

¹⁵ Free translation from the Nianau text. Informant: Komisi Somori, Rukurva 1970. I was unable to elicit any other Nianau myths or stories in which the cuscus plays a prominent part. Jensen and Nigemeyer (1939) give accounts of several from Seti in central Seram and from the Wemale area of west Seram (1939:395-6, 397) in which it adopts distinctly human characteristics, in addition to a number of Alune and Wemale myths where this is less apparent (1939:123-4, 329).

¹⁶ It was emphasised by informants that when a person was slain it was only the head which was taken. There was no cannibalism, this being regarded as an uncivilised custom of the *Potiti* or people of New Guinea, who are also believed to be so unclean as to eat meat uncooked. Thus, although the killing of the cuscus is in some cases a relic of the slaying of humans, the consumption of cuscus is not a hang-over from cannibalism.

¹⁷ Among the Alune, initiations take a different form and the cuscus is not ritually killed. However, the elders officiating pretend to confuse the initiates by jokingly pointing to inland highlands. In fact, the cuscus is frequently a source of fun and amusement among the Nianau. It is constantly imitated, which causes great hilarity, and to talk of hunting cuscus can be an extended metaphor in recalling sexual exploits. *Mari'kokowe* is forbidden to be mentioned in front of females as it is said to refer to the penis. In west and parts of south Seram (Sachse 1907: 164) children are said to imitate cuscus in dances.

¹⁸ See notes 2 and 17 above.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGHER PRIMATES IN THE DIET OF THE FANG OF RIO MUNI

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An enquiry was recently undertaken by one of us (J. S. P.) into the diet of the Fang of Rio Muni (Republic of Equatorial Guinea), with the particular object of recording information on the utilisation of higher primates (Anthropidea) as food. The Fang, according to Alexandre and Binet (1958), occupy an area of 180,000 square kilometers, embracing the whole of Rio Muni together with the south of Cameroun and northern Gabon. They are predominantly subsistence cultivators, but considerable importance is attached to hunting, and in many cases this is an important source of protein. Until about the turn of the century, the Fang were cannibals (Bennett 1899; Largetau 1901; Horn 1927), a practice which is said to have been discontinued owing to legal pressures from the Spanish administration, and moral ones from missionary activity.

The study was carried out during 1968 and centred on two regions: the Abumzok-Ahinzok region at 1.28°N, 10.03°E, and the Monte Alén region, 1.45°N, 10.15°E. Both zones, according to Sabater Pi and Jones (1967) are covered by dense high forest, except around villages and along roads and highways where there is much agricultural land and secondary growth. The much abused fauna of the region is that common to most of Rio Muni; only the various species of mangabeys, which occur elsewhere in the Republic and in the same terrain beyond its borders, are absent from these areas.

The most important mammals in terms of biomass are:

- elephant—*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*;
- buffalo—*Syncerus caffer nanus*;
- duiker—*Cephalophus sylvaticus*, *C. nigrifrons*, *C. callipygus*, *C. dorsalis*,
- C. monticola*;
- bushpig—*Petamochoerus porcus picius*;
- leopard—*Panthera pardus leopardus*;
- mandrill—*Papio sphinx*;
- guonon—*Ceropithecus cephus*, *C. nictitans*, *C. pogonias*;
- talapoin—*Miopithecus cf. talapoini*;
- gorilla—*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*;
- chimpanzee—*Pan troglodytes troglodytes*.

Other, smaller mammals include the porcupine and other rodents, porro and angwantibo, and three species of galago. In the rivers live two species of crocodile and a terrapin; in the forest occur two species of land tortoise (Villiers 1958).

* * * * *

Some 506 persons were questioned, in Fang or in Spanish, but valid responses were obtained from only 100. Other returns were rejected for various reasons; some people refused to answer; some did not fully comprehend the sense of the questions; and others appeared deliberately to falsify their responses. Although three age categories of respondents were distinguished, and men and women were considered separately, in only a few cases were different results obtained from the different groups.

Very little interest was shown in domestic stock (chickens, ducks and goats) as food; noteworthy, however, was the case of one individual whose favourite animal food was lamb and goat. The flesh of the mandrill is highly regarded; 20 per cent. of those questioned considered it superior to all other meat. Perhaps on account of its status as a delicacy, the mandrill has been much persecuted and is a rare animal today in Río Muni; consequently only 4 per cent. of respondents claimed that they ate mandrill meat more frequently than any other.

