

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

Guy M. Robinson¹

¹ University of Adelaide

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

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

This presents a detailed examination of how villagers and conservation professionals view damage to crops by forest elephants in Lopé National Park, Gabon. The analysis employs content analysis of interviews with 46 individuals, organising the content via a synthetic framework into a hierarchy of themes, contexts, drivers, and problem types. Although it was somewhat difficult to follow this approach, the results provide useful insights regarding the causes of increased depredations by forest elephants, and there is consideration of how future management can tackle this situation.

The Introduction sets the scene very well and succinctly, presenting the rationale for the ensuing research before discussing the study area. Why was this particular national park chosen? Is it because it is located right in the centre of the country? Or is it because it has more crop depredation than other parks (if so, why)?

Why select the two villages - Kazamabika and Ramba? And why avoid consideration of non-permanent residents?

The methods are outlined clearly, and the approach adopted seems eminently sensible. In terms of results, the thematic analysis seems quite complicated. Why was this particular approach adopted rather than something simpler? Where is the underpinning theory to support the approach adopted? This is perhaps the weak link in the paper. I don't think you can present what is quite an elaborate analysis of qualitative data without drawing upon relevant theory to help account for what you are doing. Indeed, theory is completely absent despite socio-ecological systems and interactions between people and animals having been theorised in various ways. I think this needs to be rectified by inserting a theoretical dimension ... between the Introduction and Materials/Methods.

In addition, given the complexity of the analysis, which is depicted very nicely in Figure 5 as part of the Results, this type of framing would have benefited from a simple diagram in the Methods linking it to the theory.

I enjoyed the Results section. This gives a really good account of how the various issues regarding human-elephant interaction are changing and the underlying drivers. The story that unfolds is fascinating and the authors have done a really good job of unravelling a complex set of interactions. My only real quibble after this is that the Conclusion is

something of a 'kop out.' It refers to identifying management strategies, which seems rather lame after such detailed analysis. Shouldn't we have a much clearer idea of what those management strategies are after this analysis? I accept that dealing with these strategies is probably the subject of another paper, but while stating this, couldn't the authors say more about the applied aspects of their results? What does this research tell us about how this dynamic situation could be managed better in terms of win-win for all concerned? Then they could follow-up this paper with another focused on potential future strategies.

Overall, an enjoyable and really valuable piece of work but with a little room to improve ('tighten') and to set the scene for a more applied second paper which I would strongly encourage the authors to consider pursuing.

Minor corrections

Pg. 1 penultimate line	Not ital for c in Crop
Pg. 2 line 3	Remove ital for references
bottom of para. 3	as in 2002 the government established a network of 13 national parks across the country for biodiversity protection, which could have contributed to CDIs in nearby villages.
Para 4 at bottom	what is a 'precedent result'? Rephrase.
Pg. 3 para 2	Villagers were selected from two villages near the park ...
Pg. 4 line 3	with an additional set of
Pg. 5 para 2	We illustrated how individual interview passages were assigned to the figure and, when appropriate, (Appendix S2). Doesn't make sense - rephrase.
para 4 last line	ten researchers.
Pg. 8line 2	<i>Forest structural changes</i> were identified by 37% of professionals, and they were derived
Pg. 11 para 2	insert space primarily <i>economic</i>
Pg. 12 at bottom	Although logging tends to create intense disturbances in tropical forests (Hosonuma et al., 2012; Tyukavina et al., 2018), including loud, disruptive activities and the loss of fruiting trees, such short-term impacts ...
Pg. 13 para 4	insert space - the <i>disruption</i>
	The bracket for (Villager is not ital
	as fruit represents a central component
Pg. 14 para 5	... is supported by Laguardia et al., (2021) and Meier et al.,
	(2023),

Pg. 15 para 3 at bottom *pursued it. These ...*

Para 4line 1 space after Gabon.

Why are the references in ital?