

Ghana's Forest Wildlife in Danger

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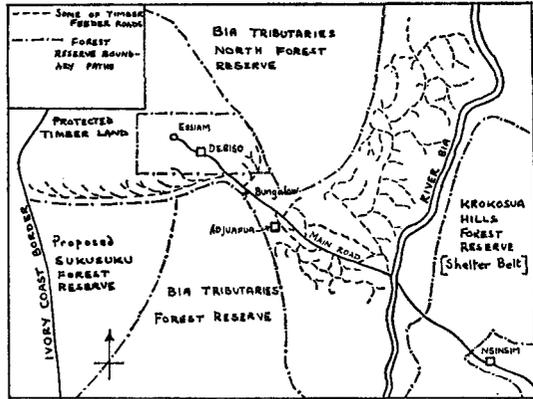
Timber operators building access roads open up the forest in Western Ghana and make it easy for farmer-settlers to come in. The roads also enable them to get their produce to the towns to sell, and thus the farms become profitable and expand, and the wildlife disappears. At the same time the slaughter of wildlife in the forest reserves (its only refuge) is severe and continual, largely because meat is scarce. The author pleads for some forest reserves to be made game reserves as well so as to protect the forest wildlife.

Ghana's natural rain forest is rapidly diminishing. Where I live, in the Western Region, in a remote part of the forest belt a few miles from the Ivory Coast border, most of the farming is at subsistence level. The fertile forest soils are not restored, humus is soon used up, minerals are leached out by the high rainfall, and the land made barren, so that farmers are constantly moving on to exploit new areas. Only in the forest reserves and protected timber lands are they discouraged, but the latter are only protected until the timber is felled by agents. Often protection is difficult to enforce as farms which already existed in the areas before the Protection of Timber Act provide a nucleus for expansion. In Forest Reserves, which have been in existence longer, little or no encroachment occurs, and only certain trees can be removed at certain intervals.

The suggestion that it is felling operations by large timber firms that destroy the habitat is misleading. In order to extract the timber the firms build roads which open up new areas. We are living in one such area of 400 square miles which has been intricately roaded in the last seven years (see map), roads being built at the rate of 3 to 4 miles a week; before this the only form of communication was by devious winding forest paths. Even before the road building began the area was heavily farmed in places (a cause of severe losses to the firm through burned trees). But the roads have encouraged farming on a larger scale; because marketable produce can be transported more easily to the towns, farms are profitable and they expand. In the timber operations damage incurred during felling and hauling to loading bays is quickly made good by the fast-growing vegetation, and the removal of trees may stimulate more rapid growth in others which get more space and light. Farming, on the other hand, destroys all except the occasional high tree left for its shade; for farmed land to return to its original state would take hundreds of years.

Where farming has taken over, destroying the habitat, the indigenous forest wildlife has disappeared. Only the forest reserves offer any hope for the wildlife, and even there hunting is rife. In this region the Ghanaians are starved of meat, and they will eat almost anything. I have seen young dormice not more than five inches long, found in a hollow

Sketch map of the area described by the author showing how timber roads have opened up the forest



tree, being roasted on a spit. Similarly, young squirrels are taken helpless from their nests, and monitor lizards and tortoises of any size are collected. A saving grace for some species is their rejection by certain tribes or customs. If your wife has twins you must not eat the giant rat *Cricetomys emini*, and only certain tribes eat python and viper. Some meats such as potto are renowned as being very tough, others, such as monkey, have a strong flavour; but not many people can afford to be choosy, and bush-meat prices are very high. Few domestic animals such as cattle thrive in this climate, and although sheep appear healthy they are slaughtered only at traditional ceremonies. A sheep killed by a passing car will lie on the roadside untouched until the vultures pick it clean.

The meat of duikers, cutting-grass and brush-tailed porcupine is considered good and they fetch the highest-prices. Maxwell's duiker *Cephalophus maxwelli* are shot from the Sucusuku Forest Reserve at the appalling rate of two or three a night; they sell at 30s to 40s each here, possibly to a timber-lorry driver who can then sell them again for a higher price further down the road where bush-meat is scarce. Amateur hunting is probably discouraged by the high price of cart-ridges, being seven times the UK price.

The black colobus monkey *Colobus polykomus*, reported rare in other parts of Ghana, is common in the Bia Tributaries North and South, and the Sucusuku Forest Reserves. It is shot from each of these on average once a day, despite the fact that, in the Wildlife Preservation Act 1961, it is completely protected, as also are all bovid ungulates with young. These are two outstanding examples of the hunters' complete disregard of the Act and the lack of enforcement. The people's attitude is if it is edible kill it now, with no thought for what has already happened throughout most of Ghana. The bush elephant, once a national emblem of Ghana, is still well protected and even becoming a pest in farmlands bordering on some reserves.

