

# Combating the Commercial Bushmeat Trade in Central Africa



*Bushmeat seizure in Ivindo National Park, Gabon.* Credit: Richard Ruggiero/USFWS

Unsustainable hunting for wild-sourced meat, commonly referred to as bushmeat, has been identified as one of the greatest threats to Central Africa's wildlife. Fueled by demand in the region's expanding urban centers, the commercial bushmeat impacts fragile populations and ecosystems by emptying forests and other habitats of their wildlife. Nearly all species are affected, ranging from iconic large mammals such as forest elephants, gorillas, and chimpanzees, to smaller animals such as porcupines, pangolins, bats, turtles, and birds.

Urban demand for bushmeat trade is driven by luxury consumers. The urban consumption of bushmeat not only impacts wildlife; it also has a direct negative effect on the food security and livelihoods of local and indigenous people by depleting game populations and destabilizing communities that depend on wildlife for subsistence.

Sustainability of the bushmeat trade is not currently possible for many reasons, including:

- Gaps in enforcement capacity
- Weak adherence to laws
- Lack of protein and economic alternatives
- Corruption across all levels of governance
- Lack of scientific information to determine offtake levels

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) supports a range of efforts to reduce demand for commercial bushmeat, including strengthening wildlife and protected area management, promoting alternative livelihoods, and conducting behavior change campaigns. All efforts aim to reduce protected species in illegal trade, and ensure greater economic and food security for local people.

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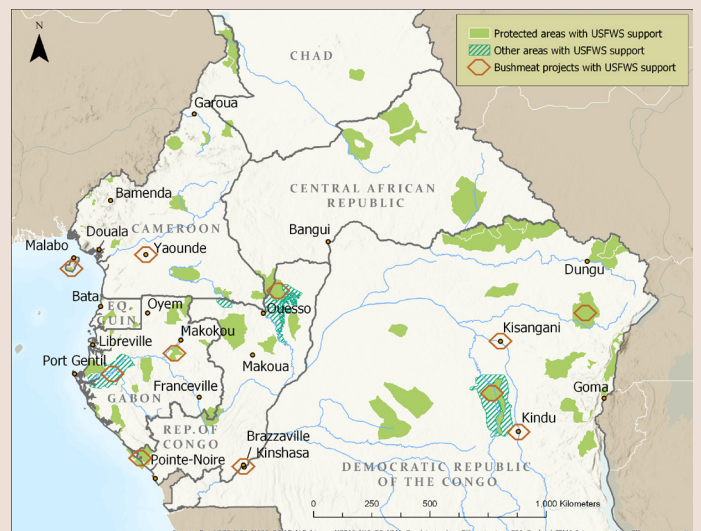
*Bushmeat markets in Central Africa include many protected species such as elephants, gorillas, and chimpanzees, which are supplied by illegal traffickers for urban luxury consumption.*

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*Live crocodile in an urban bushmeat market.*

Credit: Nancy Gelman/USFWS



*Bushmeat projects with USFWS support in Central Africa.*

Credit: Matthew Luizza/USFWS



*Pangolin in a bushmeat market.*

Credit: Nancy Gelman/USFWS

## Threats Posed by the Bushmeat Trade

### Local Extinction

Every year, approximately five million tons of wild animals, including numerous protected species, are extracted from the Congo Basin's forests to satisfy the demands of growing urban markets. Unsustainable commercial trade in bushmeat is causing local extinctions and irreparable damage to wildlife populations in the region.

### The Future of the Forest

The bushmeat trade poses a critical threat to ecosystems in Central Africa and across the continent. Unsustainable hunting creates an "empty forest syndrome," leading to weakened ecosystem functionality and less resilience to environmental change and disease. Wildlife targeted in the commercial bushmeat trade play a key role in seed dispersal and in maintaining the forest environment and composition.

### Security of Local People

The illegal commercial trade in bushmeat supplies an urban market in which wild-sourced meat is often viewed as a luxury item. This unsustainable urban trade threatens local people who are dependent on wildlife for economic and food security.

### Public Health

Handling and eating wildlife poses concerns for human health, as many diseases of animals are transmissible to people. Disease outbreaks in Central and West Africa have been linked with human contact with wildlife species that are hunted for bushmeat.

## Strategic Objectives

USFWS has a long history of working with partners to address the illegal commercial bushmeat trade, both through its Multinational Species Conservation Funds and with funding from the Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE). Over the past two decades, USFWS has supported 80 partners in 28 countries to implement priority strategies to combat the unsustainable bushmeat trade, including:

- Training and capacity development
- Alliance and partnership building
- Basic research and status monitoring
- Outreach and communications
- Behavior change campaigns
- Alternative livelihoods

Combating the commercial bushmeat trade is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach tailored to local circumstances. In cities, bushmeat often remains the preferred choice even where alternative sources of protein are available.

## On-the-Ground Investments and Achievements

- In the capital cities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the neighboring Republic of the Congo, the **Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)** is working to conserve protected species by developing a replicable model to reduce luxury bushmeat consumption in big cities across Central Africa. The project will develop and implement a campaign and coalition to change consumer behavior, strengthen capacity, and reduce availability of protected species in markets.
- The **Central Africa Bushmeat Action Group (CABAG)**, a network of projects addressing the bushmeat issue, is committed to raising regional and international awareness about the impact of the commercial bushmeat trade on people and wildlife, with the goal of preventing protected species from entering the commercial bushmeat trade.
- **CABAG**, in partnership with the **University of Stirling**, **The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)**, and other partners, is working to provide conservation and development stakeholders in Central Africa with the tools they need to develop and test bushmeat management interventions using an evidence-based approach, with the goal of developing an openly accessible database on bushmeat hunting in Central Africa.
- In the Lomami Basin of the DRC, the **TL2 Project** is working to address the threat of commercial bushmeat hunting to endemic species by instituting a hunting season to help communities secure wildlife populations. This project also supports efforts to curb criminal activity in and around the park, strengthening capacity for park management, and establishing the country's first new protected area in more than 40 years.
- The **Bioko Biodiversity Protection Program (BBPP)**, a partnership between Drexel University in the United States and the National University of Equatorial Guinea, focuses on combating the illegal bushmeat trade on Equatorial Guinea's Bioko Island, which is home to seven species of monkeys and one of the world's largest nesting populations of leatherback turtles. BBPP works with government and other stakeholders on park management and impact assessments, conducts research, raises awareness, and works to reduce demand for bushmeat.
- In Gabon's lake region, the **Organisation Ecotouristique du Lac Oguemoué (OELO)** is conserving wildlife by working to lower consumer preference for bushmeat and reduce illegal sales of protected species such as the slender-snouted crocodile, African manatee, forest buffalo, and giant pangolin. This project monitors success through bushmeat surveys, raises awareness, and increases sustainable revenue sources through ecotourism development.



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International Affairs  
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November 2018