

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION: ITS ROLE IN THE PROMOTION OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines wildlife conservation: its role in the promotion of recreational activities in Nigeria. Wildlife conservation is the practice of protecting wild animal species and their habitats in order to maintain healthy wildlife populations and to restore, protect and enhance natural ecosystems. The conservation of wildlife is of great need because of threats to their lives such as hunting, habitat destruction, degradation, fragmentation, overexploitation, poaching, pollution, climate change and the illegal wildlife trade which result to their extinction in their natural habitats. This study uses secondary data collected from the review of literatures in textbooks, journal articles, library and the internet. This work adopts method of content analysis to analyze the contents. The findings of the study showed that conservation of wildlife species is paramount as it promotes sports activities, research, educational purposes, entertainment and tourism. The study recommends that because of the importance of wildlife conservation, awareness campaign should be carefully designed to educate the people in rural areas on the need for wildlife conservation. National parks should be built in various communities for proper harvesting and safe-keeping of wildlife.

Keywords: Wildlife, recreational, activities.

Introduction

The desire to survive and make a living has necessitated man's engagement into different activities that destroy natural habitats and wildlife. The innumerable pleasures derive by man from wild animals cannot be overemphasized. A lot of people especially in rural areas depend heavily on wildlife killing for cultural, economic and nutritional purposes (Nasi, Taber & Van Vliet, 2011). However, the activities of man towards wildlife led to the destruction of natural habitats, hence leading to the extinction of wildlife in the forest in Nigeria. Thus, these man's activities do not only destroy natural habitats and wildlife but cause degradation, fragmentation, overexploitation, extinction, damming rivers, draining swamps, poaching, pollution and climate change. There is no disputing that seemingly negative attitude of the people towards wildlife is quite disturbing. However, on realizing the damming effects of these man's activities towards wildlife in Nigeria culminated into the idea of national parks for conservation of wildlife species. The national park is often judged on the number of species that it contains especially mammals, birds, fishes and plants and hence diversity has become central to the majority or evaluation schemes. Usher (1991) reports that diversity either of habitat or species is the most commonly used criterion in conservation evaluation. Studies have shown that the best solution to the problem of endangered species involves preserving their "habitats" (Usher, 1992). This is because human beings and wildlife are destined to share resources and Nigeria has more than 40 wildlife parks (Gandiwa, *et al.*, 2013). These conservation areas are imageries of themselves as there is no baseline information on the biological resources components.

However, wildlife plays an important role in maintaining the balance of various ecosystems, as it allows the study living organism in their habitats. The universe is replete with indices of immeasurable contributions that wildlife species have made to human development in virtually all countries of the world. In Nigeria human beings have profitably utilized several kinds of animal species for traction, power generation, clothing, research, medicine, sports, tourism and entertainment. The national parks and game species reserved in Nigeria attract tourists from all parts of the world. Most national parks and zoos in Nigeria are providing public entertainment as not only for the idea of promoting scientific studies. Hence, the goal of keeping wildlife under captivity has shifted from educational to recreational interests. This study aims at investigating wildlife conservation and its role in the promotion of recreational activities in Nigeria.

Wildlife Conservation

Wildlife conservation is defined as the act of securing wild species and their habitats so as to protect, restore, and enhance natural ecosystems. Wildlife conservation is an activity in which conscious efforts are made to protect and

preserve the earth's biological diversity. Sahney and Benton (2008), define wildlife conservation as the study of nature and of earth's biodiversity with the aim of protecting species in their habitats and ecosystems from excessive rates of extinction and the erosion of biotic interactions. It is an interdisciplinary subject drawing on natural and social sciences, and the practice of natural resource management (Meffe, Gary, Martha & Groom, 2006).

Conservation of wildlife is very important. This is because wildlife plays an important role in maintaining the ecological balance which contributes to quality of human life (Tidball, 2014). It is also involved in balancing the ecosystem and provides sustainability to different natural processes such as rainfall, (transpiration from plant), changing of temperature (heat emission by animals) and fertility of soil (making of manure by earthworm). The goal of wildlife conservation is to ensure that nature will be around for future generations to enjoy and also to recognize the importance of wildlife and wilderness for humans and other species alike (Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement(CARE) 2012).

