
CURRENT ELEPHANT CONSERVATION PROBLEMS IN BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

Bukar Bulama Bita

P.M.B. 1637 Maiduguri Borno State Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Borno State of Nigeria is located in the north-east corner of the country within latitude 11°N and longitude 13°E. The State comprises an area of approximately 69,436km², occupies a portion of the Lake Chad Basin and shares borders with the Republics of Cameroon to the south-east, Chad to the north-east and Niger to the north-west.

Borno State is one of the few states in Nigeria endowed with elephants. Though it is difficult to trace where Borno's elephants originated, due to a lack of oral or written data, reports from the Ministry of Agriculture reveal that thousands of elephants have existed in the State for centuries. In the past, elephants lived peacefully and in harmony with people because the available habitat was enough to accommodate the elephants and reduce their chances of coming into contact with humans.

Because of the relatively large population of elephants in the State, three Protected Areas were established

in the 1970s along the traditional migration routes/elephant range: Lake Chad Game Sanctuary (approximately 530km²), located in the north-east of the State and bordering Chad; Chingumi/Duguma Game Reserve (approximately 488km²), located in the south-east of the State, and bordering Cameroon; and the Sambisa Game Reserve (approximately 518km²), located at the southern agricultural areas of the State.

Two elephant populations are known to exist in Borno State. One population occupies the southern agricultural areas of the State, which is the core range for elephants, and the migratory population (moving between Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria) occupying the Lake Chad Basin. In the 1970s the total number of elephants in Borno was estimated at 8,060 (Grema, 1990), while at present, it is estimated that Borno has fewer than 200 elephants. This decline is attributed to habitat fragmentation, heavy poaching and unsystematic and uncontrolled problem animal control. Furthermore, there is lack of political will, inadequate funding and until recently, little international concern over the elephant management issue in Borno.

HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT

During the past two decades, expansion of human and livestock populations coupled with the demand for agricultural land has led to the fragmentation and reduction of elephant habitat. Consequently, human-elephant conflict arising from the competition for food, water and space has intensified. The trend is further exacerbated in the Lake Chad portion of elephant range by the severe drought in the northern part of the State, which has forced people to migrate to the Lake Chad Basin where they can cultivate crops on the receding lake shoreline without the need for irrigation. The greater part of elephant range is now under cultivation and settlement. This, together with the insecurity of the Chad territory due to civil war creates extremely difficult conditions to manage elephants in this area. Conflict between people and elephants is worsening and there are serious problems with poaching in the area. The worst recent incident

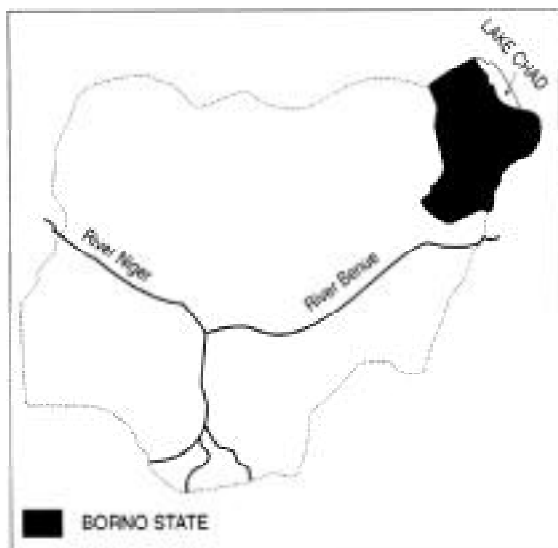


Figure 1. Map of Nigeria, showing the position of Borno State.

