

CAMEROON

Cane Rat Domestication Programme

The bush meat trade in Central and West Africa is seriously threatening regional wildlife and biodiversity as harvest levels grow to unsustainable levels and threatened/endangered species (mountain gorillas, monkeys) are killed for food. With longer life expectancy and population growth, raising demand for traditional bush meat led to increased trade volumes in Central and West Africa. This trend is causing rapid biodiversity loss, as illegal hunting is reaching unsustainable levels and many endangered species are threatened, despite laws enacted and trained Forest Guards deployed by the government to protect wildlife in Cameroon.

To address the threats posed by the bush meat trade, the Government of Cameroon has initiated the domestication and commercial production of the rodent “cane rat” (*Thryonomys Sp*). The Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife has created at the local council level official markets in order to stop the illegal hunting of endangered species. Farmers are trained in cane rat raising, animal health and marketing. A small number of farmer “leaders” are chosen and trained to serve as model cane rat farmers. After training, they are given two or three pairs of cane rats, and monitoring through follow-up visits is to ensure good husbandry and success. Just as in any livestock practice, competition prizes and other incentives are awarded to high quality producers.

The overall objective of the scheme is that commercial production of cane rats should provide a substitute for bush meat. The objective is to protect wildlife by providing a substitute source of protein in a region where bush meat is an important source of food and income. In parallel, the scheme aims to alleviate rural poverty and promote self-employment by providing alternative sources of livelihoods.

Impact on biodiversity

The programme is still limited to certain areas but expanding. Positive impacts of this programme on the illegal harvest of wildlife and the regional bush meat trade can thus be expected but, in light of its early stage, there is little data available on its precise quantitative impact.

Replicability

Based on lessons from the cane rat domestication in the savanna regions of Cameroon, the “Bush-Tailed Rat” Porcupine (*Atherurus Sp*) and other species of cane rats are now being domesticated by local communities in tropical humid forest zones. Due to limited financial resources, the cane rat domestication programme has not yet been promoted on a wider scale.