There are major threats to wildlife and these include habitat destruction, degradation, fragmentation, overexploitation, poaching, pollution and climate change. The IUCN estimates that 27,000 species of the ones assessed are at risk for extinction. Expanding to all existing species, a 2019 UN report on biodiversity puts this estimate even higher at a million species. It is also being acknowledged that an increasing number of ecosystems on Earth containing endangered species are disappearing. To address these issues, there have been both national and international governmental efforts to preserve Earth's wildlife.

Recreational Activities

Recreation is an activity of leisure, leisure being discretionary time. The "need to do something for recreation" is an essential element of human biology and psychology (Bruce & Daniels, 1995). Recreational activities are often done for enjoyment, amusement, or pleasure and are considered to be "fun". **Recreational activity** is any outdoor activity undertaken for the purpose of exercise, relaxation or pleasure, including practice or instruction in any such activity. "Recreational activity" includes, but is not limited to, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping, picnicking, exploring caves, nature study, bicycling, horseback riding, bird-watching, motorcycling, operating an all-terrain vehicle, ballooning, hang gliding, hiking, tobogganing, sledding, sleigh riding, snowmobiling, skating, water sports, sight-seeing, rock-climbing, cutting or removing wood, climbing observation towers, animal training, harvesting the products of nature and any other outdoor sport, game or educational activity, but does not include any organized team sport activity sponsored by the owner of the property on which the activity takes place.

History of Wildlife Conservation in Nigeria

The wildlife conservation in Nigeria started in 1900. The conservation started in the form of forest reserves which was first established in 1900. In the forester serves, the trees are the habitats of the wildlife animals. In the early 1930s, several articles on game preservation were published in the journal. In the Nigerian Field even in those days, many observers have noted the rapid decline in wild animals in many parts of Nigeria, but there were conflicting views on how this decline should be stopped and whether it was worthwhile to establish reserved areas. One viewpoint expressed by Collier (1934) was that conservation of animals could not be justified unless it provides supply of protein for the local people. He further suggests that (1) after the animal populations had increased, it might be possible to set aside some areas as National Parks and Game reserve; (2) there should be 'hunting forests' and in the centre there should be small areas for breeding; and (3) hunting should be encouraged since genuine interest in wild animals will help to stimulate interest in their protection. Shorthose (1935), opines that the immediate wishes of the local inhabitants were not the most important consideration, if the hunting of wildlife is not protected, the animal populations within a few years would be few. Indiscriminate hunting and shooting in the breeding season results in a large wastage of animals and therefore stricter rules are necessary. The long term survival of wild animals and their subsequent availability requires the immediate formation of reserves and national parks. Shorthose (1935) advocates that large reserved areas for breeding wild animals to avoid disturbance at all are necessary. These two articles written nearly forty years ago differ on two fundamental points: (1) whether there are areas of uninhabited land in Nigeria suitable for reserve, the government is prepared to establish a game

department for conservation, and (2) whether the short term interests of the local population should have priority over long term interests.

In the early 'thirties, it seemed that the main stumbling blocks to progress were:

1. The system of land tenure, since such an important social system should not be altered in the interest of wild animals. The density of the human population, which makes it difficult to find suitable areas for conservation.
2. The large herds of Fulani cattle grazing in northern Nigeria, which caused continual disturbance of game animals.

3. The high amount of hunting by individuals and by organized drives, which have resulted in the present scarcity of many species. At about the same time, in the early 'thirties, Haywood had made a survey of the wildlife resources in West Africa. In Nigeria, he found many people in the administration sympathetic to the establishment of reserved areas. In his recommendations to the Government, Haywood (1932) suggests the following:

1. There should be a system of game reserves which includes some of the existing ones

and the creation of new ones. Zoo reserves should be formed in the savannah regions: one in the Oyo area which might be designated a National Park at a later date and another in the Wase region (south of Bauchi and north of the Benue River) or in the Chafe-Kwiambana area between Sokoto and Zaria. B. A Game department with a Game Warden and 64 Game Guards should be established.