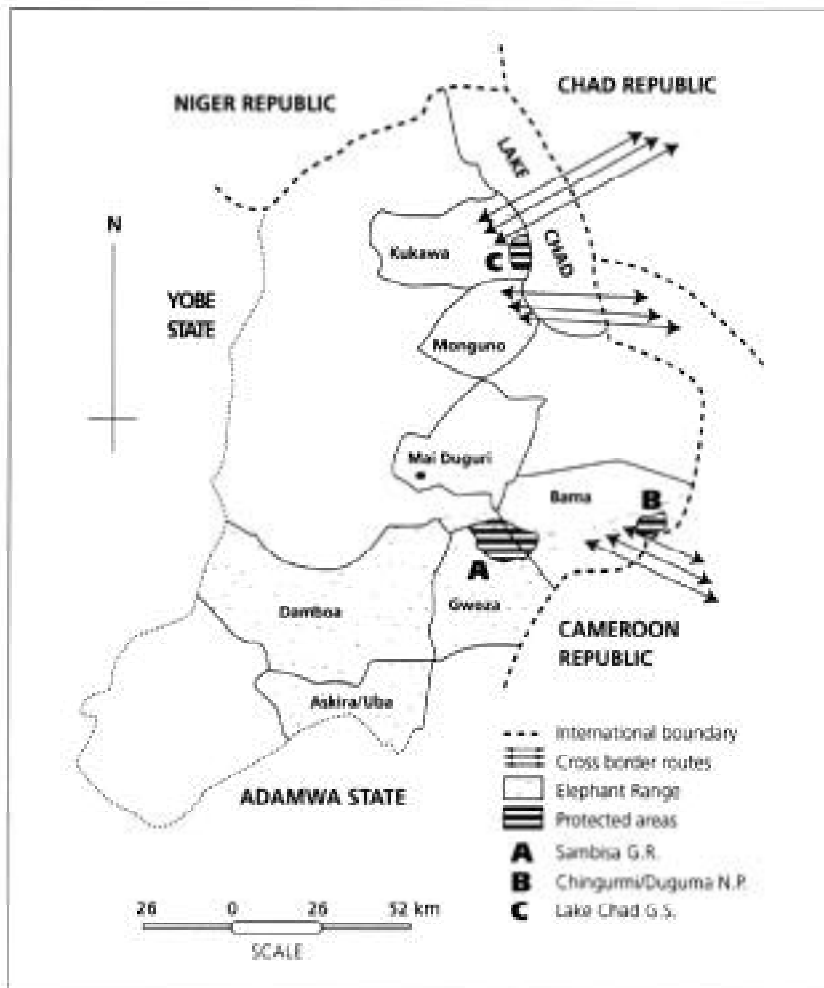


Figure 2. Map of Borno State showing elephant ranges and cross-border migration routes.

was the discovery of 36 elephant carcasses on the Lake Chad shoreline in 1988, with all the tusks removed (Bitu, B.B. 1988). Following this incident, few elephants have been seen in the Lake Chad area of Nigeria, and the usual seasonal migration from Waza National Park to Lake Chad is rarely observed. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to obtain reliable data on human deaths and injuries caused by elephants, and elephant mortality arising from conflicts. It is important to note that some deaths and injuries to both humans and elephants go unreported, often because they occur in remote areas. However, available data seem to indicate that most incidents of death and injuries occur in Askira/Uba, Damboa and Gwoza local government areas (see Tables 1 and 2).

The increasing frequency of reports in the Nigerian news media, containing headlines such as: “Elephants

menace”, “Elephants killed some people and injured some in Askira/Uba, Damboa and Gwoza local government areas”, may indicate that human-elephant conflict has reached crisis levels throughout elephant range in the State.

Table 1: Human deaths caused by elephants in Borno 1993 - 1996.

Local government	1993	1994	1995	1996
Askira/Uba	4	4	6	2
Bama	1	-	2	4
Damboa	5	7	5	4
Gwoza	2	6	6	5
Total	12	17	18	15

Table 2: Elephant deaths during human-elephant conflict, 1993-1996.

Local govt.1993	1994		1995		1996			
	CT	CF	CT	CF	CT	CF	CT	CF
Askira/Uba	4	-	6	3	5	1	6	2
Bama	2	1	4	-	2	-	5	3
Dambo	5	6	6	1	7	4	4	2
Gwoza	3	-	5	-	6	3	3	1
Total	21	25	28	26				

CT - control shooting CF - conflict death

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN MANAGEMENT

While local communities bear the brunt of the opportunity cost of living with elephants, they are left out of the decision-making process regarding management action surrounding elephants and communities. As a consequence, they do not derive any benefit from elephants, not even those animals destroyed for problem animal control. When these problem animals are destroyed, the meat and trophies are sold to licensed dealers, with no proceeds returning to the community to cover the damage costs. Because of this, farmers feel alienated from their land and its resources, and regard the elephant as a pest and not as a valuable natural resource. This feeling leads to antagonistic behaviour towards the wildlife authority, and creates the scenario where communities welcome poachers, who will eliminate the elephants and return some proceeds to the village.

PROTECTED AREAS

Borno State has three constituted game reserves; Lake Chad Game Sanctuary, Chingumi/Duguma Game Reserve and Sambisa Game Reserve, covering a total area of about 1,536km², or 2.2% of State land. The control and management of the reserves is the responsibility of the government. In the last two decades, however, government resources dwindled rapidly and proper maintenance of the reserves became increasingly difficult. The reserves do not have any bufferzones, and have been almost abandoned by the government owing to lack of funds, which allowed neighbouring communities to claim the land for settlements and farms (e.g. Chore, Durfata, Njibia and Alafa villages in Sambisa Game Reserve). Sambisa Game Reserve was a stronghold for elephants and other wildlife species, and has

now become a hunting, felling and grazing ground for the surrounding communities. The previously abundant natural resources and protective habitat for elephants in the Reserve has been almost entirely destroyed.

