

FEEDING ECOLOGY OF ENDANGERED PRIMATES IN CROSS RIVER NATIONAL PARK

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The feeding ecology of endangered primate species Gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla*), Chimpanzee, (*Pan troglodytes*) and Drill (*Mandrillus leuco-phaeus*) in Cross River National Park was studied, covering both wet and dry season. The order as a whole was identified as omnivorous, with some having serious camivorous characteristics and some frugivores or folivores. For the wet season, relative percentages of specific browse food utilized were 15.5%, 17.0%, 11.5% and 11.5% for *Erythrophleum suaveolens*, *Brachystegia eurycoma*, *Ficus congensis* and *Aframomum melegueta* respectively. Relative percentage of major grasses: *Panicum brevifolium*, *Sporobolus pyramidalis* and *Andropogon shirensis* were 12.5%, 8% and 12.5% respectively during wet season and 6%, 5% and 1.5% during dry season respectively. Dry season food species utilized for both browse and grass species were significantly lower ($P < 0.05$). Smaller invertebrates such as termite, grasshopper, tick and earthworm were also recorded among the primate diet. Indications of cannibalism on small primates were observed. Proximate compositions of some of the food utilized showed significant difference ($P < 0.05$) between dry and wet season pointing at variations or fluctuations in terms of the nutritional richness. Shift in seasonal food preferences was observed, which invariably corresponded with availability within the seasons. Primates feeding relationships with humans within the enclaves around the National Park were highly competitive. Primates food and habitat interactions portend an endangered ecological status. Human incursion on this species of primate must be controlled and farm wildlife management was prescribed.