Africa: History and Distribution* write «Ivory has linked the people of Africa with the outside world and shaped perceptions of the continent. Long before Africans were colonised, the elephant herds were being exploited and many regions became enmeshed in international trade through ivory. For more than 10 000 years the 'subtle glowing colour and sensual surface' of

ivory (Luxmoore, 1991) has ensured its prominent position among the luxury goods of the world, but in the later years of the twentieth century the assault on the elephants of Africa to procure it has been unprecedented».

Although it could be argued by some that it is an illusion or presumptuous to think that African

take as much out of an area which he did not belong to and which he thought was reserved for his brutal harvest to make as much wealth as possible.

The aims and perspectives of exploitation by the traditional African societies were very different from that of Western exploiters because



Early 19th Century European Ivory Traders in South East Cameroon

cultures functioned precisely in harmony with the environment and that it was rather with an exploitative intent, a characteristic of all human beings, that the African was keen to master and dominate his environment, to satisfy his wants which inevitably were food, shelter and clothing, while seeking to maximize his gains from the environment in which he lived. This would be very much like the modern safari or trophy hunter, the poacher or the Western colonialist who after all was simply seeking to maximize his exploitation of wildlife and consequently his gains. Such an argument nevertheless, falls short because the idea behind the African mind was never filled with such exploitative cruelty and profitability like the Western exploiter who aimed to rashly

wildlife was almost solely regarded as as food as Yaa Ntiama-Baidu writes in the article *West African wildlife: a resource in jeopardy*: «Traditionally, wildlife was regarded as a valuable community asset, which was used and protected by customs and taboos.» Taboos were

«Traditionally, wildlife was regarded as a valuable community asset, which was used and protected by customs and taboos.»

of serious significance as some animals could not be killed or touched because of many reasons advanced which were wide and varied but invariably, cultural, spiritual and ancestral. According to Ntiama Baidu, in Ghana, specifically in Boabeng and Fiema villages of the Brong Ahafo region, the the black and white



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colobus monkey and the mona monkey and their forest habitat have long been protected by the people because of their beliefs and traditions. They believe that the Black and white colobus are sons of gods protecting their community as the respect reserved for such a tall order equally goes with these monkeys who cannot be disturbed, killed or captured. The monkey is mourned and buried like a human being when it dies. This has attracted other species of monkeys into the area and little wonder this is the only place in Ghana where you still find large numbers of monkeys. The monkeys simply feel safe and secure there. This exemplifies the role African cultures played in conserving species from extinction «You know in our tradition, we believe in life after death and after death, the human culture is transformed or human spirit is transformed into animals and other objects. Most of the animals are considered spiritual. Take for example the lion, the leopard, the python, the buffalo and the elephant. These are royal animals which while you see anywhere they represent the spirit of a deceased and they cannot be shot or tampered with without the permission of the palace. They are also other animals in which the Bafut spirit can live in the form of that animal and we also have traditions that prohibit the killing of these animals without prayers, rituals and without also finding out whether these are

rare animals or spiritual animals», says Fon Abumbi II, the ruler of the Bafut. Remnants of this tradition exist today but they have almost totally fallen apart because of changes in the society. These changes are political, religious and social, which came as the West came along. The result of these new cultures and new methods of wildlife exploitation have been the continuous decline in species of wildlife in Africa. The race to extinction

Wildlife laws that existed then were roundly kept and respected by a society that understood that its own survival depended on wildlife

is now on if we consider that the tools which are used to kill wildlife today are diametrically different from that used by people in traditional African societies and that the aims for killing these animals are equally very different and dangerous for the survival of wildlife on the continent. The West introduced the commercial value of wildlife and this damaged the fabric of the traditional African view on wildlife. As early as the 18th century, parts of Africa were already coming under these commercial interests founded on wildlife products as «By 1750 the Portuguese had established a permanent settlement at

present-day Maputo and soon this became an extremely significant port which encouraged economic growth and political consolidation (Eldredge, 1995). The traffic in ivory boomed, allowing the Tembe and then the Madubu to become formidable traders. For local Africans, ivory quickly changed from being a byproduct of the hunt to an objective of it, and age regiments were organised to kill elephants», according to Jane Carruthers and al. in *The elephant in South Africa: History and Distribution*

Great respect was given to wildlife in traditional African culture - not all as an item of commerce but as part of an environment that was necessary for the African's survival. This enabled great respect for the animals and wildlife laws that existed then were roundly kept and respected by a society that understood that its own survival depended on wildlife. Western exploitation of wildlife in Africa changed these values and the value given to wildlife today and the manner of exploitation are fundamentally different from that which was the case. This has resulted in the irrational and frequently criminal exploitation of the Africa's wildlife for the benefit of a few with the result being a persistently dwindling wildlife population around the continent today.



