

## **Wildlife Trade and Bushmeat Consumption in Benin City, Southern Nigeria: Threats to Biodiversity Sustainability and Conservation Implications**

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**Abstract :** Despite the call for wildlife conservation and sustainability, wildlife trade and bushmeat consumption seems to have reached an all time high in Benin City, Southern Nigeria. This necessitated the survey of wildlife trade otherwise called bushmeat in selected markets in Benin City, Southern Nigeria between December and May 2016 (dry season) and June to September (rainy season). Eight markets randomly selected within the urban and peri-urban areas were surveyed weekly for both whole wildlife and prepared bush meat for consumption. Quantitative as well as descriptive records and pictures were collected. Records were made of whole specimens, juvenile alligators and dried body parts properly identified by the vendors. Quantitative data analysis was done using SPSS 14 software programs. A total of two thousand five hundred and eighty-nine (2589) bushmeat specimens comprising six mammals and a reptile were recorded for the rainy season, while nine thousand seven hundred and ninety -three (9793) specimens were recorded during the dry season comprising four mammals and reptiles. Species recorded included (*Thryonomis swinderianus* (grasscutters), *Artherurus africanus* (porcupine), *Sylvicapra grimmia* (duikers), *Alligator mississippiensis* (alligators), *Manis tricuspis* (pangolin), *Potachoerus porcus* (bush pig), and *Cercopithecus erythrogaster* the endangered white-throated monkey. The designated Central bush meat market as well as markets in the peri-urban areas recorded the highest number of specimens. The grasscutter dominated the collections in both the rainy and dry seasons. The increase in specimens collected in the dry season could be due to a greater exposure due to reduced vegetation cover. This high number poses a great threat to wildlife conservation as juveniles as well as endangered species are hunted indiscriminately. Educating the people about the importance of sustainability and conservation, rearing of the grasscutter which is in high demand and enforcement of existing laws on wildlife trade offenses would help in reducing threats to wildlife conservation.

**Keywords :** bushmeat consumption, conservation implications, Southern Nigeria, threats, wildlife trade

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