



## Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Covid-19 Rapid Response Round - Final Report

*Due within two months of the end date of the Rapid Response Round project*

*(maximum 6 pages)*

Project reference	CV19RR13
If linked with an ongoing project, please include that project reference here (e.g. IWT001)	25-015 Why Eat Wild Meat?
Project title	Impacts of COVID-19 on wild meat consumption in Cameroon
Country/ies	Cameroon
Lead organisation	IIED
Partner institution(s)	University of Oxford, Fondation Camerounaise de la Terre Vivante (FCTV), The Conservation Foundation (TCF)
Start/end date of project	01/01/21-31/03/21
Which fund was this project relevant to?	Darwin Initiative / Darwin Plus / Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund
Grant value (£)	£47, 486
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### 1. Project Summary

Unsustainable hunting for wild meat is a major threat to biodiversity in Central Africa with significant implications for both human food security and public health. In Cameroon, wild meat is eaten by rural communities, but also by urban consumers and overexploitation of vulnerable species is a major threat. Through the Darwin-funded Why Eat Wild Meat (WEWM) project (25-015), the project partners have been exploring *why* local people choose to eat wild meat and are developing a tool that can improve the design of wild meat alternative projects by responding to those drivers. The purpose of this Rapid Response project was to understand if COVID-19 has altered perceptions of wild meat among urban and rural consumers and, subsequently, affected trade and consumption patterns – for example, are urban consumers purchasing more or less wild meat? Is the economic shock of COVID causing urban-rural migration and increasing hunter numbers? Are people choosing or avoiding certain species implicated in COVID such as pangolins?

The project focussed on in depth analysis with the rural communities around the Dja Faunal Reserve (DFR) – the location of our existing Darwin project – but also entailed a large-scale mobile phone survey covering urban and rural settings across Cameroon.

The information generated by the project is being used to inform the decision-support tool we are currently preparing under our main Darwin project, and also is feeding into a broader

project being led by Oxford to give a regional picture of the impacts of COVID on wild meat consumption in Central Africa.

## 2. Project Achievements

The expected outcome of this project was that “The impacts of COVID-19 on wild meat consumption and trade in Cameroon, both nationally and around the Dja Faunal Reserve (DFR), are elucidated, informing policy and decision support tool development. “

Our proposal had the following objectives:

1. Understand the impacts of COVID-19 on wild meat perceptions and consumption in Cameroon
2. Explore the impacts of COVID-19 on wild meat perceptions and consumption in eastern DFR, and mechanisms behind these impacts
3. Integrate the results of objectives 1 and 2 into the outputs of the WEWM project, particularly the decision support tool
4. Complete data analysis and write-up and share the results with local people, and local and national policymakers in Cameroon

B Post-project:

5. Regional-level understanding of post-COVID wild meat trade gained, and disseminated to an international audience of policy-makers and donors, to inform strategies for livelihoods and food security support in the Congo Basin region

Achievements against these aims was as follows:

1. Understanding impacts of COVID-19 on wild meat perceptions and consumption in Cameroon

We designed a structured questionnaire of 19 questions: 17 multiple choice and 1 open ended (Appendix 1) to be delivered via a mobile phone survey. An ethics review was conducted for both surveys through University of Oxford CUREC (Appendix 2), and an oral consent process was developed for both surveys as part of this review. We planned to use in-person voice calls and to target 2000 people. Respondents are contacted by phone and, if they are over 18 years old and agree to participate, they are read the questions by the interviewer, who then records them into standardised database. Respondents can choose to hear the questions in English, French or a further 6 common local languages.

There was a delay in agreeing a contract with the survey implementers GeoPoll (<https://www.geopoll.com/>), a company which specialises in mobile phone surveys. As a result, the surveys are still underway. Despite these delays, over 1000 surveys were completed. We had a higher response rate from men than women (64% of respondents were men) and so beyond the timeframe of the Rapid Response project but still in time to feed into the Why Eat Wild Meat project, GeoPoll will continue to survey more women in order to gain a better gender balance.

Analysis of the data shows that 81% of respondents eat wild meat at least once a year but only 8% eat it once a week or more. 44% of consumers said that the main reason for eating it was because of the taste, 22% for special occasions (such as weddings or other ceremonies), 10% because it is healthy, 8% because it is traditional and 6% because it is easily available.