The Tradition of the Baka pygmy and Conservation: A Long Standing Love Affair Disrupted by “Development”

Eric Kaba Tah

To the Baka pygmies, during old times, traditions inherited from their ancestors always had a positive influence on the conservation of wildlife and vegetation. But with the emergence of poaching and deforestation due to abusive exploitation of the forests, the Bakas live in a complex situation today, one in which their life is troubled by these activities, a life that changes every day, a sedentary life that is imposed by these activities, which gets them more and more out of contact with the harmonious communion which has always existed between them and nature. But nature had always been that nourishing mother that had always served them with the necessary needs; nutritional, therapeutic and esoteric needs. One of their spiritual needs is embodied in the jengi. The Bakas are animists who worship a forest spirit known as jengi their guardian, parental figure and their source of strength. They have a ceremony around jengi – the jengi

We the Baka, we hunt for subsistence with spears and crossbows. It is the Bantus who buy hunting guns

ceremony as it is called, is a long and secret initiation rite. The young man of over 20 years, undergoes a painful circumcision marking his passage from boyhood to manhood. There are dances and rites that surround the jengi ceremony

but it is a closely guarded secret from outsiders and the Baka women. It is carried out deep in the forest and the ceremony culminates to a crescendo when boys come face to face with the Spirit of the Forest who «kills» them and «resuscitates» them to life now as adults, while giving them special powers. This is a man's turning point. The forest plays a central role in this very prominent ceremony among the Bakas. Claver Anguio is a Baka who lives in Ngolla 20 near Yokadouma in the East Region of Cameroon and he spoke to *Wildlife Justice* to share with us

the inner umbilical link that existed between them and nature, whose mystery the Bakas respect a lot. He says they are an ethnic group that never harm nature and points a finger at the Bantus and their modernity. Excerpts:

What do you think about the cutting of trees and what impact has it on your environment?

The forest is our natural habitat. The cutting of trees is therefore a bad thing for us because it negatively changes our living milieu. The noise from machines chases our animals. Trees which constitute our medicine stocks are carried out and this leads to the disappearance of our remedies. The coolness of the forest has given way to more heat and the climate changes because there are no more shelters. It is true that we have some housing in the villages but we do not have land.

What do you think of those who hunt animals and cut trees in your environment ?

We are not happy with them, because they are killing us bit by bit. An example, my children have never seen a standing elephant since they were born. They come, destroy everything and go. They come and kill to sell while we kill to

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eat. For example, if I kill two hares, I eat one and sell the other to get money to buy soap. This is not the case with the poachers who are looking for profits by emptying our forest of its animals.

Do you hunt here ? If yes, why ?

Yes, I hunt because I am a hunter by birth. We kill animals to eat. But to satisfy our needs which are created by modernity, it becomes necessary to sell to Bantus, in order to buy kerosene for our lamps, soap, salt and any other thing for our needs.

What are the animals you hunt the most?

We mostly hunt hares, porcupines, monitor lizards, wild boars, vipers and boas. We equally hunt elephants, gorillas and chimpanzees.

Why do you hunt these ones particularly and not the others?

We hunt the first category because they are easy to find in the forest. For the second category consisting of gorillas, chimpanzees and elephants they are very difficult to find because today, they live deep inside the forests.

Are there animals you never hunt ?

Yes, they are animals like the leopard, the Bosman's potto, the chameleon. As far as the leopard is concerned, we no longer master the techniques which our ancestors used to kill the animal and because it's a taboo animal to us, which is dangerous and very skilled. We do not kill chameleons because our tradition forbids this. It is known that if a Baka kills a chameleon, an ill luck will befall the family, same situation with our women who will never attempt to eat the potto because this is forbidden to reproductive women. We never kill nor eat the spectacled cobra, because it is considered to be a totem which when eaten by a Baka will lead to his death.

