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**Urban Bushmeat Trade in Madagascar**

**May Threaten Conservation and Survival of Endangered Species**

New research on Madagascar’s illegal bushmeat trade indicates that wild animals are moved hundreds of kilometers from rural to urban areas, where the oft-threatened species are sold at key market stalls and restaurants to urban consumers. These urban consumers not only eat twice as much bushmeat as their rural counterparts, but are willing to pay higher prices for it as well. The bushmeat trade impacts thousands of Endangered animals per year – including lemurs, fossa, and fruit bats – possibly threatening conservation efforts and hastening the extinction of some of lemur species, according to a study by Temple University researchers.

The researchers published the findings in two new articles: “Capture, movement, trade, and consumption of mammals in Madagascar,” online Feb. 29th, in the open access journal, [PLOS ONE](http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0150305), and “The consumption of wild meat in Madagascar: drivers, popularity and food security,” in the interdisciplinary environmental science journal, Environmental Conservation.

Led by Kim Reuter, the researchers spent three months in Madagascar surveying almost 2,000 households, meat-sellers, and inter-city transporters in 21 cities and villages across the country’s northern half about the bushmeat trade. Most bushmeat traded in Madagascar is often illegal.

“This study changes and expands how we view the bushmeat trade in Madagascar,” said Reuter. “This is the largest study of its kind to examine how urban individuals interact with the bushmeat trade. What we found is disheartening.”

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Reuter, one of the creators of the [Lemur Conservation Network](http://www.lemurconservationnetwork.org) and the [Pet Lemur Survey](http://www.petlemur.com), said that although most bushmeat hunting and trade is illegal, enforcement of the law seems to be relatively weak. She said that even though researchers and conservationists are aware of the activity, many have focused their attentions away from urban areas and towards rural areas near protected areas.

“Our study shows that in urban areas of Madagascar, the most important driver of bushmeat consumption is a preference for bushmeat,” said Reuter. “We had expected the biggest driver of bushmeat consumption to be a lack of alternative food options, as you often see in rural areas. But that is not the case.”

With several species of lemurs and bats listed as Endangered, Reuter said Madagascar’s extensive bushmeat trade could be driving some species closer to extinction, while even causing some populations to go extinct altogether.

“Now that we know the structure and drivers of the urban bushmeat trade, and that it is happening at this scale, it’s an issue that we can’t ignore anymore. Especially because urban bushmeat is traded through well-known market stalls and restaurants,” she said, adding that the urban bushmeat trade must be factored into future conservation efforts.

“More outreach, regulation and enforcement is needed to ensure the illegal bushmeat trade is curbed, especially in the big cities,” said Reuter. “Conservation programs that don’t consider the urban bushmeat trade may unnecessarily increase their costs and risk extinction of the very species that they are trying to protect.”

In addition to Reuter, the researchers included Temple biology alumna Haley Randell, Abigail Wills of the Mpingo Conservation & Development Initiative in Tanzania, and Temple Assistant Professor of Biology Brent Sewall. The research was funded by the National Science Foundation, Explorers Club and a Temple Faculty Senate grant.

**Note:** *Copies of this study are available to working journalists and may be obtained by contacting Kim Reuter at kreuter@conservation.org.*