The cost of this service would be paid from rates, licenses, wild animal products, and from import and export duties on guns and ammunition.

2. There should be a ban on organized drives, spring traps and night hunting with lights'

3. There should be a register of non-Nigerian hunters to ensure that hunting licenses trophy fees and permits are not evaded.

4. Special consideration should be given to endangered species, e.g. gorilla, chimpanzee, rhinoceros, giraffe, water chevrotain, pigmy hippo and ostrich.

Other areas suggested as conservation areas in the 1930s include part of Yola Province east of the Confota river where rhinoceros and giraffe were fairly common, and some regions near Kontagora. Although many of these articles suggest that no progress was actually made, certain regions of the Northern Province did take practical steps, mainly as a result of the co-operation of the Emirs. For example, hippo reserves were created on the Benue, Donga and Katsina rivers, certain areas were closed for the hunting of elephants, hippos, "giraffes and rhinoceroses, and it was illegal to capture and sell those wildlife. In retrospect, none of these measures had a lasting beneficial effect.

Importance of Wildlife Conservation

Wildlife conservation helps future generations to enjoy our resources. Conservation can include harvesting natural resources, activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping and harvesting timber as well as non-consumptive activities such as bird watching, photography and hiking. Conservation helps to balance issues between wildlife and human populations. Conservation of wildlife implies insuring threatened and endangered species receive special management to protect their presence in the future.

Wildlife is the base of the food chain: Wildlife holds immense value to the area they inhabit. Consequently, wildlife is key to maintaining the ecological balance in a given area. Their sudden disappearance severely disturbs the delicate food chain balance and leads to irrevocable damage to the ecosystem. As an indispensable part of the ecosystem, wildlife is essential for the survival of interconnected species. It means eliminating even one species could trample the whole food chain, resulting in a wide-scale extinction of wildlife.

Medicinal significance: Although plants are the primary source of medications, some animals also play an essential role in the production of medicines. Cobra venom, for instance, is a vital ingredient in leprosy medications, and lobsters are used as anti-fungal treatments.

Cultural preservation: The influence of wildlife on culture cannot be overstated. Animals and plants have always had significance on things like religious beliefs and food. For example sage is an important herb for religious

ceremonies in many indigenous groups. Regional dishes made from locally sourced ingredients preserve memory and tradition while also bringing communities together. It is critical to protect wildlife to preserve culture and traditions.

For pollination and native plants survival: Birds, insects, and bees are some small animals that contribute significantly to food production. The conservation of these animals thus aids pollination. They are important in crop production, inter cropping, and ensuring the survival of native plant species because they rely on nectar from flowers. Bees carry pollen when they move from one flower to another to find nectar, which is very beneficial for crop growth.

Contribution of Wildlife Conservation to Recreational Activities

Recreational use of wildlife species in national parks and reserved centre has increased greatly over the past century. The use of National Forest wildlife for recreational activities in Nigeria has been trending since 1940 and has been attracting more than 12 million recreation visitors on annual basis (Lucas & Stankey, 1988). As of 1946 to 1986 the popularity of wildlife recreation activities grew from 1 percent of total forest recreation use to 6 percent in 1986 (Lucas, 1989). In 1946, only 5 percent of forest camping occurred in wilderness. Wildlife Preservation and Recreational Use in 1986, 35 percent of forest camping took place in wilderness (Lucas, 1989). The wildlife conservation contributes to the growth of recreational activities in Nigeria through the following ways:

Research and Educational purposes: Most of the zoological gardens in Nigeria are kept for exhibition, for recreational, research and educational purposes (Alarape, Yager & Salman, 2015). Omonona and Ayodele (2011) describe zoos as educationally planned oriented life animal displays, which is presented to visitors in the most aesthetically pleasing, interesting and naturalistic context.

