

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

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One of the main interests of this paper is trying to establish a symmetrical perspective between the needs of villagers and elephants rather than focusing on either one of them, which is often the case with a number of research articles usually written by elephant specialists or anthropologists. However, the article has the potential to go one step further by looking beyond how elephants and people mutually threaten each other and considering the situation more broadly as a possible source of disagreement between humans (conservation actors and local residents) about elephants as well. In the paper's current form, it is as if conservation professionals and villagers never interacted themselves. I would recommend, at least for future prospects, considering the history of these stakeholders' relationships to see how realistic it might be to help establish convergent views between them, which is the main goal of the paper. Conservation history, considered somewhat elliptically here through mentions of the establishment of the protected area, also encompasses this dimension.

The text is clearly written; however, at least one sentence on p. 14 was disconcerting: we learn that some parks have villages inside them. This is rather disturbing because the authors' spatial analysis is based on a simple distinction between protected areas and village areas, while we realize here that it seems more complicated. This should be better explained at the outset. Importantly as well, I found the results section a bit hard to get over, consisting of bouts of discourses related to one another running on several paragraphs, awaiting explanation. Wouldn't a few examples be enough? In at least one instance, there is a tautology (i.e., "Native fruits scarcity was identified by 46% of professionals, and it was derived from two subproblems that were most often brought up by professionals, including native fruit scarcity (46%)"). In another instance, there is a perceived correlation by interviewees that would need further explanation (considering economic background perhaps), which is not done in the discussion section: "Lack of a labor force was the least frequently identified problem type and was mentioned only by 9% of professionals; it was derived from only one problem type, the absence of people in the village." Is such a statement really necessary? Does it not point to a method's limitation?

In the discussion section, I understand it is impossible to address all the relationships represented by diagrams 5 and 6. Only the most significant ones can be considered for sure. However, I would encourage the authors to check if they have not mentioned connections that remain to be explained for the sake of this article's clarity. For instance, how do "rural exodus" and "plantation expansion" relate to one another, at least in the interviewees' understanding? This is rather counter-intuitive. Other parts of the discussion should be revised / dealt with more depth:

- there is a lack of symmetry in the treatment of elephant and human demographic data. While the human population is said to decrease, what about the elephant population, especially after the establishment of hunting bans and protected areas? According to a villager, they forage by groups of 6 individuals versus one at a time in the past: how does this possibly relate to overall elephant numbers and social clustering patterns? On the other hand, it is worth insisting on the fact that human-elephant conflicts are escalating in the context of a human population decrease: a statement that contradicts many neo-Malthusian conservation policies.
- p. 13 “the establishment of national parks has increased village-elephant habitat spatial overlap”: this statement comes after a discussion of fruiting patterns in relation to climate change and has no apparent relation with the establishment of protected areas
- Finally, the discussion section could also consider to what extent the relationships established between multiple factors by the interviewees will contribute to reconsider (or not) existing elephant conservation plans (e.g., <https://www.iucn.org/content/iucn-advises-african-states-how-manage-wild-elephant-populations>).

Overall, a worthwhile article that could, however, propose deeper analyses. Moving beyond the authors' fact-checking approach of the actors' verbatim accounts with scientific articles, there may be enough empirical material to strategically discuss conservation and coexistence policies.