A marked preference for the flesh of the guenons (*Ceropithecus*) was expressed by 9 per cent. Although considerably less popular than the mandrill, this is a high figure; moreover, some 15 per cent. stated that they ate this meat more than any other, which places these monkeys among the most constantly hunted or trapped of all game. We calculate that some individuals, together with their families (at an average of five persons per family), would account for around 100 guenons per annum. The most consumed species are those which are most abundant; namely the mustached guenon (*C. cephus*), followed by the spot-nosed monkey (*C. mitis*). It is very interesting that there appeared to be no taste for colobus monkey (*Colobus satanas*), although these animals are abundant in the mountains of the Abumzok-Añinzok area; it is said that the flesh of this species is very dry and has a rather disagreeable bitter taste. In spite of these assertions, there is evidence that some colobus actually are killed for the pot. It is possible that the wholly leaf-eating diet of the colobus contributes to its reputedly unpleasant taste; or that there is a food taboo in operation—in theory if not in practice.

Three elderly people, and one middle-aged man (4 per cent. of the sample in all) informed us that their favourite meat was that of the gorilla. Gorilla meat is today little eaten, since gorillas are becoming scarcer all the time, and their killing is theoretically illegal. It is known notwithstanding that at least five gorillas were killed in the Monte Alén region during 1968, and destined for the pot. As far as the quality of this meat is concerned, those who favoured it were in agreement as to its delicious flavour and fatty nature, tasting of *Aframomum* which, according to Sabater Pi (1966) and Schaller (1963) is in most places the gorilla's commonest dietary item for most of the year. The most appreciated portions of the animal are the facial muscles, the palms and soles, and the tongue. Basilio (1962) confirms that gorillas are still much sought after and appreciated by the Fang, and Schaller (1963) writes that many gorillas are killed for food in the Uru and Tshaberimu regions of the eastern Congo-Kinshasa (Zaire).

As for the chimpanzee, which is common in the forests of both localities, no-one expressed any interest in its flesh; when questioned on this anomaly, various persons replied that the chimpanzee is 'almost human' and that to eat it would therefore be a sin. No case is known in these areas of chimpanzees being eaten by man.

The various forest rodents (*Atherurus*, *Thryonomys*, *Cricetomys* etc.) are without doubt the animals most appreciated as food—by 25 per cent.—as well as being the most frequently eaten—35 per cent.—due to their abundance and ease of capture. Bushpig are especially esteemed by 17 per cent. of those questioned, but their hunting is very difficult, and in spite of their relative scarcity they form the most important animal diet of 7 per cent.

Pangolins, especially *Smutsia gigantea*, are the animal flesh most favoured by 15 per cent. of those questioned, and are appreciated for the sweetness of their meat and their strong flavour of formic acid; but since pangolins are rather rare their consumption is only occasional.

Antelope (duiker) is considered the best meat by 2 per cent., but is the main source of animal protein for 23 per cent. of those questioned; they are abundant and relatively large, so that the preservation of the meat by smoking is rendered easy.

We found only a single individual who expressed a preference for leopard meat; leopards are in any case hardly ever eaten because they are so rare.

Crocodiles and tortoises are little appreciated (1 and 2 per cent. respectively) and are little eaten in these areas. River fish are little appreciated (3 per cent.), but are the most frequent animal diet of 15 per cent., being easily obtainable and abundant.

Although they are by no means the most abundant game, higher primates are preferred as food by 33 per cent. of those questioned, one third of the sample; the much commoner elephants and forest bovids are considerably less sought after. The reasons for this preference are unclear, especially since the ethnography of the Fang is poorly known, and such subjects as totemism and its consequences in the realm of food avoidance have been very little assessed. It should also be noted that direct questioning has its drawbacks; in that there may be unwillingness to reveal that one has committed acts which are against the law of the land, or against

TABLE 1. Consumption of wild animals by the Fang of Río Muni, based on information from 100 informants.

