

18. ELEPHANT HUNTING BY THE MBUTI HUNTER-GATHERERS IN THE EASTERN CONGO BASIN

Mitsuo Ichikawa^{1*}

¹Center for African Area Studies, Kyoto University, Sakyo, Kyoto, 606-8501, Japan
*ichikawamitsuo@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Mbuti hunter-gatherers in the Ituri forest of the eastern Congo Basin have been known as elephant hunters since the colonial period. They provided the colonial agents with ivory, and supplied meat for local mining and plantation workers, as well as for their own consumption. In this study, I present ethnography of the Mbuti elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) hunting practiced during my field research in the 1970s and 1980s, including the description of hunting method with spears, hunting party and success rate, distribution of meat, and festive nature of meat consumption. Although the elephant hunting provided almost as much meat (6–7 tonnes of live weight/year for a group of 50 people) like other types of hunting aiming at medium to small-sized antelopes and monkeys, the success rate of the elephant hunt was very low. In contrast to the stable yields of meat from hunting for smaller animals, elephant hunting was successful only a few times a year, mainly by skilled hunters called *batuma*, with their courage and luck. For such unstable nature, with its low success rate

and huge quantity of meat supply in a successful hunt, elephant hunting provided the Mbuti with exciting experiences with rich ritual performances and festive meat consumption, and gave a strong accent to the otherwise monotonous hunting life in the forest.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) hunting by the Mbuti in the Ituri Forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire) has already been described by several authors. Paul Schebesta, a Catholic Father and ethnologist, described briefly elephant hunting carried out by the Mbuti (Schebesta, 1933). Putnam (1948), who spent many years in Epulu, central Ituri, gave a four-page description on elephant hunting and associating rituals. Turnbull (1965) also described it briefly, though it seems he did not observe directly the elephant hunt. Coon (1972) gave accounts of elephant hunting methods by the Akoa in Gabon, Efe and Mbuti in Congo, citing the



works of Trilles (1932) and Putnam (1948). More recently, Duffy (1984) gave an on the spot observation of hunting and butchering of an elephant by the Mbuti, in his book of “Children of the Forest”. Harako (1976) and Bahuchet (1985) reported also on the elephant hunting by the Mbuti and Aka Pygmies of Central Africa. In a study of prehistoric and contemporary mammoth and elephant hunting, Agam and Barkai (2018) reviewed various elephant hunting methods employed by contemporary hunter-gatherers. There is also a film on elephant hunting by the Mbuti in Ituri, taken by Japanese television team (NTV, 1972). However, most of these contain only brief descriptions of hunting methods, and ritual and festive characteristics of elephant hunting and meat consumption. Only one example, witnessed by Duffy, was based on the observation of actual cases of successful hunt. I will mainly focus here on the hunting method, success rate, and meat distribution patterns, and festive nature of meat consumption among the Mbuti, which I studied during my fieldwork in the Ituri Forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1974 to 1975 and from 1980 to 1981.

The Ituri forest is situated in the northeastern part of the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, former Zaire) and covers the area of approximately 100,000 km². The vegetation is dominated by evergreen dense forests with closed canopy, consisting of Caesalpiniaceae, in particular, mixed forests of *Julbernardia seretti* and *Cynometra alexandri*, and single-dominant forest of *mbau*, *Gilbertiodendron dewevrei* (Itani, 1974; Harako, 1976). There are about 30,000 to 40,000 hunter-gatherer people, called Mbuti, Efe and other names in the region (Harako, 1976). The Mbuti belong to a Bantu-speaking group and live in the central, southern and western parts of the forest, whereas the Efe are Sudanic-speakers, living in the northern and eastern parts of the forest. Both groups have been in close economic and social relationships with the neighboring agricultural groups who speak similar languages with the respective hunter-gatherer groups.

