IUCN SSC PRIMATES
SECTION ON HUMAN-PRIMATE INTERACTIONS

IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Position Statement on Primate Consumption for Wild Meat and Terminology

The unsustainable hunting of nonhuman primates (hereafter "primates") for direct consumption and trade is the primary threat to the survival of a fifth of all primate species and a major contributor to the ongoing decline of most others (Ripple *et al*. 2016; Estrada *et al*. 2017). Nevertheless, it is also important to recognise that primate meat is an essential part of many people's livelihoods across the tropics, contributing to their nutritional and/or economic sustenance (Shaffer *et al*. 2018; Lemos *et al*. 2021; Koné *et al*. 2023). Additionally, in certain communities, primate hunting has a cultural and symbolic significance that supports traditional values and practices, which goes beyond its nutritional value as a source of protein (Alves *et al*. 2016; Gnanaolivu *et al*. 2022; Rivera *et al*. 2024). Bearing these factors in mind, we, the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group, acknowledge in this statement that, as practitioners, it is necessary to simultaneously balance concern for primate conservation and welfare with the importance of maintaining the traditional cultural vitality and autonomy of rural human societies, so long as such practices are sustainable and do not lead to species extinction.

Capturing wildlife, including primates, has always been intrinsic to the subsistence of rainforest and other rural peoples. In the past, many Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities living in rural areas were able to maintain sustainable levels of wildlife hunting, including capture of primates (Fa *et al*. 2016). However, increases in rural development, concurrent natural habitat loss and human population growth have led to overall biodiversity declines and unsustainable offtake levels in many parts of the Global South (Supriatna *et al*. 2017; Ingram 2023). Increased demand from new residents, more remote urban markets in range countries and internationally, drives commensurate increases in commercial trade in "luxury" or "exotic" meat, even in countries where hunting is prohibited (Reuter *et al*. 2016; Waller *et al*. 2016; Coad *et al*. 2019; Koné *et al*. 2023,). Technological changes in hunting and trapping, including greater availability and sophistication of firearms, continued diversification in methodologies, i.e. use of metal cable snares, improved lights, remote camera traps and thermal cameras, coupled with increased access to remote areas from new road development and wider availability of all-terrain vehicles, have improved hunter

efficiency (Rovero *et al*. 2012; Jost Robinson and Remis 2014; Dounias 2016; Branch *et al*. 2021; Ferreira da Silva 2021; Galea and Humle 2022).

Primate species that forage in large groups or nest communally, are slow-moving, or which incorporate loud or distinctive visual displays are especially vulnerable as they are more easily detected by hunters (Fa and Brown 2009; Rivera *et al*. 2021). Large, diurnal primates are often preferentially targeted by hunters as they are more visible and represent greater cost-benefit in terms of hunting effort (Robinson and Bennett 2004; Fa and Brown 2009). However, once preferred species are depleted, this balance alters, making smaller, more abundant species more readily available and easily targeted (Jerozolimski and Peres 2002; Cowlishaw *et al*. 2005; Canale *et al.* 2012). Some smaller Asian primates are targeted explicitly for traditional medicinal purposes (Nekaris *et al*. 2010; Starr *et al*. 2010; Gnanaolivu *et al*. 2022). Practices such as these can lead to severe depletion, local extinction, or even extinction at the species level.

In some range countries religious or cultural taboos exist against killing primates, notably of African and Asian apes, due to their perceived "similarity" to humans. In contrast, others specifically target apes for ritual consumption to gain the superior "courage, strength, and skill" they believe these primates possess or to showcase wealth and status by serving an especially rare delicacy (Tagg *et al*. 2018; Fa *et al*. 2021; Brittain *et al*. 2022). Given the generally increased level of awareness of the protected status of, particularly, great apes, however, these species may be less readily targeted by hunters due to more severe consequences for taking them (Nijman 2009; Fa *et al*. 2022; Kuenbou *et al*. 2022). At least some primate meat supplied to markets may be an opportunistic byproduct of the even more lucrative live pet trade, particularly in immature great and small apes (Walsh *et al*. 2003; Kuehl *et al*. 2009; Nijman 2009; Fa *et al*. 2021, 2022). On the other hand, some of the young animals entering the pet trade are almost certainly a byproduct of hunting (Alexander *et al*. 2023).

