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Knowledge of Nigeria Wildlife Conservation Laws among Officials of Okomu and Old Oyo National Parks, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

One of the key resources in effective management of National Parks is the knowledge base of the park managers. There is however little or no documented information about park official's knowledge of the laws they uphold in Nigeria. This study assessed the knowledge base of Nigeria wildlife laws among park officials in Okomu National Park (ONP) and Old Oyo National Park (OONP), Nigeria. Simple random sampling was used to administer structured questionnaire to 50 ONP and 130 OONP staff. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Majority (95.6%) had heard about wildlife laws and 68.9% understood the contents of the law. Majority (72.2%) knew the decree responsible for the establishment of national parks but could not distinctively identify the activities that constitute offences under this law. For effective park management, proper orientation, education, training and re-training on the wildlife laws should be organized for the park officials at regular intervals.

Keywords: Nigerian wildlife law, Okomu National Park, Old Oyo National Park

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is rich in flora and fauna resources. According to Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) (2010), there are over 22,000 vertebrate and invertebrate species, including about 20,000 insect, 1,000 bird, 1000 fish, 247 mammals and 123 reptile species; and about 7, 895 plant species. All these animal and plant species occur in different numbers within the country's vegetation that range from the mangrove along the coast in the south to the sahel in the north (FME, 2010). Many human activities are seen to be threats to the existence of the flora and fauna resources in Nigeria (Olatunbosun, 2013) and the world at large. These constitute continuous pressure being exerted on forest resources causing fragmentation and degradation of wild animal habitats (Ijeomah, Augustine & Damilola, 2012). There is therefore an urgent need for biodiversity conservation.

National Park has become the most widely used category of protected areas in developing countries, for the conservation of fauna and flora resources. According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (2019), it is a large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities. More so, the highest competent legal authority of the country has taken steps to eliminate exploitation or occupation in the whole area and to enforce effectively the respect of ecological, geomorphologic, or scientific features which have led to its establishment (IUCN, 2019). Currently, there are 7 National parks in Nigeria spanning across the six geo-political zones of the country. They are Chad Basin, Gashaka Gumti,

Kainji Lake, Kamuku National, Cross River, Old Oyo, and Okomu National Parks. The total area of land under these parks is about 2.4 million hectares (National Park Service (NPS), 2018). They were formally forest and game reserves first established in the early 1900s (FME, 2001). The National Parks supports more than 1340 species of animals among which is 274 species of mammals, making it the 8th highest in Africa (NPS, 2018).

Knowledge refers to familiarity, awareness or understanding of someone or something such as facts, information, descriptions or skills, which is acquired through experience or education by perceiving, discovering or learning. There are several ways to describe cases of knowledge, namely; acquaintance, competence and recognition of information as being correct (Ichikawa & Steup, 2018). Fumerton (2008) defined the acquaintance knowledge as a certain degree of skill or ability to recognize something upon re- encounter with a degree of accuracy. It has been suggested that, those managing protected areas often lack the adequate resources needed to effectively manage and enforce park rules and regulations (Jones *et al.*, 2018; McCarthy, Shinjo, Hoshino, & Enkhjargal, 2018). One of the key resources in this regard is the level of awareness and knowledge base of the park managers. This will definitely impact conservation efforts. The Nigerian National Park Service (NNPS) is responsible for the management and regulation of use of the national parks, to preserve and conserve Nigeria's heritage particularly the flora and fauna, their habitats and the unique sceneries they provide. It seeks to meet the hopes and aspiration of Nigerians in preserving and protecting the natural heritage and the cultural relics that are in them for generations to come (NPS, 2018). In recognition of the need to protect Nigeria's biological and natural resources in National Parks, a number of legislations have been put in place. Of most relevance to national parks is the National Park Service Act of Decree No. 36, 1979, revised in 1999. Generally, wildlife laws in Nigeria which has its origin from the old western Nigeria wild animal preservation law of 1916 (Ayeni, 1992; Ayodele & Lameed, 1999) and were promulgated to implement the convention on international trade in endangered species of flora and fauna (CITES). The existing wildlife laws in Nigeria

are The wild animal preservation law of 1916 {covered areas for protection (CAP) 132}, The wild animal law of 1963, The wild animal law of 1965, Wild animal preservation law 1970, The wild animal law amendment edict of 1975, Wild animal law of 1978, Kainji Lake National Park decree no. 46 of 1979, Endangered species decree of 1985 now CAP. E9, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (L.F.N), 2010 and National Park decree no. 46 of 1999 now National Park Service Act CAP N65 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 (Ayeni, 1992).