The principal hunting methods of the Mbuti in central Ituri are collective net hunting, bow-and-arrow hunting, and spear hunting. Unlike their neighboring agriculturalists and Pygmy groups in other regions, they rarely used snares in the 1970's and 1980's when I conducted my research. Net hunting is adapted to the forest environment with poor visibility, and carried out for capturing small-to medium-sized animals, in particular forest duikers (weighing from 3–25 kg), which are driven from the bush toward the net enclosure. Bow-and-arrow hunting aims at hunting arboreal monkeys, which are shot with poisoned arrows. The arrow poison is made from various forest plants, which are mixed and pounded, and the black liquid squeezed from the plants is applied to the arrows made of raffia palm axes. With spears, they aim at hunting larger-sized animals, such as bush pigs, giant forest hogs, buffaloes and elephants (Harako, 1976). The major hunting methods of the Efe in northern Ituri are bow-and-arrow hunting, in particular collective hunting called *mota*, which is also adapted to the dense forest environment. It aims at shooting duikers driven from the bush with arrows with iron tips. Solitary hunting is also common for shooting monkeys in a tree with poisoned arrows. Spear hunting is carried out for larger targets. While both the Mbuti and Efe had formerly used spears borrowed from the Bantu or Sudanic agricultural villagers, who had become the owner of the animals killed with the spears, most of the Mbuti and Efe hunters had their own spears when the research was conducted in 1970s.

We do not know when the Mbuti started elephant hunting. According to the information given by a British ex-prisoner of Portuguese, elephant hunting had already been practiced by the hunter-gatherers in the present-day Gabon in early 1600's (Schlichter, 1892; Kitanishi, 2012). Dapper (1686; cited in Kitanishi, 2012) also mentioned about the “dwarfs”, who hunted elephants and traded ivory. In a study of central African history, Klieman (2003) wrote that elephant ivory had comprised one of the important items for the Atlantic trade since the contacts with European

in the 17th century. In the Ituri forest of DRC, which is far from the Atlantic coast, elephant hunting probably had not become a major hunting practice until relatively recently. An old Mbuti man once told me that they had formerly hunted mainly bush pigs and other smaller mammals with spears, and that they began hunting elephants frequently as the demands for ivory increased. Probably, it was during the time of arrival of Arab traders in the 19th century when the Mbuti started elephant hunting actively. It was then accelerated under the Belgian rule. The travelers to this region in late 19th century mentioned briefly on the elephant hunting by various “Pygmy” groups (Stanley, 1890; Cassati, 1891; Parke, 1891).

It is understandable that they had not attempted at elephant hunting frequently in former days, because it was a dangerous work [as reported also by Lewis (this volume)], whereas there were other, smaller animals, which could be easily hunted in the forest. I was informed that a Mbuti man of the group I studied had been killed by an elephant during the hunt. Schebesta (1933, 1936b) also reported an example of a Mbuti hunter killed by an elephant, and another example of serious injury. He then expressed his concern about the Mbuti hunters, who were driven to hunt elephants by the request of a Bantu chief seeking for ivory.

However, as elephant hunting became popular, the motivation for it was gradually internalized within the Mbuti themselves. Elephant hunting risked a hunter’s life, whereas it provided a huge quantity of meat when successful. As such, elephant hunting became a practice associated with rich ritual performances and social significance, as described by various authors (e.g., Trilles, 1932; Schebesta, 1936a; Putnam, 1948; Turnbull, 1965; Harako, 1976; Lewis, 2002). The success of elephant hunting may also have given a sense of accomplishment to the hunter, even though he could not gain prestige in the egalitarian Mbuti society.

In early 20th century, the Mbuti became known to Western society as brave elephant hunters, who hunt the largest terrestrial mammals with spears, sometimes a single hunter by himself. Ivo-

ry was then one of the major export items from the forests in this region, together with wild rubber, which was often called “red rubber” for the bloody nature of quota system (Stengers and Vansina, 1985; Jewsiewicki, 1983; Hochschild, 1998). According to the Mbuti elders, they moved to the forest near the trading posts, and hunted elephants actively. When they killed an elephant, they brought the tusks to their Bantu patrons, who sold them to the traders. The Mbuti then obtained salt, tobacco, clothes and agricultural food from the villagers. The photograph taken at Mawambi trading post (now deserted) on the right bank of Ituri River illustrates the scene of weighing the rubber and ivory. It was taken by a British explorer, Captain Powell-Cotton, on his honeymoon journey to the Ituri Forest (Powell-Cotton, 1907).