Are there sanctions against those who hunt forbidden animals ? If yes what are the sanctions?

At the traditional level, they are animals like the leopard, if someone kills it, it necessitates that traditional rites be carried out by those initiated. You are washed with potions and a traditional medicine is given to you to wash your eyes that saw the body of this taboo animal. When officials get hold of the news that we have killed a leopard, or any other animal protected by the law, we are liable to sanctions which lead to jail.

What are your taboos as far as animals are concerned ?

Tradition imposes on us the killing of one elephant maximum per year to obey traditional rites. And to do this, we have to use a witch doctor who works around a big fire. The witch

doctor localises a herd of elephants and gives precisions on this to hunters. He gives them amulets which are used as bands «the simbo» and some which they use to rub. The best period for this is during July and August, during the harvesting of wild mangoes. During this traditional rite, women are present but it is carried out exclusively by men.



Claver Anguio of Yokadouma

Once the elephant is killed, we remove the trachea and take it to the elder, to those who have been initiated and to women who stayed behind in the camps. If this part is not sent to the elders, the hunters prepare other pieces of the elephant meat which they cast into the forest as sacrifice to the god of hunting called «mokondi». It is formally forbidden for the hunter who shot this elephant to eat its meat for fear of not being able to kill another elephant for the whole of his life. The whole community organise feasts where there is eating and dancing and the feasts are called «abale» and «wounga» which are traditional happiness rituals.

Do you know any animals which existed before and are no longer existing today?

My children have never seen a standing elephant since they were born Claver Anguio

In the past, animals would come to close proximity to the village. But because of the deafening noise of machines from forestry exploiters and with the high growth in poaching which is very active in the zone, many animals are now very rare. We can cite the river hogs, chimpanzees, gorillas, , elephants, boa and even gazelles. One needs to go right deep into the forest to find them. Contrary to the distant past when you just had to turn behind and get an animal.

According to you what must be the reason for this situation?

It is poaching done by Bantu traders which is the reason for this. We the Baka, we hunt for subsistence with spears and crossbows. It is the Bantus who buy hunting guns and cables to kill animals on a large scale for commercial purposes.

Baka Legend

Once upon a time, the hare and the leopard went to hunt. The hare found some honey and they decided to harvest it. While the hare climbed the tree for the honey, the leopard stayed down to keep watch. At the end of the harvest, the hare sent the honey down. With the honey safely in the leopard hands, he warned the hare not to climb down the tree if she wanted to stay alive. The hare stayed this out for some time but stung repeatedly by the bees she started crying out for help.

The Nile monitor on passing, by heard cries of distress and sorrow. She came around and asked what happened. When she finished listening to the story from the hare's mouth, she told her to come down. The leopard on hearing this ceased threatening and let the hare climb down. Immediately, she stepped down, together with the Nile monitor they caught and tied the leopard. The leopard cried for help but nobody came. The mole, the leopard's cousin on passing by smelt the relative's scent and came to his rescue. She took him home and started preparing food for him. But the greedy leopard asked for her tail and the mole gave him part of her tail. After grinding the tail down his stomach, he asked for more. The mole sensing danger decided to escape. Deep inside the forest, the mole went.

From that day, the hare and the mole have never wanted to meet the leopard on their way because he rewarded good with evil.

Lesson: It is necessary to study your friends and even your relations very well because there are some who are wicked and ungrateful. It shows to what extent greed is dangerous. It therefore teaches us to stay away from greed. Society is built on excellent harmony among all and greed can only work against this.



Traditional Protection of Chimpanzees by the Vili people in Congo Brazzaville

Mesange Josephate and Naftali Honig in Brazzaville

In the ancient traditions of the Vili people of the coast of Congo, the consumption of chimpanzee meat is unacceptable. Since time immemorial, the Vili consider the chimpanzee to be the animal the closest to humankind, but most importantly the chimpanzee is considered as a totem animal: a sacred species.