Of those respondents that ate wild meat, 38% reported eating less now than before the pandemic. 44% said that they ate the same amount and only 2% said that they ate more. When asked only 17% of respondents thought that covid-19 originated from a market, however, over 40% of respondents would back a ban on urban sales. The main reason for this was a perception that wild animals can be the source of many diseases. Many respondents also expressed doubt as to the quality of the meat sold in markets.

## 2. Exploring impacts of COVID-10 on wild meat perceptions and consumption in eastern DFR

We conducted a survey of 199 households covering 18 villages around the DFR: 11 villages in the North Antenna of the Reserve, and 7 villages in the East Antenna (the villages are small - varying between 8 and 40 households - and this gave us a coverage of between 40% and 100% in each village). We interviewed one person in each household. Participants were selected to represent a balance of men and women. Nearly 50% of households were involved in hunting, which is generally a men's activity. The questions asked covered: background information on the respondent's characteristics (e.g., age, sex, age, education, ethnicity) and livelihood activities; what respondents think of the pandemic and how they gained information on the pandemic; the impacts of the pandemic on their lives and livelihoods; their perception of health risks from wild meat in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The full questionnaire has been provided in Appendix 3 as a PDF.

The results of the interviews revealed that, despite low direct impacts of Covid-19 in the villages to date, there was a very high awareness of Covid-19 in the villages. Everyone knew about it, and most people had heard about it from the radio, television or from visiting NGO representatives. The level of concern surrounding the virus was high.

Hunting and consumption of wild meat has temporarily changed because of Covid-19 around the Dja Faunal Reserve. Firstly, there has been a reduction in clients travelling into the villages to buy wild meat, partly due to travel restrictions and increased costs, and partly due to a reduced demand for wild meat, both from external clients and within the village. 26% of the hunters interviewed said that their hunting effort had decreased during the pandemic because of a perceived risk of catching Covid-19 from wild meat. Over 1/3 of respondents believed that Covid-19 could be caught from wild meat, and many respondents suggested that pangolins were particularly likely to transmit Covid-19. Several respondents suggested that hunters were preferentially not hunting pangolin, partly due to the worries of disease transmission and partly due to a reduction in demand.

Overall, the field survey found that Covid-19 has had an indirect but serious impact on the livelihoods of communities surrounding the Dja – primarily through halting access to education and reducing access to markets and clients for agricultural and wildlife products. As a result, 45% of household reported reduced incomes during the pandemic.

## 3. Integration of the results into the outputs the Why Eat Wild Meat project

We have incorporated the following findings into Version 2 of the Why Eat Wild Meat decision support tool:

- *Shocks and stressors can adversely affect the lives of people in rural areas and the success of wild meat alternative project as a result.* For example, Covid-19 has led transport costs to double and halted road building projects around the Dja Faunal Reserve. Roads are now harder to use and fewer customers have travelled to the villages from town. As a result, prices for crops (such as cocoa) and other products have reduced in villages, and respondents noted that they could no longer travel into town to sell fish (an existing alternative to wild meat in many villages).
- When asked what people thought about the idea of closing urban wildlife markets as a way of preventing outbreaks of future diseases, 72% of the respondents disagreed with this policy. Almost all of them said that they did so because selling wild meat was an important source of income for many people. Several people said that alternatives needed to be found before shutting down livelihoods in such a way. *This highlights how important wild meat is for local livelihoods, and that suitable alternatives would be required to prevent increased food security, if policy makers were to close wild meat markets in response to future disease outbreaks.*

Additionally, we are using the results of this work, combined with the results of the Why Eat Wild Meat research, to develop a policy brief for Cameroonian policymakers. Further, the results will be included in a think piece we are currently drafting as part of the Why Eat Wild Meat project on the drivers of wild meat consumption and design of wild meat alternative projects. Finally, the results of this work will be integrated into the discussion of a peer-reviewed paper on the drivers of wild meat consumption in Cameroon,

#### 4. Data analysis, write up and sharing of results with local people and policy makers?

The data from the field surveys have been analysed and a report drafted for submission to a journal (draft attached as Appendix 4). Our Cameroon partner FCTV will be presenting the findings at the next meeting of the Dja Actors Forum (scheduled for late June 2021) and will also include a discussion on the findings in meetings scheduled with Cameroon policy makers for the Why Eat Wild Meat project in July 2021.