18.2 HUNTING METHOD

Hunting elephants is a difficult task. A photograph showing elephants stuck in a mud pool may give us an idea of how elephants were killed in prehistoric times. The elephants cannot get out of the pool by themselves, because of their heavy weight. The prehistoric hunters may have hunted the elephants that were similarly stuck in the muds. Du Chailu (1867) described the elephant hunting by the Fang, Bantu-speaking farmers in equatorial Africa. They made liana tangles on the elephant trails in the forest. When an elephant was entangled, it was killed with spear traps, called *hanou*, falling logs with spear points, hung high up in the air. A similar falling spear traps were also used by the Bantu agriculturalists in the Ituri forest of Congo. Babali hunters set a heavy spear trap, with an iron head of one foot long and a thick shaft of 6–9 feet, suspended in the air at a height of 15 feet (Schebesta, 1936a). A different type of falling spear trap was once used by the Suiei Dorobo hunters in northern Kenya. The trap is called *lkerenget*, and the poison made from the root of *Acokanthera* (called *morijoi*), a shrub genus belonging to Apocynaceae, is applied to a small spear point. The Dorobo

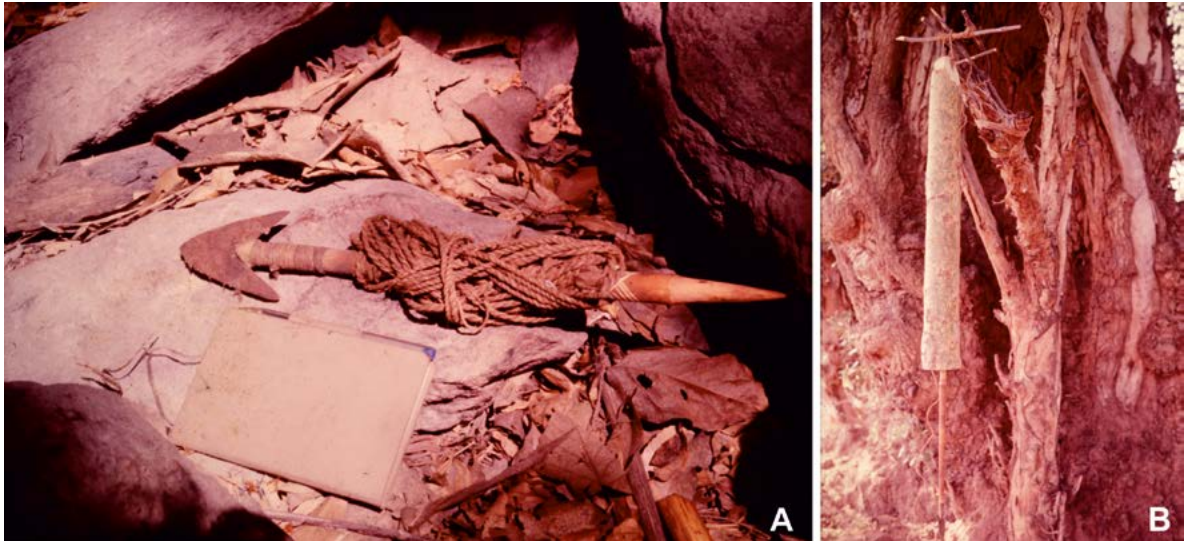


Figure 18.1: A, Lkerenget, falling spear; B, Lkerenget trap set in the air. Photos by M. Ichikawa.

hunters set the trap on the elephant's trail. A heavy weight of *Commiphora* wood, with a poisoned iron spear, is hung in the air with a liana cord, over the branch of a high tree. The cord is then set across the elephant's trail. When an elephant pushes the cord, the trigger is released and the poisoned spear point with heavy weight falls on the back of the elephant (Fig. 18.1a, b).

The Mbuti hunters in the Ituri forest of Congo Basin, however, did not use these traps when I stayed there in 1970s and 1980s. They neither used pit falls or trenches, which had been used by their neighboring Babali and other Bantu-speaking cultivators (Schebesta, 1936a). Elephants were always hunted with spears by the Mbuti. According to Turnbull (1965), when metal spears had not been available, the Mbuti asserted that they had hunted elephants with fire-hardened wooden spears. When I asked the Mbuti hunters about this, they said that it was impossible. I think it is extremely difficult to pierce the elephant thick skins with wooden spears, unless the elephant comes to a complete stop, and waiting for a hunter to spear, for example extremely exhausted by enduring pursuit or stuck in a mud pool.

