Environmental Problems in Cameroon

Taylor Noeller
December 6, 2013
There are many environmental problems that are affecting the Cameroonians both negatively and positively, and they are causing turmoil with the species that are native to the area. This treatment of already endangered species will result in the unwanted extinction of many animals and plants. The extinction of many of these plants and animals is a major problem for the people of Cameroon because they depend on many of them to survive. Also, there are many species including the Bannerman’s Turaco, Mount Cameroon Francolin, Mount Kupe Bush-shrike, Mount Cameroon Speirops, Bates's Weaver, Banded Wattle-eye, Bamenda Apalis, and many more that are only found in Cameroon. The people of Cameroon are overusing their resources by destroying natural habitats, overfishing, and poaching.

The destruction of natural habitats is the harvesting of forests, swamps, plains, lakes and other habitats for human consumption. These harvestings are done to produce agriculture, housing, roads, pipelines, and other industrial developments. The main way that the natural habitats in Cameroon are being destroyed is through logging. Logging is the process of cutting down trees to use as timber. The most notable species being affected are endangered chimpanzees, forest elephants, red colobus monkeys, and many fish species whose home is currently under attack by the destruction of natural habitats.

![Figure 1: Map of Cameroon showing where deforestation is affecting natural habitats (Forests Monitor)](image-url)
United States company Palm Oil. This deforestation positively affects the people of Cameroon by lowering the price of coffee, cocoa, and food crops and increasing the amount of profit received from exporting timber. This decrease in the price of goods is due to there being more land area to use for agriculture allowing more crops to be planted and harvested. On the other hand, the forests serve as a habitat for the Pygmy, a more primitive population. The Pygmy are a very poverty-stricken people, and the loss of the rainforests they live in would only further their economic decline. To stop the destruction of natural habitats, there must be mutual effort by corporations, consumers, and the government. Corporations must introduce policies that require suppliers to produce their products in a way that allows the minimal impact on the environment, consumers must only purchase goods that are from renewable resources, and the government must introduce laws that would protect the natural habitats.

Overfishing, also called unsustainable fishing, is fishing in a way that takes so many fish from the water that the remaining fish cannot sustain their population. Some of the fish species that are found only in Cameroon are the *Campylomormyrus phantasticus*, *Chromidotilapia linkei*, *Sarotherodon caroli*, *Tilapia bythobathes*, *Synodontis pardalis*, *Aphyosemion edeanum*, *Epiplatys esekanus*, and *Fundulopanchax rubrolabialis*. Many of the endangered species in Cameroon are fish and this is because the people of Cameroon overfish these species. These fish are sought after because many of them are believed to have healing powers. Fishing allows the people of Cameroon to eat well and also profit from their catches. One study states, “Trade liberalization may have an additional positive impact by promoting the development of property rights in response to increased fish exploitation.” However, one source
reports, “Populations of top predators, a key indicator of ecosystem health, are
disappearing at a frightening rate, and 90 percent of the large fish that many of us love
to eat, such as tuna, swordfish, marlin, cod, halibut, skate, and flounder - have been
fished out since large scale industrial fishing began in the 1950s." This change
threatens the structure of the ocean’s ecosystem and can be particularly devastating to
the people of Cameroon who live on the coast and depend on the ocean for food and
livelihood.\textsuperscript{11} According to Pepijn Koster, overfishing can be managed by enforcing basic
rules. The rules he determined are as follows:

1. Safe catch limits: A constantly reassessed, scientifically determined, limit on
the total number of fish caught and landed by a fishery. Politics and short time
economical incentives should have no role in this.

2. Controls on bycatch: The use of techniques or management rules to prevent
the unintentional killing and disposal of fish, crustaceans and other oceanic
life not part of the target catch or landed.

3. Protection of pristine and important habitats: The key parts in ecosystems
need full protection from destructive fisheries; e.g. the spawning and nursing
grounds of fish, delicate sea floor, unique unexplored habitats, and corals.

4. Monitoring and enforcement: A monitoring system to make sure fishermen do
not land more than they are allowed to, do not fish in closed areas and cheat
as less as possible. Strong monetary enforcement is needed to make it
uneconomic to cheat.\textsuperscript{12}
Using these rules, it would be plausible for the people of Cameroon to manage their fisheries and sustain their fish populations to avoid overfishing and causing the extinction of many of these endangered species.

The World Wildlife Fund states, “The bushmeat trade is a leading cause of biodiversity loss in the Congo Basin forests.” Bushmeat trade is a term describing the capturing and selling of any wild animal, and this act includes poaching. Poaching is the illegal act of hunting animals. In Cameroon, the animal most frequently poached is the elephant. There was recently an elephant massacre in Yaunde, Cameroon where 40 endangered forest elephants were found dead in the national forests. The elephants are poached the most because their ivory can sell in the black market in China or Thailand for hundreds of dollars per pound. One study reports a 62% drop in the number of forest elephants in Cameroon in a 10 year study caused by poaching in the area. Poaching positively affects the people of Cameroon because of the profit that poachers acquire. For many poor Cameroon families, poaching is the easiest option to support their family. Poaching can also be quite helpful for the species being poached. The animals targeted during poaching are the larger, and therefore older, animals in the group. By removing the older generation of that species’ community, it allows the younger generation to have more breeding success because the territorial elders are gone. This is very important for a group of animals to give them more genetic diversity and minimize the chances of incest relationships. However, poaching is also very detrimental to animal species because the large number of killings gives way to extinction. Many animals become endangered because their population size suffers after consistent poaching. Law enforcement is now able to test ivory through DNA
analysis and determine which region the elephant was from to combat poaching. In early November 2013, the United States government seized and destroyed six tons of ivory that had been illegally taken from parts of Africa, including Cameroon. The LA Times wrote:

“They ivory "crush" was a largely symbolic act to raise the public's awareness of the tragedy that is unfolding in Africa. Skeptics will question the usefulness of the crush, suggesting that the United States cannot do much, as a practical matter, to address poaching because the problem is in Africa, where the elephants are being killed, or in Asia, where the demand for ivory has skyrocketed.”

The poaching problem will not be able to solve itself, however a lower demand for ivory will help the cause immensely.

The environmental problems affecting the people of Cameroon have both negative and positive effects on the people, but they have only negative effects on the animals in the area. Many species are already on the endangered species list and are risk to be extinct. So many of these species are found only in Cameroon and are important to the people of Cameroon who depend on them. Deforestation is detrimental to all of the animals living in the forests, and also for preserving the diversity of the species. Overfishing is a particular problem for the people living on the coast of Cameroon who fish to feed their families. Poaching is a particular problem for the endangered forest elephants in Cameroon. Each of these have extreme environmental effects that will ultimately affect the people of Cameroon and everyone else in that region.