The visits to zoos and wildlife sanctuaries present an exceptional opportunity for large numbers of people to be engaged in conservation issues and to support wildlife while also providing a recreational avenue (Smith, et al., 2010; Eshun & Tichaawa, 2019, 2020; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2020). In most parts of Central and West Africa, such as Nigeria, zoos are the most visited wildlife tourism destinations given their proximity to people and close interactions with wildlife when compared to conservation sites like national parks and game reserves, thus promoting the nation's tourism industry (Ajayi, 2015).

Tourism: This involves diverse activities like wildlife viewing and photography, the use of wildlife for entertainment (e.g. circus shows), wildlife-based transportation (e.g. elephant rides), hunting and fishing, attending zoos and aquariums, and visiting protected areas or sanctuaries (Newsome, Dowling & Moore, 2005). The wildlife tourism can occur in captive, semi-captive, or wild environments (Tisdell & Wilson, 2012). It can emphasize on entertainment (Shackley, 1996). Wildlife tourism is one of the main avenues through which humans interact with wildlife. Globally, wildlife tourism is valued at US \$45 billion, with an annual growth rate of 10%, and it is expected to expand with international increases in education and income (Newsome & Rodger, 2013). Studies have shown how tourism infrastructure and activities present benefits for recreational resources (Newsome et al., 2005; Tisdell & Wilson, 2012). The conservation of animal in tourist centers encourage exercises such as elephant riding and among others (World Animal Protection, 2017).

Sports: This can be called trophy hunting, game hunting or safari hunting. It involves the hunting of wildlife for sport or recreation purposes. This old form of recreation remains active today and increasingly highlighted by scholars in Africa (Lovell, 2008). Africa is considered as "Mecca" or "home" for sport hunters from all over the world, and over half of Sub-Saharan African countries officially approved sport hunting (Roulet, 2004). More than 18,500 hunters, mainly from the USA and Europe, visit these countries each year, generating annual gross revenues of at least US\$201 million (Lindsey, Roulet & Romanache, 2007).

Sport hunting plays an important role not only in the tourism industry, but also in conservation policy in Africa. The Community Conservation model aims to involve local people as the main leaders in conservation and resource

management activities by sharing the revenues and employment opportunities generated from conservation and tourism (Adams & Hulme, 2001). Some researchers and governments regard sport hunting as a tool that can be used to support strongly Community Conservation (Baker, 1997; Chardonnet, *et al.*, 2002). As an example, in the CAMPFIRE (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) project in Zimbabwe between 1989 and 2001, 89% of the total project revenue came from sport hunting, and about half of the total project revenue was disbursed to communities (Frost & Bond, 2008). Moreover, some researchers have argued that sport hunting is both economical and ecologically sustainable (Backer, 1997; Bond, *et al.*, 2004; Lindsey *et al.*, 2007). That is, sport hunting can support wildlife conservation policies and local development by providing huge amounts of revenue, and it can ensure ecological conservation through the enforcement of strict hunting rules.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Since wildlife conservation is important in the promotion of recreational activities such as sports, tourism, research, academic purposes and enlightenment, awareness campaigns through radio, television, town crier, town union and community development agents should be carefully designed to educate the people in rural areas on the need for wildlife conservation.
2. Seminars and workshops should be organized to educate people in the villages on the alternative ways of making food, meat and money from animals by rearing them at home.
3. National parks should be built in various communities for proper harvesting and safe keeping of wildlife.
4. There should be appropriate monitoring teams set by government in various localities that will monitor and punish people that embark on illegal hunting.

Conclusion

This paper examined wildlife conservation: its role in the promotion of recreational activities in Nigeria. Wildlife conservation is the conscious efforts to protect and preserve the earth's biological diversity. Wildlife conservation is the practice of protecting wild animal species and their habitats in order to maintain healthy wildlife populations and to restore, protect as well as enhance natural ecosystems. Wildlife conservation is important as it helps to preserve natural ecosystems, help in pollination, promoting cultural preservation. Thus, this paper concluded that conservation of wildlife species promotes recreational activities in Nigeria through sports, research, educational purpose, entertainment and tourism.

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