The Mbuti in central and southern part of Ituri, who speak Bantu language, use spears with extremely large spearhead and try to stab the lower abdomen of the elephants (Fig. 18.2a). On the

other hand, the Efe (Sudanic-speaking group) in northern Ituri use smaller spears and try to stab the backside of knees to immobilize the elephant (Fig. 18.2b). Both techniques are effective, because an elephant with an injured hind leg cannot support its heavy weight to walk or run fast. Otherwise, the contents of intestines come out when the spear penetrates the elephant's abdomen properly, which soon leads to peritonitis.

The spearhead of the Mbuti is 8–10 cm wide and 40–50 cm long, and attached to a strong wooden shaft. The blade is razor-sharpened with a stone. The spears are thrown for hunting buffaloes, bush pigs and other smaller animals from a distance of several meters. For elephants, however, they approach close enough to the elephants and try to stab the softer part of the lower abdomen.

Elephant hunting is carried out either by a large group of hunters or by a few hunters, but there is always at least one experienced specialist called *mtuma* (or *batuma* in plural form), which is a common word throughout the central African Pygmy societies, and suggests wide-spread practice of elephant hunting in the central African forests. While a large group may be formed for hunting elephants, which happen to be found near the forest camp, elephant hunting in the Teturi area, where I conducted my research, was mostly carried out in a remote forest by a small number of hunters, some-



Figure 18.2: **A**, spear used by the Mbuti hunters; **B**, spears used by the Efe hunters. Photos by M. Ichikawa.

times even by a single hunter (*mtuma*). A *mtuma* is often accompanied by one or two young men, his younger brother, son or nephew, as apprentice or assistant doing daily chores. These young men usually do not attempt to spear an elephant. The Mbuti in my study area did not use dogs for hunting elephants. For hunting other animals, such as buffaloes and bush pigs, dogs play important roles in tracking the target animals, stopping them when they catch up, and distracting the animal's attention from hunters. However, the Mbuti say dogs are useless for hunting elephants, because the elephants easily notice the presence of dogs and hunters, which makes the approach extremely difficult.

The hunters go into the interior forest to search for elephants, carrying with them spears, ax, fire brand, but often without food. They search for fresh traces of elephants for several days, living on wild honey extracted from natural hives, wild yams

and other vegetable food in the forest, and sleep by the fire made of the brand, which was carefully protected from dying out during the search.

Elephants frequently visit muddy marshes, called *lako* (muddy pool) or *potolo* (marshland), where the hunters often find fresh traces of elephants. If they find there fresh trace of elephants, called *maikpada*, they carefully track the animals, approach the animal from leeward while it is feeding. If the hunter successfully gets under the abdomen, he thrusts the spear through, and run away quickly and hides himself behind a big tree or squat down and stay still, so that the elephant with poor eyesight may not see him. The young men accompanying the *mtuma* try to distract the attention of the elephant from a safe place, particularly when the hunt fails.

Once the spearhead enters deep into the abdominal cavity, it cuts the intestines as the fright-

CASE	DATE	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF DAYS SPENT HUNTING	CATCH
1	March 1973	17	1	1 bushpig
2	April 1973	3	1	1 bushpig
3	May 1973	17	1	1 buffalo
4	May 1973	17	1	1 buffalo
5	June 1973	group*	1	0
6	June 1973	group*	1	0
7	June 1973	3	1	0
8	June 1973	1	1	0
9	June 1973	1	1	0
10	June 1973	3	1	1 okapi

Table 18.1: Record of elephant hunting at Lolwa, central Ituri Forest (data from Harako, 1976); *, the number of participants is unknown.

ened elephant dashes in the bush. As the spear shaft strikes the trees and branches, the razor sharp blade in the abdomen further cut the intestines. The elephant quickly loose power when the contents of intestines come out. The hunter tracks the animal to give a finishing stab. It takes several hours to a day or two, from the first stab to the final kill. If the spear does not enter the body deep enough, for example, less than 10 cm deep, and no sign of fatal damage (blood or contents of intestines) are found, they would not pursue the target.

