

People-Wildlife Conflict around CERCOPAN: the Farmers' Perspective, Iko Esai and Ekperem Communities, Cross River State, Nigeria.

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Awarded a PSGB grant in March 2012

The rainforest of Cross River State, Nigeria is recognized as one of the richest forests in the African continent, therefore a priority for conservation. In spite of Nigeria's incredible biodiversity and extinction risk, its rainforest receives very little conservation attention from the government. Centre for Education, Research and Conservation of Primates and Nature (CERCOPAN) is a non-governmental organisation started in 1995 whose areas of work are primate rehabilitation, environmental education, community rainforest conservation, and research. Iko Essai community has signed an agreement with CERCOPAN to help conserve part of its forest. It has been widely argued that the integration of human needs into conservation strategies is vital and the only means to achieve habitat management and species protection in areas where there is a clash of interest on resources between wildlife human communities.



Protected area on the left hand side and farms on the right hand in Iko Esai 2012

The objective of this study is to highlight the perceived conflicts that exist between farmers and wildlife from the farmer's perspective. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews (n=137) and participant observation. I used random selection technique and compared respondents from Iko Esai with respondents from Ekperem. Approximately 60% of farmers interviewed are wholly dependent on agriculture for their subsistence. Respondents claim poverty as their major problem more than crop raiding. Most respondents cultivate cocoa, cassava and plantain. The results are significant at the 0.05 level suggestive that a higher percentage of respondents who report farming as their only occupation cultivate a greater variety of crops. More than three quarter (88%) of respondents reported to have problems with farming but only ten percent said the problem is crop raiding. When later asked if they experience wildlife on their farms, 90% of respondents said yes and 15% of this figure said its monkeys. The deterrence reported includes; guns, traps, fence, prayer and chemicals.



Typical fencing used in Ekperem 2012

The investigation to highlight the problems farmers say they experience around Iko Esai and Ekperem demonstrates that logging has destroyed a significant amount of the forests of this region. The percentage of respondents (58%) who say that they have no other occupation to farming means that farming is predominant across the respondents. The problem with animals are much less commonly cited than is problems with money, i.e. whilst conservation might focus on the animals, farmers prioritise other factors as causing them most problems. Large proportion of respondents report to use guns to protect their farms from wildlife. Additionally, respondents in both communities claim to use chemicals called Animal Killer.

The majority of the respondents report that the farmer owner is responsible to prevent wildlife from going to his/her farm. However, this makes them feel it is right to use any mechanism to protect their crops. This poses a kind of war; man versus wildlife.



Typical traps attached to fencing in Iko Esa 2012