#### 5. Dissemination to regional and international audience of policy makers and donors

We have been invited to submit the results of the Dja fieldwork as an open-access research paper to the African Journal of Ecology's special issue on wild meat use and policy in Central Africa. This special issue is policy-focussed, contains authors from several Central African government departments, and editors will be disseminating the Special Issue to key government departments and regional stakeholders in Central Africa. This issue is due to be published in October 2021. We will also be writing up the broader regional findings of the mobile phone surveys in Cameroon and DRC into a research paper for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, and widely disseminating the results, once the DRC surveys are completed.

We will be disseminating our Dja-focussed research paper to our regional contacts in Cameroon, including regional bodies such as COMIFAC; NGOs active in Cameroon including WCS, WWF and international organisations including through the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods listserv; the People and Conservation Learning Group Listserv; and via a blog on Oxford University's website publicised on social media.

### 3. Lessons learnt

#### What worked well:

During the pilot surveys conducted as part of the WEWM project in the Dja, we recorded interviews using a mobile phone, and took paper notes. This made the analysis and write-up of the surveys very labour intensive, as each interview had to be listened to and coded after the field surveys had been completed.

For this project we therefore designed the survey in Kobo Collect, software that supports data gathering on a tablet directly into a database. During each interview, the responses of the participants were coded and saved in real-time. The results could then be sent to researchers in the UK for analysis once an area with internet had been reached. This made analysis of results much quicker, but also meant that we could analyse the first round of responses while the field survey was in progress, and check that the survey was functioning well. While we did not revise the survey at this stage, due to its rapid nature and a lack of real need, other Darwin projects might find this useful. The ability to pilot test, analyse, tweak a survey and continue, all while in the field, allows for much more adaptive research. We would therefore recommend the use of KoboCollect for these types of rapid survey.

#### What didn't work well:

We originally planned to use a different company, VIAMO, for our mobile phone surveys in Cameroon, as Oxford have an ongoing contract with them to conduct surveys in DRC, and therefore the setup of a new contract for Cameroon would be rapid. However, once we began

the project it became apparent that VIAMO were not able to deliver an adequate number of surveys for Cameroon, within the budget and timeframe available. This is because each phone survey company has contracts with specific mobile phone provider companies, and the degree of usage of mobile providers differs between countries.

We therefore had to switch mobile phone survey providers to GeoPoll, who are another very well-regarded provider. However, we did not have an ongoing contract between GeoPoll and the University of Oxford, and so had to set up GeoPoll as a new provider and organise a new contract. This proved more difficult than we would have hoped because a) the University of Oxford's Research Services department is working under reduced capacity due to the pandemic and was therefore slower than usual in checking and issuing contracts, and b) GeoPoll is an American organisation, and the standard contracts used by the University of Oxford needed to be revised before they were accepted by Geopoll. This took several rounds of revisions, and therefore contracts were only finalised in early March. This delayed work on the mobile phone surveys, which are therefore still underway.

One of the Project Leads, Dr Lauren Coad, was ending her maternity leave as the project started, and when the UK went back into lockdown and schools closed in Jan March, she was also home-schooling an older child. While she was able to continue work on the grant, she did incur delays due to an increase in childcare responsibilities during lockdown.

#### What would we do differently:

We would make sure that when working on a rapid response survey, any required contracting was already in place. This was the original plan, but when a change in contractors was needed, the resulting contracting process took up too much time. This potentially precludes work that needs elements to be contracted from rapid-research projects, as the chance of delays are too high.

Due to continuing restrictions because of Covid-19, our plans for in-person dissemination of results have been delayed. We could, in retrospect, have realised that these delays would occur and planned for a more phased dissemination of results.

#### **4. Other comments and feedback**

Overall this project will deliver all our objectives, but with delays due to a combination of factors. By the end of July, we expect the project aims will be fully realised. With an ambitious 3 month project, this is perhaps inevitable, particularly in a pandemic when nothing is predictable.