However, it is more often the case that hunters are noticed by elephants before approaching close enough and the elephant runs away. When I accompanied the Mbuti hunters in elephant hunting, they were very sensitive about the scent of my clothes. When the target got away, they often complained about my clothes, saying that the elephant noticed the smell of soap of my clothes, even when I had been wearing the same clothes for more than a week after washing. They often smear their body with muds, or elephant dung, so that the elephant may not notice their smell. They also smear the charcoals of certain forest plants, which they say make their body invisible to the elephants. The charcoals are also rubbed into incisions made on the leg, which, they say, enables them to run fast in the forest. However, even when they could get close to the elephant, the hunter may fail to stab

the elephant, or the spear may not enter into the body deep enough.

18.3 SUCCESS RATE

According to Harako (1976), who reported on spear hunting at Lolwa, central Ituri region, elephant hunting was conducted either in large or small groups. A large hunting group was comprised of two components; first spear givers composed of adult hunters, including *batuma*, and assisting group, or apprentices of young hunters, who carry food packed with leaves, called *musaba*, leftovers of breakfast, to eat on the way. During the five-month research by Harako in 1973, a total of ten attempts, of which five were by large groups of more than 10 men, were made. The results were two kills each of bush pigs and buffaloes, and one of okapi, but they could not kill their major target, an elephant (Table 18.1). When they encounter other animals while searching for elephants, they will of course, try to hunt them.

During my research for a total of 15 months from 1974 to 1975, and from 1980 to 1981, elephant hunting took place in small groups of two to four hunters, always led by an experienced elephant hunter (*mtuma*). Out of six hunts attempted during ten months from 1974 to 1975, they succeeded in killing an elephant only once,

CASE	DATE	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF DAYS SPENT HUNTING	CATCH
1	October 1974	4	3	elephant
2	November 1974	3	4	dwarf crocodile
3	December 1974	3	6	0
4	January 1974	4	2	0
5	February 1975	3	3	okapi (deceased)
6	February 1975	3	2	0
7	December 1980	3	2	elephant

Table 18.2: Elephant hunting record from August 1974 to February 1975 in Teturi area (data from Ichikawa, 1982).

though smaller animals were killed on two occasions (Table 18.2). The success rate in this period is, therefore, one for six attempts, or, one elephant kill per 60–70 hunter-days of hunting efforts. According to the Mbuti interviewed in 1980, during 25 months from August 1978 (when colleagues of mine visited the same group) to September, 1980 (when I visited them again), a total of four elephants had been killed at different parts of the forest, all by the same *mtuma*, who killed one in December, 1980. For the Efe in northern Ituri forest, Terashima (1983) reported that during his six months research from 1978 to 1979, two hunting groups attempted elephant hunting for several times, and killed two elephants. Probably, the average kill by a band is around one elephant for half a year, because elephant hunting is not practiced regularly, but only occasionally. When an elephant is killed, a huge quantity of meat becomes available, but it is rather a rare occasion, and not reliable for daily subsistence. In December 1980, during my second research, a young elephant was killed by a well-known elephant hunter.

18.4 DISTRIBUTION OF MEAT

When the elephant was killed, the hunters returned to the camp, beating the buttress root of a large tree on the way to inform the success of the hunt. When the *mtuma* hunter arrived at the camp, carrying his broken spear on the shoulder, which was a sign of success, the people in the camp shouted

with joy. The entire group immediately moved to the site of the kill (Fig. 18.3). On arriving at the site, men started dismembering the carcass, cutting and dividing the meat. There was no “skin biting ceremony” (that is, to let a small boy bite the membrane under the skin and bathe the sprouting putrefied contents of intestines) as reported by Putnam (1948). Duffy (1984), who witnessed dismembering of an elephant at the killing site, also stated that there was no such ceremony. A video taken by Japanese television crew showed a Mbuti hunter (not a boy, however) biting the white subcutaneous tissue of an elephant (NAV, 1972), but the meaning of this biting was not clear.

The elephant formally belongs to the owner of the spear, which made the first fatal stab, most probably the *mtuma*. However, this ownership is only nominal. Everyone can cut and take the meat as they like, except for special parts to be allocated to specific members of the group. In the group I studied, the special parts, numbered in Figure 18.4, are eaten only by the members of the Bapuera patrilineal clan, which form the majority of the group. These parts are either highly prized parts, such as fatty parts, heart, liver and kidneys, the parts with a special taste or texture, or with some ritual meaning such as the trunk tip and the tail. As most forest-mammals, except bush pigs in the fruiting season, are generally low in fat, fatty parts are highly valued¹. The foot above the planter

¹ While they said they would extract marrow (white fatty substance) from bones, I did not observe them to eat the bone marrow of the elephant.