The Vili were among the first peoples touched by the European Age of Exploration. Early Portuguese voyages sailing down the western coast of Africa made contact with the Vili, who occupy much of the coast from modern-day southern Gabon, across Congo, down to Cabinda in Angola. As is true across Africa, the Age of Exploration and subsequent colonization destroyed many aspects of traditional cultures and economics.

Oral tradition taught the Vili that neighbouring tribes such as the Loumbou ate great apes, but were reproached by the Vili and ultimately

How could a man hunt something so close to himself? The Vili People

abandoned this practice. Great apes are targeted for bushmeat across a wide number of ethnicities in northern Congo, and with the coming of logging roads, guns and other more advanced hunting techniques, many great apes found refuge in areas of the forest that were just simply too remote for hunters to frequent. But back in southern Congo, do great apes in the region, namely central chimpanzees and western lowland gorillas, find themselves under hunting pressure today, despite the traditions which protected them? Yes and no.

No, because tradition simply blocks the possibility. How could a man hunt something so close to himself? Such is the case during war, but not during a time of peace! Not just a crime against the conservation of nature, but the murder of a spirit which has been alongside the Vili for all time.

Yes, because over time cultures are receiving less respect. Immigration and emigration; exchange of practices based in culture and others based on sheer economics. People are abandoning their culture, new and disruptive cultures are emerging. But why hunt that which one does not eat?

The response is simple. Man, in search of easy gain, seems to forget the most important

principles. The objective becomes to make

The Vili say if you want to live long respect the laws and customs of the clan and among these laws is the ban on eating or killing species considered to be sacred or taboo



money by killing an animal.

Last year, a man in Sangha, northern Congo was sentenced in absentia to 2 years in prison. Irreverent and without care for the beauty of the forest, he entered it with an assault rifle and killed some 52 monkeys, 3 red river hogs, various antelopes and even 3 gorillas, integrally protected species throughout their range. This is not sustainable hunting. This is pillage of the forest for commercial gain. The man has an arrest warrant out in his name.

More recently, a man killed a chimpanzee in West Cuvette, in a remote, forested region of northern Congo. Thanks to effective ecoguards and the legal work of PALF (Project for the Application of Law on Fauna), the Congolese homologue of LAGA, the laws of the Republic of Congo were strictly applied and the poacher was sentenced to 3 years in prison with hefty fines to pay as well. If this commercial culture continues to spread throughout the forests where the Vili live, the chimpanzee will be under serious threat. The law will be a deterrent, but if people remember their traditions, the coastal forests of Congo might just have an advantage in the effort to protect Humankind's closest relative.

Mavoungou Joseph is a Vili notable and one time sub divisional officer in Congo. He talked to Wildlife Justice. Excerpts:

Question : Are there some animals that the Vili consider to be sacred or taboo ?

Yes, these include gorillas, chimpanzees, crocodiles, leopards and all reptiles.

Question : But it seems as if people eat these animals today ?

Today, with changes in populations moving from the North to the South and from the South to North, some groups have changed habits, hence eating some of these animals like gorillas, or even the crocodile but the ban remains and many pay the price for this disobedience.

Question : In the past, according to the Vili tradition, what was reserved for anyone who kills or eats one of these animals ?

Anyone who killed or ate such animals would face the death penalty, that is the elders had to punish him to calm the anger of the ancestors or the spirits of those who protected the clan.

Question : Why do we protect animals or sacred species ?

These sacred species are protected for the simple reason of continuity of tradition left by the ancestors of the Vili world. The chimpanzee, for example, is considered as the animal closest to man and cannot be the subject of hunting nor capture. The Vili say if you want to live for long, respect the laws and customs of the clan, and among these laws is the ban on eating or killing species considered to be sacred or taboo. These wildlife species are important to conserve because of the survival of man and the environment. It is an international problem and the only way to solve this problem is that each country should learn to respect its laws, and saving some of the mentalities as it is the case with the Vili. Climate change, deforestation, illicit trade in fauna and flora species, rightly demonstrate the importance of respecting the government laws



