

The Search for a Baboon Products Market

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Abstract

This study explored the potential for exploiting baboon meat and other products from the culling of problem baboons in forest plantations. The baboons have become a menace in pine plantations where they strip the bark of trees rendering timber production less viable. A mail survey was carried out with potential buyers of the products, game ranchers, pet feed processors and wildlife hide tanners. Wildlife, veterinary and health specialists were also consulted. Responses from the potential markets indicated that they were not sure if they could market baboon originated products and the other indicated unwillingness to market the products because of health and cultural reasons.

Key Words: Bushmeat, baboon products, bark stripping, marketing.

Introduction

Virtually all species of wild animals are acceptable as a food source to some group of people in Africa (Jardin, 1970). Bushmeat has been the main source of food and the sole source of animal protein for people in pre-historic times. Man has hunted and eaten wild animals on a scale to support the subsistence needs of local human populations. Bushmeat marketing is particularly well developed in West Africa and it is also the area where the trade has been well documented (Asibey, 1978; Jeffery, 1977; Martin, 1983; Ntiamoa-Baidu, 1987).

The marketing of wildlife products is one of the factors driving declines in wild animal populations in Africa (Barrett and Arcese, 1995) and has given birth to wildlife ranching and community based wildlife managements concepts such as CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe. The CAMPFIRE programme has increased household income by 15-25% as a result of benefits derived from wildlife resource utilization including the trade in animal parts (Butler, 1995). The marketability of animal products has seen the emphasis on ranching of wild animals for increased production, for example ostrich and crocodile farming in Zimbabwe (FAO, 1995). The crocodile hides sale in Zimbabwe in 1991 earned US\$2 million (Makombe, 1993). While in all regions of Malawi, wild animal food such as caterpillars, honey, termites and meat of large mammals are exploited for food (Nyirenda, 1993).

Trade in bushmeat and wildlife products as well as wildlife-based industries contribute significantly to both national and household food security through the generation of financial resources (FAO, 1995). Markets for bushmeat and other wild animal products help to fuel rural economies and provide income.

Factors, which determine the species sold or consumed, include the size of the animal, cultural considerations as well as personal or public appeal and demand (Lahm, 1993). Bushmeat is expensive throughout the region and in many areas it is more expensive than meat from domestic animals (Ntiamoa-Baidu, 1987).

Apart from bushmeat, wild animals contribute to local economies through their by-products such as hides, horns, shells and bones (FAO, 1995). Some wild species may be more valuable for their trophy (e.g. elephants, rhino) or their skins (e.g. carnivores, reptiles) and these items have high intrinsic values. Hides and skins may be used locally for the manufacture of items of clothing such as shoes, bags, belts and hats. Other animal products are used for medicinal purposes in traditional medicines and at a CITES summit held in Harare it was put across that traditional medicines made from animal (and plant) products are deeply embedded in the culture of African people.

The aim of the study was to assess the acceptability of baboon products for domestic and industrial processing as a beneficial means of culling in forest plantations where they have become a problem. Bark stripping has been identified as significantly threatening the viability of Zimbabwe's timber industry as it has reached about 90% of trees/ha, and the bark stripping habit increasing among various baboon troops, thus the decision to carry out a market survey for acceptability of products from baboons.

Material and Methods

A telephone survey was carried out to identify the potential respondents' perceptions regarding baboon product processing and consumption. Results of this survey were used in the structuring of a questionnaire during the project-planning phase.

The questionnaire was administered through the postal system as a mail survey accompanied by an introductory letter that gave an insight into the essence of the research to the timber industry. Mail survey was used because the sample was drawn from across the country and was the cheapest method for data collection. The questionnaire probed the acceptance of baboon

products and the preferred culling methods. The questionnaires were distributed targeting the following potential markets; pet feed processors, leather processors and game ranchers.

The leather processing market targeted wild animal hide-tanners and game ranchers aimed at conservation and recreational parks specializing in the conservation of carnivores such as crocodiles, lions and cheetahs which could be fed on baboon meat after the culling in forest plantations. A minimum of six respondents was targeted for each potential market.

Personal Structured Interviews

The interviews were done as applied by Priston 2000. The interviews were carried out targeting non-respondents in the mail survey and specialists who are conversant with animal products. This was carried out in the third quarter of the research project using the structured questionnaire administered in the mail survey.

Results

All respondents from the three potential markets indicated that they use meat and wildlife hides in their industry as a raw material. However pertaining to either baboon meat or hides utilisation, all the respondents were not sure whether they would accept them since a number of factors had to be considered. A market survey coupled with consultations with feed formulation specialists, wildlife specialists and health personnel had to be consulted before embarking into such a project. Most responses were either on the negative or respondents were not sure as indicated in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Responses from potential baboon product markets

Respondent	Question	Response (%)		
		Yes	No	Not sure
Animal Feed processors	1.Do you use animal meat in pet feed processing?	100	-	-
	2.Would you like baboon meat for pet feed processing?	-	-	100
	3.Do you think your clients would accept pet feed processed from baboon meat?	33	67	-
	4.Would you market pet feed processed from baboon meat?	33	67	-
	5.Would you accept baboon meat for pet feed processing?	-	-	100
	6. Would you accept the baboon meat at a cost?	-	17	83
Game Ranching Industry	1.Do you use meat for feeding carnivorous animals?	100	-	-
	2.Do you think baboon meat will make a special feed for your animals?	33	67	-
	3.Do you think baboon meat will meet the nutritional requirements of animal feed?	16.5	67	16.5
	4.Would your clients and or visitors support the idea of feeding your animals on baboon meat?	-	67	33
	5.Would you accept baboon meat as feed for your animals?	-	83	17
	6.Would you accept the baboon meat at a cost?	-	50	50
Wildlife hide tanners	1.Do you use animal hides in leather processing?	100	-	-
	2.Do you think baboon hides will make a special brand of leather?	-	-	100
	3.Would your clients accept leather processed from baboon hides?	33	67	-
	4.Would you accept marketing leather processed from baboon hides?	67	33	-
	5.Would you accept baboon hides for processing as leather?	-	33	67
	6.Would you accept the baboon hides at a cost?	-	17	83