These laws are instrumental to sustainable wildlife management as it sets the parameters for protection and use of wild animals (Morgera, 2011). Park officials are saddled with the responsibility of upholding the content of these laws in national parks. It is important that park officials, who are responsible for the protection of the parks' wild resources, be knowledgeable about the laws that concern the park and the wild resources it holds. Park officials especially park ranger were formerly poachers or rural dwellers of host communities who were employed as a form of alternative source of livelihood, having little or no formal education. It is important to properly orientate and educate them on the existing conservation/wildlife laws. An extensive search of literature revealed that there are little or no documented information about park official's knowledge of the laws. This study therefore assessed the knowledge of Nigerian wildlife conservation laws among parks officials in Okomu National park (ONP) and Old Oyo National park (OONP).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

The study was carried out in Okomu and Old Oyo National Parks, Southwest Nigeria. Okomu National Park (ONP) is a forest blocked within the 1,082km²Okomu forest reserve in the Ovia South West Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria (NPS, 2018). It is the smallest of the seven National Parks in Nigeria. It is a rainforest ecosystem from the former Okomu Forest Reserve in 1935 on coordinates latitude 6° 20' 0"N and longitude 5° 16' 0"E and has a land area of 200 km². The Okomu River runs through the park and from it the park derived its name (NPS, 2018).

Old Oyo National Park derives its name from the ruins of Oyo-Ile, the ancient political capital of Yoruba Empire. It has a land area of 2,512km² in the Northern Oyo State, South West Nigeria and positioned between latitude 8°15' and 9° 00'N and longitude 3° 35' and 4° 42'E. Most of the park area is covered by plains, lowland, undulating from 300m-500m above sea level. The Southern part is drained by the Owu, Owe, and Ogun rivers while the Northern sector is drained by the Tessi River (NPS, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were collected from officials in both parks using a semi-structured questionnaire, containing close and open-ended questions. The questionnaire covered issues on awareness of Nigeria conservation laws, frequency of studying the laws, knowledge of existing wildlife laws, decree responsible for national park establishment, what constitute offence according to the decree, amount/fine stipulated for killing elephants, the endangered species decree as well as the accompanied schedules. The close-ended questions provided respondents with a range of answers from which they can choose from. The open-ended section gave respondents freedom to provide answers to questions asked as they deemed fit. The two parks had a total of 431 staff consisting of 281 in OONP and 150 in ONP as at September 2018. Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a total of 194 respondents were sampled. Of these, 50 (from ONP) and 130 from OONP) were sampled and returned for analysis. This study was carried out between January and April 2019. Quantitative data collected in the course of this study were subjected to descriptive statistics

which included frequency and percentages using SPSS Version 2.0. Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the qualitative data.

RESULTS

Awareness of Nigeria wildlife law among Okomu and Old Oyo National Parks' officials

The result of the awareness of Nigeria wildlife laws is presented on Table 1. The study indicates that 95.6% and 96.7% of respondents in both parks have heard of wildlife laws and affirmed the existence of wildlife laws in Nigeria respectively. Likewise, 86.1% claimed to have been informed about wildlife laws after employment in National Park. A total of 67.8% of respondents also indicated that they were educated on these laws by Park Management. Only half of the respondents (50.0%) were provided with documents containing the laws while a total of 68.9% of the respondents reported to understand the contents of the law.

Frequencies at which the Nigerian wildlife laws are studied among officials in Okomu and Old Oyo National Parks

More than ten percent (10.6%) of the respondents indicated that they studied wildlife laws always, 6.1% indicated that they studied them often, 38.8% indicated that they studied sometimes, 29.4% indicated that they rarely studied the laws and 13.9% of the respondents indicated that they never studied the laws (Figure 1).