Traditional Conservation in the Central African Republic

Hubert Yamande and Dingote Kossani Guy in Bangui

The conservation of wildlife heritage is a major preoccupation of our times because we know that forest resources are under high pressure from human beings. This point is easily proven when we look at the anarchical exploitation going on. Hunting today is simply poaching, illegal trade and trafficking of wildlife species thereby constituting a threat to wildlife especially pushing some wildlife species to extinction. But during old times in the Central African Republic, hunting was guarded by traditional values that relied on conservation. It followed a number of elementary rules of the community which included, the respect of social hierarchy, forbidden feeding habits, totems,

Controls did not only end with the animals themselves but with resources which were necessary for the survival of these animals and in this regard bushfires were controlled and the use of weapons was adapted to the local context, and in more recent times the use of legally kept firearms. Nets were used for hunting which meant wildlife destruction was limited. Some important instructions were given before any hunt and include: don't kill pregnant animals, direct hunting mostly towards old, solitary males with scars or handicaps left behind by troops. Inhabitants of an area had to hunt within their own area. Some traditional safeguards favoured conservation and included forbidden feeding habits which saved many animal species.

- we need to simply strengthen and respect old African traditions which proved for so many years to be very reliable in conserving wildlife species.



The RALF project has been running in the Central African Republic for three years and it has contributed to the tracking of some major wildlife dealers in the country. In tackling the issue of traditional conservation practices, Georges Ngasse gave an insight into what constituted traditional conservation practices not so long ago in the country. He is the Director of Inventory and Forestry Rehabilitation at the Ministry of Forestry and Water Resources in Bangui and teaches in the University of Bangui. He travelled all the way to his native lands to get more information on traditional hunting from members of his ethnic group, the Madjas, to whom hunting is a main activity, before carrying out this interview. Excerpts:



It is clear today that with rising demographics, we record rising levels of illegal trade and trafficking of wildlife products. Nothing today can be compared to traditional hunting yesterday, where meat was never sold but distributed according to the food requirements of the people. In the Central African Republic, today, wildlife species are constantly being killed for their parts, leading them to extinction because some of the animals killed fall prey to some of these factors we find today in the country.

Question : In practice, how was conservation done, what were the means used to hunt or to save wildlife, to keep the state of wildlife?

In practice, it was the respect of social hierarchy, the old or the patriarchs of the village or cantons organised the community in function of the resources available in the region. They organised hunt of animals for consumption and the redistribution of products from this hunt at the level of the communities. They organised controlled bushfires and they used hunting means adapted to their local context, that is, they used nets made from natural material in order to limit the destruction of wildlife and generally hunting directives were done according to the instructions given by the old. These included not to hunt pregnant animals but to prefer old solitary male animals that can no longer hunt, those with handicaps and those left behind by their groups.

Even the local population are no longer morally tied by their traditions as totem animals are being killed today. These animals represented totems in different parts of the country and include, chimpanzee, gorilla, elephants, aardvark, bongo (for populations in forested areas), baboons, giant tortoise, warthog, bush pig, giant forest hog (for the moslem populations in the north of the country), hippopotamus, crocodile, monitor lizards, python, leopard and lion (for the north east), Giant pangolins etc. .

Question : What means were used to control hunting activities because there are always quacks around?

The first means used was solidarity at the level of the communities where the population was ready to report acts committed by some. There was inter-community solidarity.

hunting according to plan, the control of bush fires and social cohesion, The respect of elementary rules mentioned above contributed to biodiversity conservation. Some wildlife species formed the animal base thereby saving many animals because they were believed to be totems or were simply forbidden by some ethnic groups to be eaten. This was the case of the elephant, the bongo and the aardvark. As far as hunting was concerned, communities were organised according to the availability of wildlife resources in the region. Most of the times, the animals which were not protected by tradition were killed to be eaten and the meat was distributed to all.

We need to simply strengthen and respect old African traditions which proved for so many years to be very reliable in conserving wildlife species

The growth in lust for profit, the non-respect of rules governing wildlife by administrative and political authorities and even also the local communities help the destruction process. This is accompanied by nocturnal hunting with the complicity of local communities leading to the massive destruction of young and pregnant animals.

While many experts think we should educate Central Africans on the need to protect our wildlife heritage, the solution is already available



Some African Proverbs on Animals

Compiled by Anna Egbe in Yaounde

The very famous Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe wrote in one of his earliest novels, *Things Fall Apart*, «Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten». African proverbs and legends have habitually been around animals and in consecrating so much to animals in this edition of *Wildlife Justice*, we must be very unfair, if we do not mention a few of the proverbs spun around them. We selected a handful of these proverbs.