Discussion

This study explored the potential of industrially processing baboon products and use of baboon meat in feeding wildlife carnivore species. It aimed at providing an alternative since product research helps to find additional uses for existing and potential products (Proctor, 1997). Knowledge about the potential market is very important since an organisation entering a new market with a new product needs information about that market since its success is dependent on good decision making in developing sales of the new product (Birn, 1999).

All of the pet-feed processors were not sure if they would accept baboon meat in feed formulation citing bio-security reasons. Game ranchers also echoed the same reasons with 83% basing unacceptability of baboon meat as feed for their animals on zoonoses. This confirms the international views that primates have been known to harbour novel pathogens that are infectious to other animals and humans (International Society For Infectious Diseases, 2004). HIV has jumped from primates to humans on at least 7 occasions in recent history, SIV the precursor to the HIV virus has been found in 26 different species of primates (Bushmeat Crisis Taskforce, 2003), many of which are hunted and sold for food. This suggests that such infectious strains are circulating in wild animals, such as primates, sparking fears that where the meat is commercially exploited, this could fuel an already disastrous global HIV pandemic. Experts within the veterinary sector argue that even under the most hygienic conditions increased interface with these primates in commercial exploitation creates optimal conditions for diseases to multiply rapidly and jump between species. They suggest that utilization of primate products will complicate the management of parasites that affect both humans and wildlife considering that it is only recently that man contracted tuberculosis (TB) from cows and measles from dogs. Then under such circumstances there is a high risk of new diseases spreading into the human population, also providing an ideal environment from where they could mutate and form complex forms of infective parasites.

Crocodile ranchers, as one of the respondents, were concerned with the possibility of transmitting a parasite *trichinella* from baboons to crocodiles. In 2004, in Papua New Guinea, *trichinella* was found in a crocodile after being fed wild pig meat and this parasite was also found in Zimbabwe in 1999 (Emerging Infectious Diseases, 2004) and it affected the crocodile export market. This parasite can infect humans if they consume infected crocodile meat, causing rashes, fever, respiratory and neurological problems.

Some of the diseases that have been linked to the wildlife markets include Ebola fever, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), monkey pox and the West Nile virus. Ebola, one of the

most deadliest world diseases is found in primate species and SARS has been linked to the wild life markets of southern China. The number of these infectious pathogens found within primates seems to increase with increased interface and exploitation of primates especially in the bushmeat trade. This raises concern of bio-security, which is the possible transmission of these infectious pathogens from primates to humans.

Besides zoonotic diseases, most respondents were not sure as to whether they would use baboon products basing their confusion on conservationist ideas. Though they see the potential in the utilization of baboon products, conservationists argue that baboon populations could be endangered unless conclusive studies are initially conducted to determine the significance of the problems caused by baboons and the population status. Game ranchers (67 %) responded that their clients and visitors who are mainly Animal Rights Activists (ARAs) would not support the idea of feeding animals on baboon meat. Conservationists and ARAs are concerned with the state of the baboon population worldwide. A similar planned project in South Africa designed to can wild baboon meat (Brend, 2004) targeting West and Central Africa baboons and the Asian market enraged ARAs on the premises that this would fuel animal cruelty, poaching and illegal trade in animal body parts. This also explains the 67% ' Not sure' response of the targeted wildlife hide processors.

The 67% of respondents in pet feed processing and game ranchers observed cultural and traditional aspects as reasons behind their non-acceptance of baboon meat. Beliefs, values and customs may influence behaviour in a general way and can sometimes be very specific encouraging or discouraging consumption of certain products (Oliver, 1990). One fundamental factor is the cultural attitude of people towards primates. Levels of tolerance, acceptance and even demand for interactions vary with cultural context (Biquand *et al* 1992). There is need to ensure that the potential industrial processor is aware of product existence and most important its acceptability (Adcock *et al* 1995). Many wild animals in Africa have spiritual and cultural associations. Some animals, especially primates, are sacred, respected, feared and may not be touched or killed. The Chacma baboon is found in three categories that is as a totemic, tabooed and spiritual species. Totemic species are regarded as symbols of an existing and unseen relationship with the ancestors (Ntiamao-Baidu, 1995). These cultural and traditional aspects have influenced the non-acceptance of baboon meat for commercial exploitation. The socio-cultural aspects influencing acceptability of baboon products for industrial processing need to be documented, since social and cultural factors influence all aspects of consumer and buyer behaviour (Doole and Lowe, 1999).

Conclusion

Baboon meat or primate meat in particular is not highly accepted as animal feed and for pet feed processing due to the possibility of transmitting animal diseases (zoonoses) to animals and humans, animal welfare, poaching and illegal trade in animal products of concern to Animal Rights Activists and Conservationists, Cultural and Traditional aspects. Thus the potential of industrially processing baboon products will least likely be accepted.

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