

**Local Perception and Gender on the Exploitation and Conservation of the Grasscutter,
Thryonomys Swinderianus in the Gomoa District, Central Region**

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ABSTRACT

The grasscutter (*thryonomys swinderianus*) is a popular bush meat species in Ghana. It is hunted for its meat and may also serve as a source of income, but there have been concerns recently about some of the methods used in hunting it. Grasscutter meat is sold to the public through a network of traders from the hunting grounds with men and women playing distinct roles. This study was conducted in the Gomoa District of the Central Region of Ghana between February and November, 2003, to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of residents of the Gomoa District regarding grasscutter hunting and conservation and the gender disparities in the grasscutter trade. Purposive sampling was employed in administering questionnaires to hunters, bush meat traders, chop bar operators and traditional rulers. The general public was also surveyed using random sampling. Capture characteristics of grasscutters were monitored over a 10-month period, whilst bush meat used in chop bars were assessed over a 6 month period. Ninety-two percent of hunters cited economic reasons for hunting grasscutters, and 84% got their grasscutter catches near cultivated lands. The use of chemicals and fire in the hunting of grasscutters was rampant, with dire implications for the environment. The use of fire accounted for 0.7% of all grasscutter catches whereas 1.4% was harvested through the use of chemicals. Knowledge of wildlife laws was particularly low, especially among women, with about a fifth of women respondents aware of wildlife laws. More than 70% of hunters were conversant with some of the wildlife regulations. Grasscutter farming was generally accepted by the general public (76% for male and 61% for female respondents) although some bush meat traders objected to it, because they preferred the taste of wild grasscutter meat. Grasscutter meat is the most important and popular source of protein and local income. Grasscutters invade farms for food, with no preference for any one agricultural produce. In the light of the above, residents of the Gomoa District should be encouraged to venture into grasscutter farming as the benefits far outweigh the constraints. Furthermore, there has to be a rigorous education drive to raise the

level of awareness of hunters and all other stakeholders including the local residents on the importance of adhering to wildlife laws to conserve the environment.

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