

Bushmeat: Logging's Deadly 2nd Harvest

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Animals like the Muntjac are reduced to cuts of meat for sale in the markets of Indonesia.

When a rain forest is cleared by logging, the results are immediately apparent. What may not be so apparent is the secondary effect that logging has — its devastating impact on animals.

Poaching has long been a problem for Asian and African wildlife, but according to a report released by the Wildlife Conservation Society April 22, the number of elephants, gorillas, antelopes, chimpanzees and other wildlife killed and marketed as bushmeat, has increased exponentially with the increase in roads used for logging. The roads provide access to areas that were once completely inaccessible, and routes for transporting product to market.

Bushmeat has been a staple in the diet of forest-dwelling African peoples for centuries, but the number of animals being taken now has reached crisis proportions, according to experts.

The Congo is sited as an example, where hunting of wild game was three to six times higher in communities adjacent to logging roads than in roadless areas, according to the report. WCS estimates that the annual harvest of bushmeat in equatorial Africa exceeds 1 million metric tons; the wild meat trade in the Malaysian state of Sarawak, in 1996, was conservatively estimated to be more than 1,000 tons a year, **“Logging has pulled the plug on tropical forest wildlife,”** said Dr. John Robinson, WCS vice president for international programs and lead author of the study. **“Animals are now being sucked out along the newly constructed roads.”**

The logging companies are contributing mightily to the problem. In many cases the logging camps are under supplied, and workers must hunt to eat. In 1996, workers in just one logging camp in Sarawak killed more than 1,100 animals

totaling 29 metric tons, according to WCS.

A nine-year study by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) found that apes living within 18 miles (30 km) of logging roads are being devastated by the burgeoning commercial bushmeat trade. The study found that the main catalyst of the devastation is growth of the timber industry -- timber prices and profits are tied to provision of commercial bushmeat to migrant workers, according to the IUCN report.

Tribal cultures that once enforced taboos against eating primates are beginning to try it as a result of exposure to the logging camps. As eating apes becomes an accepted practice, education and law enforcement becomes more difficult.

The demand for bushmeat impacts many species in the Republic of Congo, including the gray-cheeked mangabey, the red duiker and the white-nosed monkey.

The loss of these animals will be felt for centuries. Wildlife such as elephants and tapirs help regenerate trees through seed dispersal. The losses will also profoundly impact local people who have relied on subsistence hunting of wild game for centuries.

The prospect for an immediate change is dismal. Any solution must include the logging companies, which are often the only institutional presence in remote forests. National legislation and international agreements banning the commercial sale of bushmeat will also be necessary. The laws and treaties will be worthless without the money to back up enforcement and public education efforts.

“Wildlife Harvest in Logged Tropical Forests” was published in today's issue of the journal Science.

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