PROBLEM ANIMAL CONTROL

The management of elephants in Borno is the responsibility of the Forestry and Wildlife Services Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The Ministry has established an elephant control squad which is trained and equipped with guns and fire crackers for controlling problem animals and also for controlling poaching of elephants. Equipment, such as 4-wheel drive vehicles, motorcycles and radiophones, is provided at strategic stations throughout the elephant range in the State. Problem animals are reported by local wildlife authorities to headquarters, who then arrange the appropriate action. Elephants are only shot on control following human death and/or injury, or persistent crop-raiding. However, lack of funds has limited the effectiveness of the team.

In 1984, most Rangers in the State wildlife authority were retrenched due to the dwindling budgetary allocation for wildlife management. Recruitment of new Rangers and staff training became almost impossible, and equipment maintenance also became increasingly difficult. Increasing the problem was the enactment of a recent government policy which states that budget allocation to each Ministry depends on the amount of revenue earned by the respective Ministry. Therefore, the sale of elephant carcasses and ivory are considered an important method of generating revenue. There appears to be no limit to the number of elephants killed in any given conflict situation, as long as they generate revenue for the Ministry. Consequently, increasing numbers of elephants are being shot under the pretext of elephant control.

POLICY AND LEGISLATION

There is no clear policy on elephant conservation and management in Borno State. The State government, despite its long history of conservation policies, has not integrated a multipurpose approach toward land-use classification (by designating specific areas for elephant conservation and agricultural land), resulting in serious fragmentation of elephant habitat and human-elephant conflict.

There are two principal pieces of legislation which have direct bearing on the status of elephant and ivory trade issues in Borno State: The Wild Animals Law (No. 16 of 1963, amended in 1975); and Decree No.11 of 1985, Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic).

Under the Wild Animals Law of 1975, elephants which bear less than 10kg of ivory are defined as "Immature" elephants and are prohibited animals on the First Schedule. This essentially grants them total protection. "Mature" elephants are designated as a specially protected species on the Second Schedule and can be hunted under licence. This law also allows the possession and trade of ivory in Nigeria under a trophy dealer's licence.

The Decree no. 11 of 1985 imposes a regulatory system for the import and export of wildlife species listed on the two schedules. Again "immature" elephants are listed under Schedule I and are strictly prohibited in trade, while "mature" elephants are listed on Schedule II which allows trade under licence. The law prescribes fines and/or imprisonment for any offender in violation of the law. Because of the extreme devaluation of the Nigerian currency (Naira signified by #) in recent years, the fines are an inadequate deterrent. For example, under the Wild Animals Law, violations involving a First Schedule species, including possession of immature ivory tusks without a free disposal permit, are punishable with a fine not exceeding #1,000 (approximately US\$ 7) and/or six months imprisonment. Similarly, under the Decree No. 11 of 1985, illegal international trade in a Schedule I species is also penalised with a fine of #1,000. These fines, when compared to the current value of elephant carcasses and ivory, which are sold at #2,000 (approx, US\$ 14) and #20,000 (approx, US\$ 140) per kg respectively, cannot deter offenders.

The Nigerian legal framework is inadequate for prosecuting wildlife-related offenses, and their effectiveness in enforce laws leaves much to be desired. The most discouraging aspect is the time involved in trying a case. Cases involving elephants or ivory are often delayed unnecessarily in courts, and in most cases the judges exercise leniency and charge culprits less than the fines stipulate in the law, which as they stand, are more symbolic than deterrent in nature. Under these conditions wildlife officers are discouraged from taking cases to courts.

CONCLUSION

Borno State of Nigeria is potentially rich habitat for elephants. The existence of these elephants is, however, threatened by the factors described: lack of clear policies on land use in the context of elephant conservation, poaching, an inadequate legal system, unsystematic and uncontrolled problem animal control and no constructive local community involvement in protected area management.

It is also clear that human-elephant conflict in Borno is real and worsening. This trend is further exacerbated by the desperate lack of government resources to address the situation. Furthermore, the State has not enjoyed the support of either national or international conservation organisations specifically for elephant management. Consequently, Borno's elephants are being lost at such a rate that, unless urgent action is taken, elephants in Borno State will only be found in literature. As long as there continues to be a market for elephant meat and ivory, there will continue to be the problem of illegal killing of elephants in the State as many people are joining the hunting and ivory trade business in the State without fear of punishment.

However, it is encouraging to note that the Environmental Protection Agency was conceived in the State in September 1995. This Agency is the focal point for protection, conservation and management of the environment and natural resources in the State. The Agency has already compiled a compendium of all existing laws and regulations in the State that are impinging on the environment (including the wildlife laws) for review. The Agency is also putting the finishing touches to an Action Plan for elephant conservation in Borno State. These efforts help in alleviating the plight of the remnant elephant population in the State.

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