At present there is one established wildlife reserve in the north of Ghana, the Mole reserve, and another two in formative stages, all in dry regions with savanna woodland animals. But there is no move by the

government to make an area of high forest, such as a forest reserve, into a game-protected area as Curry-Lindahl suggested in his report to the government—see ORYX, December 1969, page 147. If this were done, hunting under licence could be permitted when stocks had built up enough to allow a sustained yield. But the problems involved would take many years to solve: lack of both money and qualified people in Ghana, and the short-sighted attitude of the local people involved, are but three of them. Many hunters would have their livelihood removed and many people their meat. It would take the thousands of illiterate people in this area several generations to comprehend such a venture. As a tourist attraction to help the country's economy a high forest presents difficulties for seeing animals; there is no viewing from vehicles through field glasses on an open plain, but stealthy trekking for many hours through inhospitable foliage and then maybe only glimpses of the high forest inhabitants. Such a reserve would only attract the true naturalists and those willing to spend both time and patience.

List of Species

The following is a list of species I have personally encountered so far, with some brief comments.

Rodents

Derby's flying squirrel *Anomalurus derbianus*: 2 seen in felling operations; not very numerous.

Pel's flying squirrel *A. peli*: very common especially where land farmed and many dead or hollow trees. Especially seen while felling ofram.

African pouched rat (forest form) *Cricetomys emini*: very common.

Brush-tailed porcupine *Atheris africanus*: common, a pest in farms.

Cutting-grass *Thryonomys swinderianus*: more common in farmland, a pest.

Small dormouse *Graphixurus spurrelli*: common around houses.

Large grey dormouse *G. hueti*: in large hollow trees.

Zebra mouse *Lemniscomys striatus*: common.

House mouse *Mus musculus*: occasional.

Pigmy mouse *Mus minutoides*: very common in grass.

Three-striped mouse *Hybomys trivirgatus*: probably common.

Black rat *Rattus rattus*: a pest in most villages.

Hylomyscus stella: occasional one in Longworth trap.

Rufous-bellied rat *Lophuromys sikapusi*: very common.

Multimammate rat *Mastomys coucha*: present in high forest, and kitchens.

Tullberg's rat *Praomys tullbergi*: common, often trapped.

Swamp rat *Malacomys edwardsi*: present in high forest.

Side-striped squirrel *Xerus pyrrhopus*: common in high forest and farms.

Giant forest squirrel *Protoxerus stangeri*: recorded in high forest.

Small forest squirrel *Heliosciurus punctatus*: recorded from farmland. *Heliosciurus* sp.

Ungulates

Bay duiker *Cephalophus dorsalis*: present in forest reserves.

Black duiker *C. niger*: present in forest reserves here.

Maxwell's duiker *C. maxwelli*: very numerous in reserves.

Royal duiker *Nesotragus pygmaeus*: common in reserves.
 Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus*: occasional animals shot.
 Bush cow *Syncercus nanus*: reputed to be in area.
 Bush pig *Potamochoerus porcus*: small family groups in high forest.
 Giant forest hog *Hylchoerus meinertzhageni*: signs in Sucusuku Reserve.

Carnivores

Leopard *Panthera pardus*: occasional sightings in last few years.
 African golden cat *Felis aurata*: skull and skin not fully identified from Sucusuku.
 Kusimanse mongoose *Crossarchus obscurus*: very common in high forest.
 Pigmy mongoose *Herpestes sanguineus*: recorded in farmland.
 Forest genet *Genetta maculata*: quite common.
 Two-spot palm civet *Nandina binotata*: high forest.
 African civet *Civettictus civetta*: high forest but often seen near human habitation.

Primates

Demidoff's bushbaby *Galago demidoffi*: probably common, often near houses.
 Potto *Peridicticus potto*: farmland and high forest.
 Black colobus monkey *Colobus polykomus*: very common but only in high forest.
 Red colobus *C. badius*: occasional ones shot.
 Green colobus *C. verus*: probably quite common.
 Diana monkey *Cercopithecus diana*: troops in Sucusuku.
 Mona monkey *C. mona*: recorded from farmland.
 Spot-nosed monkey *C. petaurista*: common.
 Green monkey *C. aethiops*: one young from farmland.
 White-crowned mangabey monkey *Cercocebus torquatus atys*: in Bia Tribes. North and South, a pest to maize and rice farms.
 Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes*: Bia Tribes. North Forest Reserve.

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Under Fifty Monkey-eating Eagles

The total population of the monkey-eating eagle of the Philippines is about 36 birds, certainly less than 50, is the verdict of Dr Rodolfo E. Gonzales after his WWF-aided investigation on Mindanao Island (the eagle's only home) last year; the causes are the same ones that recur with monotonous frequency—deforestation, slash and burn cultivation and firearms. Deforestation he graphically describes as proceeding at the rate of 'one hectare every three minutes', depriving the forest-dwelling eagle of its habitat. 'No mountain today seems high or remote enough to escape human invasion'; in addition the eagle faces 'severe persecution by an expanding, well armed and uncaring human population'.