Table 1: Awareness of Nigerian wildlife laws among Okomu and Old Oyo National parks' officials

Respondents answered...	Okomu National Park	Old Oyo National Park	Total
Awareness of wildlife laws	45 (90%)	127 (97.7%)	172 (95.6%)
Awareness of laws on wildlife in Nigeria	47 (94%)	127 (97.7%)	174 (96.7%)
Informed of the law on employment	40 (80%)	115 (88.5%)	155 (86.1%)
Education/training on the laws	35 (70%)	87 (66.9%)	122 (67.8%)
Provision of materials containing the law	28 (56%)	62 (47.7%)	90 (50.0%)
Understanding of the content of the law	29 (58%)	95 (73.1%)	124 (68.9%)

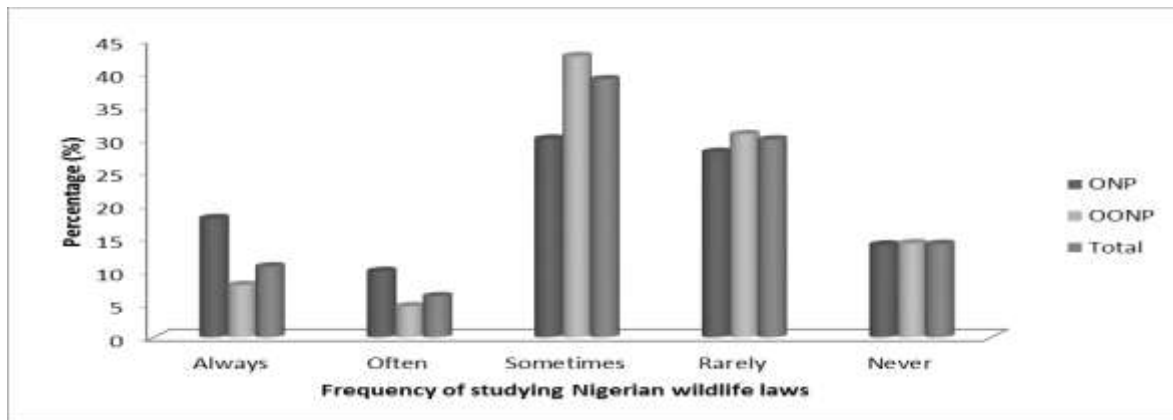


Figure 1: Frequencies at which the Nigerian wildlife laws are studied among officials in Okomu and Old Oyo National Parks

Knowledge of existing wildlife laws in Nigeria

Knowledge of existing wildlife laws is presented on Table 2. When respondents were asked to name any one of the wildlife laws, 34.4% got it right. Decree No 46 of 1999 was rightly identified by 77.8% of the respondents as the law which established the national parks in Nigeria. Majority (95.0%) of the respondents indicated

that there are seven (7) National parks in Nigeria. Only 1.7% and 37.8% of the respondents identified “no option of fine” and “maximum of five-year imprisonment”, respectively for killing an elephant. On the law controlling trade and traffic of endangered species, 47.2% of the respondents stated CITES and Endangered Species Decree of 1985.

Table 2: Knowledge of existing wildlife laws in Nigeria

Knowledge issues	Okomu National Park	Old Oyo National Park	Total
Name of any one of Nigeria wildlife laws	15 (30%)	47 (36.2%)	62 (34.4%)
Decree for the establishment of National Parks	45 (90%)	95 (73.1%)	140 (77.8%)
Number of National Parks in Nigeria	46 (92%)	125 (96.2%)	171 (95%)
Fine stipulated for killing an elephant in the park	2 (4%)	1 (0.8%)	3 (1.7%)
Maximum years of imprisonment for killing an elephant	16 (32%)	52 (40%)	68 (37.8%)
Law controlling trade/traffic of endangered species	28 (56%)	57 (43.9%)	85 (47.2%)

What constitutes offences in a National Park according to Decree 46 of 1999

According to the National Park Decree 46 of 1999, illegal entry, hunting, tree felling, and grazing are offences in the national parks while noise making and forest fire are not listed as offences. The offences (Table 3) as indicated by majority of the respondents are

illegal entry (85.6%), hunting (67.8%), tree felling (65.6%), and grazing (64.4%). However, 20.0% and 37.2% of the respondents indicated noise making and forest fire, respectively as offences.

Table 3: What constitutes offences in a National Park from Decree 46 of 1999 according to respondents

Variable	Okomu National Park	Old Oyo National Park	Total
Illegal entry	41(82%)	113(86.9%)	154(85.6%)
Noise making	12(24%)	24(18.5%)	36(20%)
Grazing	30(60%)	86(66.2%)	116(64.4%)
Hunting	35(70%)	87(66.9%)	122(67.8%)
Tree felling	34(68%)	84(64.6%)	118(65.6%)
Forest fire	27(54%)	40(30.8%)	67(37.2%)

Classifications of animals in Schedules

Respondents were asked to classify some species of animals under schedule 1 and schedule 2 of the Endangered Species Act. This is presented on Table 4. Majority of the respondents rightly classified tree pangolin (54.4%), lion (62.2%), and white throated monkey (57.8%) into Schedule I. However, lower percentages were recorded for elephant

(31.1%), buffalo (28.9%), great grey owl (43.3%), red flanked duiker (29.4%), yellow casqued hornbill (37.8%), buffon'skob (22.2%), roan antelope (20.6%) and oribi (14.4%). Under Schedule II, most respondents (53.9%) classified baboon rightly into the schedule while lower percentage (25.6%) was recorded for the Mona monkey.