Due to their longer life histories relative to most other mammals, primates are particularly vulnerable, and the removal of even a few individuals from a group can disrupt population demographics and drive local extinctions (Linder and Oates 2011; Silva *et al*. 2016). Thus, hunting not only negatively affects the welfare of the captured individuals, but has lasting consequences for their social groups. For example, 14 out of 18 taxa of red colobus (*Piliocolobus* spp.) are listed as either Endangered or Critically Endangered by IUCN, the result of overhunting due to their large size (Linder *et al*. 2024). The role of primates as seed dispersers, pollinators and browsers means that the loss of these populations has cascading effects on ecosystems, affecting biodiversity and natural assets (Stoner *et al*. 2007; Gardner *et al*. 2019). Further, unsustainable hunting can also threaten the livelihoods of individuals who depend on wild meat for sustenance and have intergenerational impacts on the transfer of traditional knowledge (Rovero *et al*. 2012; Borgerson 2015; Shaffer *et al*. 2017).

Despite the pressures of unsustainable hunting on primates, conservation and research programmes must be sensitive to the complex human dimensions of primate hunting and wild meat consumption in their specific geographical and cultural contexts. Local and Indigenous Peoples are not homogenous and different individuals and groups may hold varying viewpoints. Furthermore, the legal status of primates and primate hunting varies

among nations and does not necessarily coincide with the conservation status of a species in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Recognising the complexities of wild meat issues, the perspectives and rights of all actors must be fundamental to any conservation or research programme.

A note on terminology

The term "bushmeat" has been in common usage for the last 20+ years, as a catchall term for non-domestically raised meat for human consumption and trade. Researchers, conservation practitioners, and policy makers are currently working collectively to adopt the more holistic descriptive term "wild meat," following IUCN Generally Assembly Resolution 2.64 (IUCN 2000) (see also Coad *et al*. 2019; Nasi and Fa 2021).

The members of the Primate Specialist Group urge fellow primatologists, educators, journalists, and general writers to adopt the term "wild meat", for the following reasons:

1) To better characterise wild animal consumption across the globe.

Early applications of the term "bushmeat" were explicitly used to describe hunting and wildlife consumption in African contexts (e.g., Dawson 2018), thereby excluding discussions of hunting economies in other geographic zones. The term "wild meat" is more inclusive of consumptive use across the globe (Coad *et al*. 2019).

2) To better frame essential issues for conservation practice because there can be implied legal implications to the term "bushmeat."

The Bushmeat Crisis Taskforce defined bushmeat as "meat that was illegally and/or commercially derived from wildlife for the express purpose of commercial trade" (Eves and Ruggiero 2002). In contrast, "wild" meat is harvested through legally, regulated means following national statutes (Eves and Ruggiero 2002). In practice, distinguishing whether an animal was legally or illegally captured is not always straightforward. Consequently, we have inadvertently defaulted to erroneously defining all consumption as illegal, with a ripple effect of unintended and unconstructive implications, which contains no implied inference of the legality of procurement.

3) To address the legacy of conservation and work together toward a practice that is inclusive and dynamic.

The term "bushmeat" reflects a colonial legacy by "bush" as a descriptor, as this was a common phrase used to describe the tropical forests or mosaic areas between farms (i.e., the tame, cultured zone) and forest (i.e., the dark, wild zone). This terminology lends itself to the perpetuation of colonial imperialism. We recognise, however, that in many African contexts the term "bushmeat" is widely used colloquially and is therefore understood to be culturally correct. These issues are layered and complex, and it is important for each researcher and practitioner to engage with multiple actors and discuss with the local community to determine the most appropriate term. While we at IUCN encourage the use of the term "wild meat", we defer first and foremost to the host communities.

The position of the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group regarding the capture and consumption of primates for food is to:

- Advocate for a reduction in primate hunting globally through sustainable local management of wild meat resources, while acknowledging that a complete cessation is not a realistic goal, and, in some societies, may not be culturally appropriate.

- Recognise that there is a difference between legal and illegal capture of primates and that national legislation and international agreements take precedence over any perspectives discussed in this position statement. In situations where it is evident that "legal" hunting is leading towards species declines that will precipitate extinction, we will work proactively with host communities and their governments to achieve more sustainable outcomes.

- Support the use of the term "wild meat" when referring to non-domesticated, wild animals caught for human consumption.

- Recognise that some species of primates are, in some circumstances, regarded as wild meat, irrespective of their conservation threat status.

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Contributors

The following IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group Executive Council and Section on Human-Primate Interactions members contributed to this statement:

Dr Claire Cardinal, Dr Carolyn Jost-Robinson, Dr R. A. Mittermeier, Dr Gustavo Canale, Dr Felicity Oram, Dr Christian Rivera, Dr Maria Ferreira da Silva, Dr Amani Kitegile, Dr Malene Friis Hansen.