

SURVEY OF THE WILDLIFE RESOURCE IN THE  
BIA RIVER AREA  
SIFWI DISTRICT, GHANA.

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#### ABSTRACT

To initiate management of the wildlife resource in the Western Region, a preliminary survey was carried out in the Bia River area in early 1971. The major concerns of the study were the status of rare species, principally the Pygmy Hippopotamus (Chocoropsis liberiensis), the status of the important bushmeat species, the importance of bushmeat as a source of protein in the area, and the problem of farm raiding by elephants. The study area covered 1,120 square miles of semi-deciduous Rain Forest, with a rich fauna of 35 species of larger mammals. Five separate studies were carried out, using walking transects to collect information on wildlife and land use. Interviewing the local people also provided some valuable information, as did discussions with other Government Departments.

No evidence was found of the Pygmy Hippo, but other rare species, i.e. Red Colobus, Olive Colobus, Diana Monkey and Chimpanzee were found. These species occur in low numbers and give some cause for concern. The species important in the bushmeat trade were found in the greatest numbers in the Bia-Tawya area. The two other major study areas supported wildlife numbers which were only 5% and 1% of those in Bia-Tawya. Ungulates, the most important bushmeat species, were only 4% and 7% respectively; indicating that over-hunting is seriously reducing wildlife populations in most areas. Other factors, especially other land uses, also effect wildlife and are discussed.

Elephants occur in the southern portion of the area and are a major problem due to their habit of raiding farms. A high concentration was found in Bia Trib. South F.R. near Adjuafua. Elephants also occur in the Sukusuku and Bia-Tawya areas, though in lower numbers.

Those in Sukusuku reportedly raid farms in the Niablé area in Ivory Coast and extensive raiding occurs in the eastern portion of the Bia-Tawya. The cost of elephant damage was estimated at 15,000.00 to 20,000.00 N¢ per annum.

Land use in the area, as it relates to wildlife problems, is also discussed. Bushmeat production is discussed at a form of land use. Alternatives for dealing with the elephant problem are suggested. Opportunities for blending compatible land uses and means of dealing with incompatible land uses are discussed, as they relate to wildlife problems.

It is recommended that the Krokosua Hills should be given strict protection in the form of status as a National Park, in order to protect the rare species and develop the tourist potential of the area. It is further suggested that the presently undeveloped south portion of the study area be given status as a Game Production Area in order to control bushmeat production and put it on a sustained yield basis. Such an area would also provide long term habitat protection and control hunting so that the survival of rare species would be assured. Since the forest in the Krokosua Hills is non-economic, and since forestry and bushmeat production are compatible in the southern area, these suggestions are generally compatible with established land uses in the area and therefore provide an exceptional opportunity for establishing intelligent management of the wildlife resource.

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## INTRODUCTION

Wildlife in Ghana is a resource of major importance. Since ancient times it has been an important source of protein. However, with the development of the country, problems concerning wildlife have intensified to a point where management to conserve the resource is necessary.

This study is the beginning of an inventory of the wildlife resource and the major wildlife problems of the country. It is the first assignment of a young unit of the Department of Game and Wildlife: called The Wildlife Resources Survey Unit. Having developed and agreed on the basic technique for the general faunal survey for Ghana, based on work in Mole National Park (then a Game Reserve), this work was begun in the Western Region of Ghana with special emphasis on the basin of the Bia river. This area was chosen as being of primary importance due to the:-

- (i) Interest in endangered species of the high forest area, especially in the Pygmy Hippopotamus, (Chocoropsis liberiensis) shown by the Fauna Preservation Society of Britain since 1960.

In 1967, the society, besides supporting the training of Rangers in Tanzania, provided tents and camp beds which I considered to be the basic requirements for a survey to find out whether any Pygmy Hippopotamus still exists in the Bia basin. With the return of the trained rangers and the equipment still kept for the operation, it was essential to carry out the exercise.

- (ii) Since 1963, it had been found that a high forest Game Reserve to be developed into a National Park, was necessary for Ghana, to contain Chimpanzees (Pan troglodytes) which are getting rare, as well as monkeys like Green Colobus (endangered) Black Colobus, Red Colobus and Diana Monkey. An area in which a population of elephants could be preserved was also of importance.

To the north of the Bia basin farming activities, coupled with timber operations, had created serious elephant control problems. Hunters camped in the Forest Reserves poached the elephants and drove them out into the surrounding farmland. There they soon acquired a taste for farm produce. In 1963, the chief of Goaso District refused to believe that elephants would turn also to feeding on cocoa. They assured me that they have lived with the elephants so far without trouble and could not believe that this would change.



Agricultural produce are now being damaged and of late the elephants have taken to eating cocoa pods. Farming is being done right up to the boundary lines of the forest reserves, and the remaining pockets of forest now seem too small to contain the elephant.

It is considered necessary to set aside a large tract of the forest as reserve to protect the elephants while the Department does heavy control shooting elsewhere in the area. Besides preserving a tropical rain forest which will be of ecological importance for the present and future generations, the area to be reserved could also contain a viable elephant population. This is necessary to avoid the possibility that as more and more land is brought under cultivation, and with intensified lumbering in the small remaining forest reserves, that the Department will be compelled to eradicate the animals; or their habitat will be so reduced that they will die out or leave the area for lack of suitable habitat.

(iii) The economic importance of the rain forest has so far been measured in terms of timber production and agricultural produce. There is however, local knowledge of the economic importance of fauna as a source of food and income though this is not acknowledged at the national level. Since fauna is not viewed as property of individuals to be managed carefully in its exploitation, but as communal or collective property, to be exploited while the going is good, it is necessary for government to ensure that this resource is properly managed. Given such a collective property vested in the Central Government, it is the responsibility of the Department of Game and Wildlife to set cash value on the wildlife of the area and thereby establish wildlife utilization as another form of land use in the rain forest; "cash value" since the present pattern of land use in the area is based on cash economy.

Consequently it was considered necessary to ensure that the faunal survey necessitated by problems (i), (ii) and (iii) above be expanded to cover land use and economic factors upon which a realistic decision can be made by the Government. Experience had shown that the fauna of the area were heavily used as a protein source and until just about a decade ago the area between River Bia and the Ivory Coast was largely a hunting ground with tapping of rubber, but little agricultural activity. The sale of bushmeat and monkey skins was a major source of income in the area at that time. I still have a black colobus monkey skin given to me by my father who once traded in the skins from that area.

In view of all these the survey team under the leadership of Mr. Bob Jamieson was assigned the duty of:-

- (i) establishing whether or not the Pygmy Hippopotamus still occurred in the Bia basin;
- (ii) investigating the present status of all major fauna of the basin;
- (iii) investigating the major factors affecting wildlife (wild animals and their habitat);
- (iv) assessing the economic importance of bushmeat in the area;
- (v) investigating the land use in the area in relation to its effects on wildlife;
- (vi) making proposals concerning wildlife management in the area.

It was and it is still my belief that in this way one can collect both qualitative and quantitative information upon which to base proposals to the Central Government. Such information gives us greater confidence in recommended lines of action.

I trust the team has done justice to its terms of reference as a pioneering project of this kind which has also offered opportunities for the training of all concerned.

E.O.A. Asibey  
Chief Game & Wildlife Officer.

Sanolo  
13/3/72