Until the lion has his own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story (Benin, Ghana and Togolese Proverb)

Explanations: Variants of this proverb exist in many parts of Africa. In Kenya and Zimbabwe, it goes: *Until lions start writing their own stories, the hunters will always be the heroes*. In Africa, hunters are powerful and respected men and are thought to have supernatural powers that enable them kill big and powerful animals like elephants and lions. They always bring home stories of their exploits in the forest which are celebrated by the people who will never know what goes on in the forest except from the hunter's mouth. So if a hunter brings home a lion, we may never know whether he was courageous and skilful enough to kill the lion, or it was pure luck on his side and he met a sleeping or wounded lion that he easily overcame. The hunter's story will always be on his side.

Lessons: A story is never complete until we hear the both sides. The person who's voice is not represented or heard is always the loser and this refers particularly to the case where there is a domineering voice silencing the weaker voice. Africans have for long been omitted in history and only Africans need to tell their own side of the story.

It is only a male elephant that can save another one from a pit. (Swahili proverb)

Explanation: This proverb is built around observation of elephant activity. Because of the sheer size and power of the elephant, Central African elephant hunters had to dig holes to trap elephants. When a young or female elephant was trapped in a hole, any other elephant would come to its rescue but when it was a male elephant, only male elephants could rescue it.

Lesson: This is all about division of labour for efficiency. Role sharing and effectiveness, activities needing huge physical efforts and strength is best managed by the male.



Where the leopard is made judge the goat will never get a fair judgement. (Nigerian proverb)

Explanation: Leopards are powerful animals preying on weaker herbivorous animals as goats etc. They view the goat as a source of food and will never be happy to simply view the goat as an animal equal to them. For this reason, the leopard might never be a right judge or objective when it comes to matters concerning its source of food.

Lessons: This aptly reflects impartiality in African societies. The rich and the powerful get their way against the weak and poor. It highlights social inequality and injustice and the predatory nature of the rich and powerful, their greed and terrible lack of a sense of justice.

He who wrestles with a gorilla will find his back dusty. (Nigerian proverb)

Explanation: The huge size of a gorilla makes it a formidable wrestler for any human being. It is

totally unfathomable that a human being takes on a gorilla without being thrown to the floor, considering its immense strength.

Lessons: You need to weigh the opponent before engaging him in a fight. You should not start a fight you know beforehand that you cannot win - you will come out beaten and full with broken bones. Only fools engage in a fight that they know they will lose.

By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from the tree. (Cameroonian proverb)

Explanation: A monkey is not born with the ability to climb trees and move from one tree to the other. A monkey learns how to jump from one tree to another and this is done through learning from its mother and other members of its troop.

Lessons: This proverb is about disappointments and failures. It says that there is nothing wrong in failing but there is something wrong with abandoning. If you fail once, twice, thrice, etc, you have never really failed. Real failure only comes when you abandon a cause. If you keep on trying and learning, you will one day succeed.

"If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality"

Desmond Tutu Retired South African Anglican Bishop and human rights activist





The « leopards of Gabon », the national team's symbol in danger

Luc Mathot in Libreville

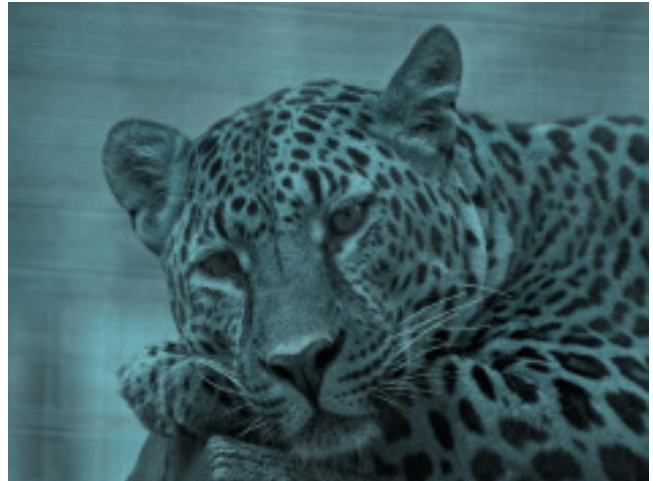
Once occupying the Asian and African continents, from Siberia to South African, the leopard's (*panthera pardus*) range has been cut back because of hunting and loss of habitat. We now find it principally in sub-saharan Africa and it is today seriously threatened in many zones. The search for its skin for decoration is the main cause for this sad trend. Collectors come from North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and also Europe and North America to buy these skins.