Figure 18.3: A young elephant whose left-side lower abdomen was pierced with a spear. Photo by M. Ichikawa.

has white fatty cushion, which is much favored by the Mbuti. The liver, heart and kidneys are rich in vitamin and minerals. The trunk tip and tail are the leading and trailing parts, and symbolize the entire animal, and are taken by a man called *bulumusa*, meaning “the first to pull”, or the one who first departs from the camp for collective hunting, and makes a hunting fire before other members arrive at the hunting ground. This hunting fire, called “*kungya*”, literally meaning “to converse”, is made for communicating with the “Apakumandura” (master of forest), and for asking permission and success of hunting. The *bulumusa* man also plays an important role in the *molimo* spirit ritual performance. These special parts are shown in Figure 18.4, with the names of parts and the recipients of Bapuera clan. The fatty meat of foot (planters), which has special taste and texture, are cut into pieces, and shared among the Bapuera clan members.

They cut and take as much meat as they like (Fig. 18.5). The man who obtained the largest amount, 50 kg after boiled and half-dried, was a paternal cousin of the *mtuma* hunter, who killed the elephant, whereas the *mtuma* hunter himself took 44 kg (Table 18.3). More than a half tonne of meat was obtained from the elephant, and this

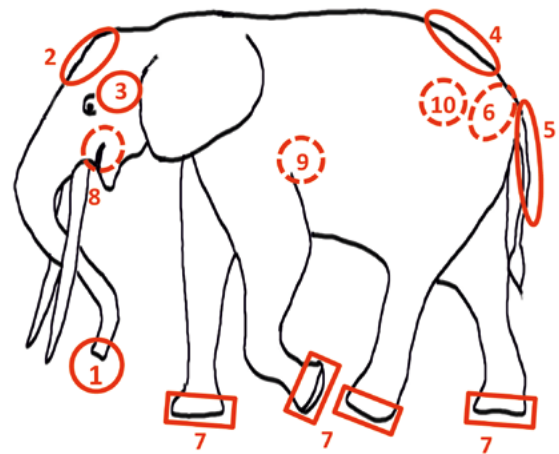


Figure 18.4: Elephant parts taken by the specific members of the Bapuera clan. 1, *sesi*: trunk tip; 2, *tinapata*: forehead; 3, *tesiyu*: front of ears; 4, *ekiliti*: loin; 5, *tinakondo*: tails; 6, *esua-ta*: meat inside the pelvis; 7, *etindi*: foot (above the plantar); 8, *edaka*: tongue; 9, *bukameema*: heart; 10, *bagbe*: kidney. Dashed lines indicate internal parts and organs.

was enough for about 40 camp members to have meat feast for a week, even when part of the meat was brought to the village for exchanging with the Bantu cultivators for cassava, plantain and other agricultural food. In this way, elephant hunting provides them with a huge quantity of meat at a time. Moreover, it provides a large quantity of much favored fats, which cannot be obtained from



Figure 18.5: Butchering the carcass. Photo by M. Ichikawa.

MEMBERS	RELATIONSHIP TO TUMA	SPECIAL PARTS TAKEN	WEIGHT OF MEAT TAKEN
Bapuera clan members			
A	<i>tuma</i> hunter	6, 4	44
B	brother	10	33
C	brother	4	37
D	brother, <i>bulumusa</i>	1,3, 5	40
E*	brother	4	15
F	brother		?
G	paternal cousin	9, 4	35
H		8	50
I*	paternal cousin	3	?
Other clan members			
J*	cross-cousin		8
K	cross-cousin		21.5
L*	cross-cousin		21

Table 18.3: Weight of meat (in kg, partly dried) obtained by individuals (December 1980). Underlined members (A, C and J) participated in the hunt; the numbering of the elephant parts corresponds to Figure 18.4; the planters of foot (7) are split into two pieces and shared among the Bapuera clan members; *, staying alone without family.

other forest animals, except bush pigs. The problem is that, it is unstable and successful only a few times a year.