Table 4: Animals in Schedules I and II of National Wildlife Species Protection Act

	Okomu National Park	Old Oyo National Park	Total
Schedule 1			
Tree Pangolin	25(50%)	73(56.2%)	98(54.4%)
Lion	26(52%)	86(66.2%)	112(62.2%)
Elephant	27(54%)	29(22.3%)	56(31.1%)
White Throated monkey	29(58%)	75(57.7%)	104(57.8%)
Buffalo	22(44%)	30(23.1%)	52(28.9%)
Great Grey Owl	17(34%)	61(46.9%)	78(43.3%)
Red Flanked Duiker	13(26%)	40(30.8%)	53(29.4%)
Yellow Casqued Hornbill	14(28%)	54(41.5%)	68(37.8%)
Kob	14(28%)	26(20%)	40(22.2%)
Roan Antelope	13(26%)	24(18.5%)	37(20.6%)
Oribi	14(28%)	12(9.2%)	26(14.4%)
Schedule II			
Baboon	18(36%)	79(60.8%)	97(53.9%)
Mona Monkey	16(32%)	30(23.1%)	46(25.6%)

DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed that a higher proportion of the respondents (95.6%) have heard and 96.7% are aware that there are wildlife laws in Nigeria. It also revealed that the respondents were informed on employment, taught, educated and were provided with materials containing the laws. Despite that a large proportion (68.9%) of the respondents from both parks claimed to understand the contents of the laws, results showed otherwise as a large proportion could not provide the right answers to the questions asked on the contents of the law. In other words, the respondents seem to be aware of the existing wildlife laws but are not familiar with the contents of the laws.

Also, the results showed that most park officials seldom study the wildlife laws causing them to lack some information about these laws. They however seem to be aware of the law that is responsible for the establishment of a National Park (National park decree no 11 of 1999 now National park act CAP N65 2004) and the number of national parks in the country (7). The respondents were provided with options of what constitute offences in the park according to the National Park Decree 11 of 1999 but a large proportion could not differentiate the right from wrong.

A higher proportion of the park officials did not know the amount stipulated for the killing of an elephant, which is imprisonment with no option of fine, the maximum number of years of imprisonment for killing an elephant (5 years) nor could they correctly place animals in the right schedules based on their status. It was however observed that higher proportion of park officials from Old Oyo National Park knew the law that seeks to control trade and traffic of endangered species (Endangered Species Act CAP E9 2010) and could place listed animals in their right schedules more than park officials from Okomu National park. It was also observed that a lot of respondents left the section of species placement

into schedules unanswered. This may be because the respondents do not know what the schedules meant and how to place the species listed.

It is essential for park official's to be familiar with the content of the law, so they can carry out their duties in the context of the laws. This agrees with the famous aphorism by Sir Francis Bacon "knowledge is power" which is a popular proverb. It means true power comes from knowledge, knowing things gives power. This

proverb motivates one to study and acquire knowledge (Sawant and Nolan, 2015). It also agrees with the idea on competence knowledge which implies ability, not just in recognition upon re-encounter but with specific skill and ability to do things (Stanley, 2011). Factors affecting knowledge base of the park officials in this study can be summarized in the following points: Individual input to study and understand the content of the laws; Government provision of materials containing the laws; adequate orientation and education on the wildlife laws on employment.

CONCLUSION

Park officials of Okomu and Old Oyo National Parks were not adequately familiar with Nigerian wildlife conservation laws. For effective park management of the parks, it is recommended that: government should provide copies of the law for all recruits of the park; proper orientation and education on the content of the laws should be given to the park officials at employment; proper orientation, education, training and re-training on the contents of the wildlife laws should be given to the park officials at regular intervals; park officials should be mandated to study the laws, frequent test should be administered to ensure park officials knowledge on the laws, and this can be a prerequisite for promotion.

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