Thanks, especially for the network of national parks, Gabon brings hope for the survival of these species. The Ivindo National Park in particular has one of the highest densities of leopards. This is what a recent study carried out by Panthera, non-governmental Organisation working in collaboration with the National Parks Agency confirms. The study in question worked with photographic shots to identify the maximum number of individual leopards and came out with a density of 12.5 leopards per 100 km² in a zone reserved for research in the Ivindo park. Further still, the density is high in the centre of the park with more than 10 leopards within 100 km², while it is halved at the edges of the park.



It is hard to come by densities of 12 leopards per 100 km² in many range areas of the leopard on the continent today. So Gabon comparatively, still has a healthy population.

This powerful predator is frequently respected and feared but cases of attacks by the leopard are rare. To many ethnic groups in Gabon, it is none the less sacred. This is the case with the Mitsogos and Pouvis with the secret society called nzergho (the leopard). But all the ethnic groups in Gabon give great respect to the leopard. By the way, it's the skin of the leopard that is one of the most powerful symbols of the «Bwiti» initiation rite, during traditional dances notably. Even though her skin and teeth are used traditionally, it is often said that killing a leopard draws bad spirits on the hunters and villages concerned and a traditional ceremony should be organised to drive it away. This is what the intrepid Gabonese catholic priest, ethnographer and author André Raponda-Walker who attended one of such ceremonies for three days near Fougamou explains and such experiences led him to conclude that «*experience is based on facts*» in *Contes Gabonais (Pensée Africaine: 1967)*. It may be for the respect that this species commands that it was chosen as the symbol of the national



football team of Gabon. A team that recently glorified the nation with scintillating performances at the African Cup of Nations held in the country and in neighbouring Equatorial Guinea.

Unfortunately, this does not hinder the fact that in 2011, fifteen leopard skins were seized by forestry officials in Libreville city alone and a live leopard had even been localised in a hotel premises, with the assistance of AALF (A wildlife law enforcement support project).

Today, the survival of this cat depends on the place that modern society gives it and only a strict application of the law by authorities, the forces of law and order, forestry officials and with the active involvement of NGOs, can enable its long term survival. It is hoped that tradition can overcome money interests and fast gains and the leopard will be preserved for future generations.

Wildlife Law Enforcement Model Moves to Guinea Conakry

After the successful transfer of experience from Cameroon's wildlife law enforcement model to 3 Central African Countries including Congo-Brazzaville with the wildlife law enforcement support project known by its French acronym as PALF, the Central African Republic with RALF and Gabon with AALF, the experience goes to Guinea Conakry following 2 major operations carried out within two months. In the first operation, 7 major wildlife traffickers were arrested in possession of over 80 kilogrammes of ivory and 10 leopard skins. This was the first ever arrest of wildlife traffickers in the country since independence and the traffickers have been successfully prosecuted

and imprisoned. The operation was carried out in March 2012.

Two months later the next wave of law enforcement carried out with the technical assistance of PALF and AALF led to the arrest of 6 major wildlife traffickers in possession of over 800 items derived from wildlife and mostly from ivory and with cash to the sum of over 30 000 US dollars. LAGA, PALF and RALF assisted the Guinean Ministry of Environment during the law enforcement process that saw the collaboration of Interpol, the Ministry of Justice, the Forces of Law and Order in Guinea.

Guinean authorities have been welcoming and collaborative to ensure that the law takes its due

course. Guinea is presently paving the way in the West African region for the extension of replication efforts in a region that is rife with trafficking. It is very encouraging in seeing the Guinean authorities put so much courageous efforts to make sure that nobody is above the law. The country is laying down the foundation for a sub-regional wildlife law enforcement effort. Equally important has been the support of locally based conservation organisations. This new wildlife law enforcement support project is known by its French acronym as GALF and shall be hosted by Conakry-based Wara Conservation Project.