All the camp members enjoyed the feast of elephant meat. Before the hunt, ritual performances were held at night for hunting success, with intensive singing and dancing. *Butuma* (elephant hunt-

ing) songs were sung by adult men with beating of *banja*, a pair of wooden sticks torn from half to the end, and women danced in a circle. However, unlike the previous reports, there was no ceremonial performance after the successful hunt in this case, though the feast continued several days after the hunt. All the parts, except bones, teeth,

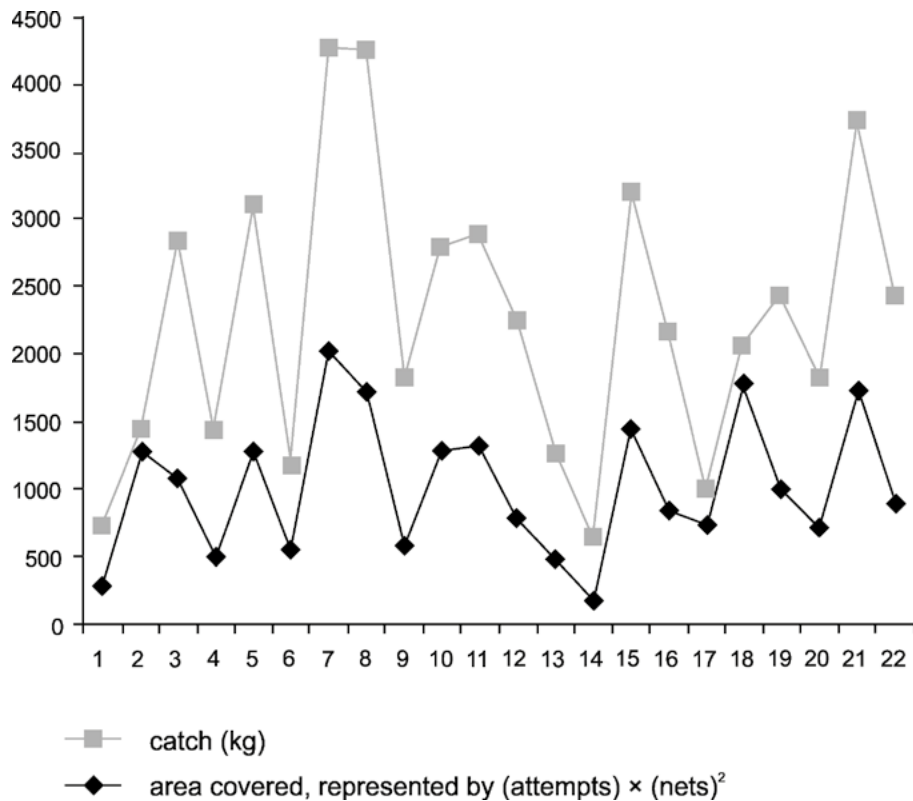


Figure 18.6: Hunting efforts and catch in net hunting. Hunting effort is shown in black lines and catch in gray lines on the vertical axis. The effort is represented by the number of attempts (net casts) \times (net length in meters)². The amount of catch is shown in kg \times 100. Horizontal axis shows the hunting days, from 1st to 22nd day.

and contents of digestive tracts, were consumed. Even skins were cut into thin strips and eaten, after cooked for a long time. If there had been cassava leaves brought from the village, they would have been cooked with elephant skins, to make one of the favorite dishes of the Mbuti. The ivory belongs to the owner, i.e., *mtuma* hunter in this case. He brought it to a Bantu farmer, who probably sold it to a trader secretly, because ivory trade without license was illegal at the time of my research.

18.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: COMPARISON WITH NET HUNTING

Compared with such an unstable hunting for elephants, the Mbuti's daily hunting with nets provides them with much more stable catch. It aims at forest duikers, weighing from 5 to 25 kg. Usually ten to fifteen nets are combined to make a large semicircle. Women and children beat the bush to drive the animals toward the nets. When an an-

imal is entangled in the net, the man hiding by the net seizes the animal and kills it with a stick or spear. One hunting attempt (consisting of setting nets, driving the animals, killing the animals entangled in the nets, removing the nets and moving to the next hunting ground) takes about an hour, and usually five to ten attempts are made in a day.

