

Local people's knowledge and coexistence with carnivores in the forest-savannah mosaic of Cameroon

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Abstract

Carnivores are threatened across Sub-Saharan Africa mostly due to retaliatory killing by people, the loss of prey species and their habitats. Due to their food and space requirements, they regularly come into conflict with humans. In many regions, information about carnivore occurrence and human-carnivore conflict remains poorly known particularly in parts of West-and Central Africa. Here, we assessed the local ecological knowledge on carnivores and associated conflicts in the forest-savannah transition zone in Cameroon. We conducted a semi-structured questionnaire survey with 649 local inhabitants from 23 villages around the Tchabal Mbabo Mountain Range, Yoko Council Forest and Mpem et Djim National Park. The majority of local people could easily identify the lions (73.8%, n=479) and correctly named (90.2%, n=432), whereas other species (e.g. leopards, cheetahs, hyenas, African wild dogs, as well as the medium-sized carnivores) were identified with more difficulty. Most respondents (71.3%, n=463) reported depredation of their livestock, mostly by lions, spotted hyenas, civets and foxes and half of respondents (50.2%, n=326) reported retaliation against predators as the main action resorted to protect their livestock. The use of poisons against wild predators was advocated by some respondents, an additional threat to wild carnivores. Local people suggested construction of enclosures (46.4%, n=301) as the most important mitigation measures. Our study provides baseline information on carnivore occurrence in Cameroon's transitional forest savannah environments and threats to these animals from local people.

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