The shooting and hunting of such animals are highly regulated and people who violate traditions are sanctioned spiritually and traditionally Fon Abumbi II Paramount Fon of Bafut



Fon Abumbi II, traditional ruler of Bafut

Traditional royalties and their secret societies are the custodians of the culture of the people and they constitute the vast and unfortunately dying libraries of African traditional practices. They still hold in earnest what existed in the past and to get a proper insight into the role played by tradition in conserving wildlife species, *Wildlife Justice* had an interview with the traditional ruler of one of the most prominent ethnic groups in the North West Region which is considered to be a bastion of tradition in Cameroon today. Fon Abumbi II has been ruling the Bafut Fodom since he took over in 1968 upon the death of his father, the elegant and hard drinking Fon described in Gerald Durell's Bafut Beagles. Excerpts

Question: You just celebrated your Annual Dance festival, why is it important that the people of Bafut keep on celebrating and respecting this tradition?

The cultural festival which we recently held is known in Bafut as «abenefor» and is held every December to mark the foundation or the creation of the Bafut Fodom and also to pay homage to our ancestors who founded this Fodom and to pray to them to continue to strengthen and consolidate the kingdom.

Question: During the festival, we found out that there were many representations of animal species. Why so?

You know in our tradition, we believe in life after death, the human nature is transformed or human spirit is transformed into animals and other objects. Most of the animals are considered spiritual. Take for example the lion, the leopard, the python, the buffalo and the elephant. These are royal animals which when you see anywhere

they represent the spirit of a deceased and they cannot be shot or tampered with without the permission of the palace. There are also other animals which the Bafut spirit can live in. They can live in the form of that animal and we also have traditions that prohibit the killing of these animals without prayers, rituals and without also finding out whether these are rare animals or spiritual animals.

Question: It therefore means that there were rules and regulations which people had to follow. And if somebody killed such animals what were the sanctions reserved for them?

The most important thing is killing a particular spiritual animal is considered as murder – that is like killing a person. Sanctions were very severe and that is why if you see an elephant, you don't shoot it. You first of all come to the palace and obtain permission from here. The oracles will say whether it is just a mere animal or a spiritual animal. The shooting and hunting of such animals are highly regulated and people who violate such traditions are sanctioned spiritually and traditionally. And this includes death sanctions or affliction by incurable diseases. So the laws protecting these animals were very seriously enforced by the physical being and by the spiritual being.

Question: What we find today is that people no longer respect these laws, so do we still have some of these animals in your kingdom?

Most of the animals are extinct. For example, the elephant was once plentiful in Bafut. There

is none today but we still have the buffalo, the python and some cats but the elephant is extinct.

Question: Why is it important to conserve these animal species while making sure that people do not kill these animals to extinction?

First and foremost, it is a religion which leads us to worshipping these animals and therefore we also believe these animals protect us, the tribe, the king and it is therefore important to preserve these animals so as to preserve our religion and also to hand over these animals to future generations. But the most important reason for preserving them is religion because all of us die and all of us one day may become these animals and therefore when you are shouting these animals, you are shouting human beings. We should conserve them for the wellbeing of the kingdom and for the wellbeing of the human race because when you shoot them you bring a curse to the kingdom, to the family and everybody and it is not good. Besides that, these animals are also good for the future generation, so that they will know the animals that inhabit the kingdom.

I see a small forest behind your palace, is it a sacred forest?

It is a sacred forest, some of the animals living there, birds living there are considered sacred and there you also have herbs which are considered sacred and which are used for traditional religious purposes, for rituals and also for curative purposes.

Two New Books for Wildlife Conservation in Cameroon

Literature on wildlife conservation in Cameroon has been enriched by 2 new books that hit the bookshelves this year. The books written by 2 members of the LAGA family include *Lois et Procédures en Matière Faunique au Cameroun* by Alain Bernard Ononino, jurist and head of the Legal Department and *Cameroon's Wildlife – Endangered Animal Species* by Sone Nkoke, wildlife management expert. Grab your copy now! Contact the Editor in Chief Wildlife Justice for your copy.

