

# Conservationists find birds in central African rain forest are facing major threats from bushmeat hunting

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In a new study released this month, conservationists are sounding the alarm about a growing hunting crisis plaguing rainforests in central Africa. The study, published in the journal *Biological Conservation*, found that more large forest birds such as raptors and hornbills are being killed to provide bushmeat (wildlife taken for food) than previously thought. Researchers concluded that unless the threat posed by unsustainable hunting is reduced, bird populations will continue to decline—potentially leading to devastating consequences for the biodiversity of the region.

The study was conducted in the Littoral Region of Cameroon, where scientists surveyed 19 villages that border the proposed Ebo National Park in the western part of the country. Researchers used direct and indirect questioning and statistical models to quantify the socioeconomic predictors, scale and seasonality of illegal bird [hunting](#), and bird consumption in the area.

"Understanding why people eat birds and quantifying how many are killed is just the first step in understanding how bushmeat hunting can affect birds like hornbills and eagles," said Robin C. Whytock, a Ph.D. researcher at the University of Stirling in Scotland and lead author of the study. "I think birds such as crowned eagles are particularly threatened by hunting in Cameroon, both because of direct persecution and because their prey base has been depleted by hunting. These and other similar

large-bodied birds that reproduce slowly are therefore a conservation priority."

The science team also found surprising information they believe ties education levels to the amount of time people spend hunting and how much wildlife they consume.

The team originally thought that younger, [unemployed men](#) at lower education levels would consume more wild birds than other hunters. While the study did conclude that [birds](#) were primarily hunted and consumed by unemployed men during the dry season, the data unexpectedly revealed that hunting has increased among those with higher education.

This discovery may change the way scientists tailor future conservation programs, in reaching out to urban populations as well as rural communities. Conservationists could also focus on better informing those at higher education levels about the importance of specific bird species to their ecosystem. Moving forward, researchers said closer examination of other habitats will be necessary to fully understand the totality of the growing bushmeat hunting crisis.

The two-year study and analysis was conducted by numerous conservation and educational facilities, including the University of Stirling, the University of Dschang, Drexel University, Wageningen University and Research Centre, The Peregrine Fund, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and San Diego Zoo Global.

Provided by Zoological Society of San Diego

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