

Local wildlife is important in human diets

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Animals like antelope, frogs and rodents may be tricky to catch, but they provide protein in places where traditional livestock are scarce.

According to the authors of a new paper in *Animal Frontiers*, meat from wild animals is increasingly important in central Africa.

"The elephant or [hippopotamus](#) may provide food for an entire community, smaller antelope may feed a family, while a rat or lizard may quell the hunger of an individual. Alternatively, these species are often sold on the road side or at local markets to supply a much needed source of cash revenue," write researchers Louw Hoffman and Donna Cawthorn.

Hoffman and Cawthorn are interested in the nutritional value of wild animals. They cite previous studies showing that bushmeat contributes 20 to 90 percent of the [animal protein](#) eaten in many areas of Africa. Studies show that some bushmeat species are high in protein, amino acids, vitamins and minerals.

"Besides the contribution of protein, the provision of calories from bushmeat cannot be overlooked and while the meat of many wild animals is low in fat, some species such as rats and porcupines are prized for their fatty consistencies," write Hoffman and Cawthorn.

Nutrients from wild animals help people survive in these regions. According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation, 25 percent of the world's undernourished people live in sub-Saharan Africa.

But with increased consumption comes a loss of biodiversity. Hoffman and Cawthorn cite the decline of primates in [central Africa](#) and the over-hunting of the manatee and pigmy hippopotamus in Ghana.

"This situation is exacerbated by the fact that international and domestic commercial and often illegal trade in [bushmeat](#) and other parts of [wild animals](#) is increasing and is largely outpacing legitimate subsistence hunting," write Hoffman and Cawthorn.

An alternative is the "semi-domestication" of certain animals. Already, many African antelope are raised in large enclosures or in state-owned nature preserves, though that meat is often sold for export. Hoffman and Cawthorn write that rodents could easily be raised as food animals because of their quick rates of reproduction and simple care requirements.

"Besides supplying valuable protein, the meat of rodents also contains essential amino acids which are required in the human diet," they write.

In their paper, Hoffman and Cawthorn also examine the importance of wildlife outside of Africa. They write about the consumption species like guinea pigs in South America, alligators in the United States and snakes in Asia.

"Today, up to 4,000 tons of snake meat are served annually in China, where this reptile's meat is commonly served in restaurants in cities such as Shanghai, Foshan, and Yangshuo," they write.

More information: animalfrontiers.org/content/2/4/40.full

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