The daily catch from net hunting is strongly correlated to their hunting effort, as shown in Figure 18.6. The more hunting effort is made, the more hunting yields they get. Hunting effort in this case is estimated by the total area covered by the nets in the day's hunt, which in turn is represented by (number of attempts = net casts) \times (total net lengths used in the day's hunt)². The meat distribution patterns are also contrastive. In the case of net hunting, the owner of the animals must distribute the parts to other participants, depending on the roles they have played in the hunt. The hunter, who uses other's net is given a hind leg, while the woman who carries the carcass to the camp takes one of the front legs. The

	NET HUNTING	ELEPHANT HUNTING
catch	6–7 tonnes/year, small and stable	5–6 tonnes/year, large but unstable
participants	ordinary men and women	specialists (<i>batuma</i>)
meat sharing	first obligatory, followed by voluntary	share with equal access, except of specific parts
ritual performances	rare	special performances
songs	yes but infrequent	special songs by men
feast	no	yes

Table 18.4: Comparison between net hunting and elephant hunting.

one who assists to kill the animal entangled in the net takes the part of the chest called *esosi*, while the man who first depart the camp and make a hunting fire before the hunt starts takes the lower ribs, called *seka* of medium-sized duikers and the heads of blue duikers. Such distribution is formal and obligatory, and we call it “first distribution”, which is then followed by voluntary, secondary distribution from those who have to those who haven’t the meat. The distribution of elephant meat is quite different. Certain parts are given to the specific individuals, regardless of the role played in the hunt, whereas other parts are shared freely among the camp members as they butchered the carcass.

As has been often reported, elephant hunting has a heavy cultural load, or, cultural meanings. Before the hunt, special ritual is performed, with singing and dancing. The men sing special songs for *butuma*, elephant hunting songs, and women dance. For net hunting, no special skill/technique is necessary. Any adult men and even boys of lower teenagers handle the nets, and women and children participate also as beaters. By contrast, elephant hunting is performed by experienced adult hunters, with a master hunter (*mtuma*) playing a central role. The *mtuma* exerts leadership in hunting, based on his skills, knowledge, and courage. He has developed the capacity for *mtuma* through accompanying his predecessor *mtuma*, often his father or uncle. While his authority is restricted to the activities related to elephant hunting, it is still unusual in an otherwise egalitarian society.



Figure 18.7: Dwarf kingfisher, “bird of elephants”. Photo by M. Ichikawa.

The amounts of meat obtained in a year from two hunting methods are almost the same, 6–7 tonnes per annum for a group of 40–50 members. However, the stability of meat yield is very much different. The elephant hunting fails in most cases, but when it is successful, a huge quantity of meat is obtained at a time. Meat distribution pattern is also different; elephant meat is shared almost freely among the camp members, except for certain parts, and joyful feast follows after the successful hunt.

In these ways, elephant hunting makes a strong accent to an otherwise monotonous daily life with collective net hunting, which ensures regular and stable supply of meat, but only in a small quantity (Table 18.4).

How about the image of elephants? Elephants are the biggest game in the region, and provide them with highly prized meat in large quantities. The Mbuti say the elephant meat is the best of the forest animals, mainly because of the quantity of meat provided at a time. However, they also

know that elephants are dangerous animals, which may kill hunters, as mentioned before. The Mbuti women and children are afraid of an unexpected encounter with elephants in the forest. They are always excited when they are talking or discussing about their experiences with elephants. However, in the Mbuti folktales, elephants are not considered the “greatest” animal. According to the Mbuti, the chief or king of the forest animals is a small creature, the land tortoise, called *koti*. The reason why land tortoises are greater than elephants is not clear, but in a Mbuti folktale, “the land tortoise commands the elephants on their back during the march of forest animals”.

The Mbuti believe that each of the major animal species (mainly mammals) in the forest is associated with a specific species of birds, which warn and alert to their associating animals of approaching danger. Alternatively, on the contrary, these birds also inform human hunters of the location of their associating animals. A smaller type of hornbills, called “*kobekobe*”, is the bird of elephants, and said to be often found near the elephants. Also, bird species called *mangamako*, dwarf kingfishers (Fig. 18.7) and marakite kingfishers, smallest types of kingfishers in the forest, are said to be associated with the elephants, and show the direction or location of elephants with their conspicuous red beak (Ichikawa, 1998). It is interesting to see that the largest animals are subject to, or associated with such small animal species in the forest.

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