Species	Number for whom this was the preferred meat				Number for whom this was the most frequent meat diet				Index of preference ('preferred' minus 'most frequent')
	10-16	16-40	40	Total	10-16	16-40	40	Total	
Domestic fowl	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	+1
Domestic goat	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	-1
Mandrill	2	12	6	20	—	2	2	4	+16
Guenon	3	4	2	9	3	2	10	15	-6
Gorilla	—	1	3	4	—	—	—	—	+4
Porcupine, cane-rat	5	9	11	25	—	8	17	25	-10
Bushpig	4	7	6	17	—	2	2	4	+10
Pangolin	2	8	5	15	—	—	3	3	+10
Duiker	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	+15
Leopard	—	1	—	1	2	17	4	23	-21
Crocodile	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	+1
Tortoise	—	1	1	2	—	—	—	—	+1
Freshwater fish	—	1	2	3	—	2	7	9	+2
	17	47	36	100	17	47	36	100	-12

tribal or clan custom; while apparently flagrant contradictions between word and deed may arise, as in the eating of colobus—a problem well-known to ethnographers, and due to misunderstanding of the context of the query. Nonetheless, given the limited time and opportunity available, this survey method seemed to be one which would yield results worth discussing, and would also have a direct bearing on conservation.

In other parts of Africa, food avoidances may or may not have importance, and may be rationalised in various ways. For the Lela, of Kasai in Congo-Kinshasa, Douglas (1954) states that: '... no big animal can be killed without being the object of a religious act. Only birds, squirrels, and monkeys are not counted as game and can be eaten by any man, woman, or boy'. It is possible that in the present context, of another tribe which puts a premium on hunting skill like the Lela, similar factors may be in operation to produce the high frequency of usage, and apparently high frequency of appreciation, of monkeys as food.

There is equally a strong possibility that the preference for primates, especially in the case of gorillas, bears some relation to cannibalism which according to Largau (1901) was practised for purely dietary as well as for ritual purposes. The most highly appreciated parts of the gorilla coincide with those formerly most favoured human tit-bits.

It may be significant, too, that chimpanzees are not viewed as dietary items, either potential or actual, nor are they in other parts of Rio Muni, Gabon or Cameroon. The reason given for this—that chimpanzees are 'almost human'—is interesting; it would seem that this recognition of kinship has caused an extension to them of the prohibition of human flesh that resulted from missionary teachings that 'eating people is wrong'. There is some slight evidence (Horn 1927) that there was no such prohibition in the days of anthropophagy; Tracer Horn states (1927: 129-30):

The cannibal tribes are meat-eaters and always have a supply of smoked meat on hand. This they often sold to the canoe boys at so much a basket. These baskets contain about half a bushel... I have often seen gorilla's hands, the hands, feet and other portions of chimpanzees etc.

The cannibal tribes referred to include the Fang, and if the Trader's memory and identification are to be trusted, it would seem that eating chimpanzees became wrong at about the same time as eating people.

In other parts of Africa we find conflicting evidence of the palatability of chimpanzees. In a letter to Mr M. McLeod, and kindly communicated to us by him, Mr Nene Yaw Boateng and Mr Francis Mensah-Abraham write of the Ashanti:

Kontromti (baboon) is eaten, especially smoked. Akata (chimp) is also eaten but many people don't like it because chimpanzees resemble human beings. Owing to this it is normally smoked when it is killed; when this is done people don't mind eating it since they claim it is fine meat.

Mr Moses Anafia (personal communication) says of the Tallensi and Mamprusi of northern Ghana, that there is absolutely no prohibition on the eating of chimpanzee meat; clan avoidances do occur, but chimpanzee is not one of these. They are rather dangerous to hunt, and there is certain amount of prestige attached to killing one in consequence; as among the Ashanti, the meat is normally eaten

smoked, but in this case the hunter himself will often give it to his wife to cook and prepare. Other primates are also eaten, such as petas monkey.

Western European culture tends to extend the man-like attributes of the chimpanzee to all higher primates, and there is a consequent distaste at the idea of eating them. A few Europeans have nonetheless been able to adapt themselves to monkey meat (Holt 1923; Fawcett 1934), as a few have even managed to bring themselves to eat human flesh. The same attitude is found among the Kalahari Bushmen, of whom Schapera (1930) says that they will not eat baboon 'on account of its being so like a man'.

It is undeniable, in any case, that the behaviour towards man of higher primates in Rio Muni reflects the relationships which we have described above; for gorillas, mandrills and guenons man is a predator, while chimpanzees show much less fear. However, the commensalism of chimpanzees with man is considerably less than that of gorillas.

The conclusions for conservation are rather alarming. The heavy predation of man upon guenons has made even those once abundant small monkeys rather rare; while the gorilla and mandrill, never so common, have retreated more and more before the expanding human population.

NOTE

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