

Review of: "Stakeholders' Perception of Socioecological Factors Influencing Forest Elephant Crop Depredation in Gabon, Central Africa"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is an important research, contributing to understanding the impact of wildlife on human activities and survival, and vice versa. As the authors say, “despite their antagonism, villagers and elephants have common needs for a safe environment and reliable food sources”, the importance of this study lies in finding, through a sociological study based on the perceptions of two major stakeholders, what is driving the crop depredation incidents caused by forest elephants.

Science grows when researchers use novel approaches to different sets of knowledge. Using the methodology proposed for an integrative framework from other areas of research (Emerson et al, 2012) is an interesting approach. In the present case, this integrative framework is seen as a device that generates dynamism among the qualitative subjects. Since it is an innovative approach for this kind of research, making the framework somewhat more visible in the text will prove of value to understand how the themes and subthemes found from the perception of the stakeholders gear up. With the appropriate modifications, the box from Emerson et al can be presented to show the tool that generates all the connections shown in the synthetic frameworks. This can be included in the “Identified themes and subthemes” of the Results section.

The subject of socioecological factors influencing CDIs is a complex one. The authors have been able to summarize all the information gathered and show it clearly in the synthetic frameworks of figures 5 and 6. They have shown the intricate relations of the issues perceived by the stakeholders that underline the problems influencing forest elephant CDIs. As it is often said, maybe this was already known, but somebody had to put it on paper to be understood in detail and used as a source of information for further research and development of policies.

For policy-makers, the synthetic framework is the base for developing new questions on how to change or influence the interconnection of the drivers and the dynamics behind the problems that generate the CDIs. This instrument will allow the generation of better and safer interactions between wildlife and humans in regions where conservation of iconic species is so important.

The underlining subject of this paper is crop depredation incidents (CDIs). Explaining briefly, this subject clarifies the foundations of the study. Providing a basic context of what CDIs are is important, as there may be people reading this paper who are not familiar with them. The introduction can start with a brief description of what the “Crop Depredation Incidents” are – maybe with examples of them - to provide the context of the problem faced by the villagers.

Complementary information may include mentioning if forest elephants exclusively cause CDIs, how widespread CDIs are in the Congo Basin, and the economic impact of CDIs.

Maybe for a further paper associated with the sociology of this project, other possible analyses of the answers can be done based on the different age groups and genders of the informants. Possible driving questions can be, was there any noticeable difference in the answers between adults over 65 yrs and adults 18-64 yrs of age? If the informants (on both stakeholder groups) were of different genders, were there any differences in the answers? Was there any noticeable difference in the answers between the three professions of that stakeholder group?

Format/editing Notes

Authorship: Not all author names are shown related to a university or place of work. In addition, for those mentioned as associated with a university, there is no mention of a specific department at the university. This information is valuable to put the intellectual context of the project in the geography of knowledge. Affiliation of the first author should be numbered as #1. Also, contact information facilitates further communication for different opportunities that may arise from this research.

Pin the location of the two villages included in the study as a piece of complementary information on the country's map shown in Fig. 1. This will show how close to the park they are and help understand the influence and importance of it to the villages.

Furthermore, maybe you can provide a map of the study area with the location of the two villages, the village areas where they grow their plantations, and the multiple use forest (in the Results section?). This will provide a spatial image that will aid in understanding the results. Extra information could include the elephants' trails or movement trajectories to understand how these animals cause the problems.

To make the Interview Procedure section a little more logical, consider reorganizing it. Divide it into two parts: the first one introducing and describing the stakeholders, including the demographic profile mentioned later in the text, as it is not really a result but your population of informants on which you based the research. Were the informants (on both stakeholder groups) males or females, or a mix? Are the "Professional" stakeholders Gabonese or not, or a mix? The second part will be the description of the process of the interviews. Here you have to break the paragraphs to talk separately about each type of interview method used. Who conducted the interviews?

The thematic analysis was conducted in three phases. Consider splitting this paragraph into three smaller ones, and/or use bullets to point each one. I wonder if the three phases could be shown in a flow chart or graph of some kind to make it more dynamic. The questionnaire in Appendix S1 is for people from the villages. Did the professionals answer the same questions?

All the figures are very clear. Removing the percentage (%) symbol next to the numbers in figures 2, 3, and 4, and homogenizing the size of the font on the three figures will make them more fluid. Figures 5 and 6 show clearly how complex this subject is. Consider removing the boxes with the names "Villagers" and "Professionals" on the left side of

figure 5 and locating them above the corresponding graphs. This will allow expanding the size of the boxes for each column. The graphs will be more expressive as they will look less crowded. The arrows in the lower part of both figures should have the same height and a short legend below. In Fig. 5, are the widths of the arrows the “percentage” of respondents reporting a linkage between themes, or is it the “number” of them?

The use of italics in some parts of the text is mixed up and carries on to words or phrases that do not need it. Some citations are in italics and others are not. Consider homogenizing.

Check the scientific name of the forest elephant species, not only the spelling, but also the correct name of the species.

Review the Acknowledgments statement. It starts with “The authors...” but it quickly changes to “me” and “I”. One way of saying that something was granted to one of the authors is to say, for example, “... for granting HRM a research authorization that...”

The references were included twice. The second version, under Uncategorized References, does not show any difference from the first list, and it seems irrelevant. At least one citation is not found in the references (Gobush, 2021). Is the References list following any of the APA formatting guides?

Other editing notes:

Remove the scientific name of the forest elephant from the first line of the introduction, but write it after “forest elephants” on the first line of paragraph 3.

It is not clear what “when only permanent residents were present” means in the first line of the Interview Procedure.

In that same section, move “near the park” before the names of the villages, so it would read, “Villagers were selected from two villages near the park...”

On the second paragraph of the Interview Procedure, the word “subquestions” may be better than “questions” in “...three central questions with a set of [questions] (Appendix S1),”

In the Analysis of Themes by Stakeholder Groups section of the Data Analysis, consider reviewing this sentence: “We illustrated how individual interview passages were assigned to the figure and, when appropriate, (Appendix S2),” as it appears that some text is missing after “when appropriate”.

In the Acknowledgements, what is the correct extended name of IRET?

Appendices:

Have the title “CDI Manuscript Appendices” all in capital letters. In addition, a “p” is missing in the word “manuscript”. Maybe in the final version of the publication, you only need to say “Appendices.”

Appendix S1:

The subtitles heading the questions (lines 3, 16, 30, 96) should be more visible and follow the same format (one is in

italics, the other is underlined). Consider having them with a Roman numeral and maybe written in italics (for example, *I. The Preliminary: Identification and Historical Profile*)

Table in line 3. Center the words in each column. Also, change “man” to “male” to follow the same wording.

Homogenize the margin size throughout the text.

Consider having the French translation of the questions in the line below the English version.

Appendices S3, S5, S7, S9, S10, S11, S12:

Center or align right the contents of the columns that contain numbers.

Remove the percentage (%) sign from all the numbers in the percentage columns, which is not needed to repeat it in each number.

Consider switching to a small “h” in the word “human” in S11 and S12.

Appendices S4, S6, S8:

Most of the paragraphs are written in italics, but some are not. Homogenize either way.