

CHALLENGES OF WILDLIFE PARK MANAGEMENT IN KAINJI LAKE NATIONAL PARK ECOTOURISM DESTINATION, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Wildlife management is at the heart of wildlife tourism in any protected area. While some effort have been made to understand how wildlife is managed in developed and some developing countries using quantitative approach, there is scarcity of such investigation using a qualitative approach. Thus, this paper explored wildlife management practice in Kainji Lake National Park in Nigeria. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with staff of the park; they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to examine and understand patterns in the transcript which led to generation of themes. The study revealed that the park is an embodiment of valuable animals that should be well protected for the growth and development of wildlife ecotourism, and the main management practice are free range method, patrol and camera capture approach. The study also found out that the management practice is faced with challenges which include use of obsolete equipment, lack of regular maintenance of patrol vehicles and personnel resulting from poor funding. Other challenges are illegal farming, hunting, logging and fishing. Based on these findings, the study recommended that there should be an effective public-private partnership of Wildlife park management and rearrangement that encourages community participation in tourism development through the establishment of community based tourism enterprises and strict implementation of regulations guiding against illegal activities in the park.

Keywords: Wildlife, Challenges, Ecotourism, National Park, and Management.

Introduction:

Nigeria is endowed with abundant wildlife across the spectrum of her states, whose management prior to her independence was basically to safeguard them as valuable national assets. The idea of management wildlife as an important recreation and tourism resources took the center stage after independence when they were recognized as having immense potential in revenue generation and conservation (Ijeoma and Ogbara, 2013). As a way of utilizing and deriving benefits from the numerous wildlife in the country, eight national parks were developed which are currently been preserved, enhanced and managed by the Nigeria National Park Service (NNPS). Among the established parks in Nigeria, the development of Kainji Lake National park marked the first attempt at managing wildlife for tourism purposes in Nigeria, and it falls under non-captive natural habitats (Lameed, 2007).

Animals that are unusual or endangered usually pre-dominate non-captive natural habitat, and because they are particularly attractive, and interesting according to Weaver (2005), the increase in demand for closer interaction with various classes of them has sparked the emergence of different forms of wildlife ecotourism activities (Semeniuk, Haider, Cooper, & Rothley, 2010). Such interactions can play different roles in the tourist experience: from a marginal role, for example in the case where wildlife is an incidental part of a guided tour, to a central role, as in recreational hunting and fishing tours (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). Visitor interaction with

wildlife both in zoos and natural environments is today a prominent part of tourism marketing and modern tourism experience (Page & Dowling, 2002; Tremblay, 2002). Given the concern for global biodiversity loss, particularly the extinction of wildlife in natural habitats, and the growing acknowledgement of the potential role tourism could play in reducing and changing the occurrence of human-animal conflicts and threats into green opportunities, Christ et al. (2003) noted that properly managed tourism can contribute to conservation objectives by directly capitalizing on biodiversity assets, and by giving them a direct "economic value. Thus, in this regard, the efficacious management of wildlife's in natural habitat such as a national park is indispensable, and fundamental to the sustainability of national parks.

Having many wildlife tourism activities located in peripheral areas, its development and management could contribute to the development of such areas, especially those traditionally characterized by scarcity of resources (Hall & Boyd, 2005; Müller & Jansson, 2007). As noted by Higginbottom (2004) and Newsome, Dowling, and Moore (2004), one of the main point of debate in support for the advancement in the development of wildlife tourism attractions is the established fact that they help in securing long-term conservation of wildlife and their habitats. Therefore, a well-designed, properly managed and delivered wildlife habitat and tourism has the potential to stimulate conservation knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of tourists and other visitors on excursion (Ballantyne, Packer, Hughes, & Dierking, 2007).

Over the last two decades, much of the wildlife tourism literature presents information on the western world, neglecting the developing countries that hitherto have tremendous potential in wildlife habitats and ecotourism. To date, even with numerous wildlife in Kainji Lake national park in Nigeria.

Research Questions

- (i) Examine the existing wildlife management practice in Kanji Lake National Park.
- (ii) Determine the challenges of wildlife management in Kanji Lake National Park.

Literature Review

Wildlife tourism can be described as ecotourism if it is developed and managed according to the principles of ecotourism. It can be classified into "soft" and "hard" types depending on different degrees of natural protection and conservation approach (Bertella, 2011). According to Newsome et al., (2005) and Reynolds & Braithwaite, (2001), wildlife tourism is often defined as a subset of nature-based tourism and prominent for its close association with ecotourism. However, the distinction is rarely made between wildlife tourism that is based on nature versus wildlife tourism that is based in nature. These two forms may hold different expectations for the tourists and managers, different experiences for the wildlife, and consequently operate more effectively under different management policies and practices (Burns, MacBeth & Moore, 2011). Tourists' interest in attractions in peripheral areas and environmental friendly tourism products has grown in recent times, thereby making wildlife ecotourism a potentially viable, profitable venture (Müller & Jansson, 2007).

Wildlife ecotourism occurs in a range of settings including sites where animals are captive such as in zoos, aquariums and wildlife centres, or natural habitats where animals are non-captive such as ecotourism experiences in national parks (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009). Wildlife tourism is composed of non-consumptive activities such as viewing, touching and photographing wildlife (Higginbottom, 2004; Fennell, 2008) along with consumptive activities such as fishing and hunting (Peterson, 2004; Lovelock, 2008). In most settings, wildlife viewing is one of the most dominant activity of tourists. As Knight (2009) put it, wildlife viewing has been fully included into the mainstream of commercial tourism, which given avenues for proliferation and diversification of opportunities to encounter wildlife (Higham, Lusseau, & Hendry, 2008). Human encounter with wildlife offers unique opportunities for tourists to reconnect with nature in a potentially life-changing way and has become increasingly popular in recent years.

The importance of wildlife and natural habitat conservation in the promotion of ecotourism is buttressed in the quantum of wild life protected areas covering up to 13.25 million km² of the global landscape (Wishitemi, Momanyi, Ombati, & Okello, 2015). Ecotourism product attributes therefore requires naturalness, and wildlife (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012; Mosammam, Sarrafi, Nia, & Heidari, 2016). Ecotourism investments are mostly established on the presence of wildlife so that tourist can experience non-human nature. However, there arise the complications in territorial intervention in the protection of the wildlife amidst human settlements (Bluwstein, 2017). As a result, national parks often face the challenges in the implementation of the concept of ecotourism which involves protection of biodiversity and economic development (Paresashvili, 2014).

One of the challenges of sustainable ecotourism is the conflict of interest between the protected areas and the local populations (Paresashvili, 2014). The situations in national parks areas around the worlds shows that there is always collision between the cultures, values of the park managers and that of the local people (Haukeland, 2011). Many local communities are not well educated on the potentials of ecotourism to their local economy, and once the economic potentials of ecotourism are known to the people, they are more likely to see to the preservation of natural resources (Arsić *et al.*, 2017; Teresa, Javier, & Antoni, 2008). One of the strategies of management of parks is the involvement of the residents in the “doing of tourism”; in doing so they have a sense of ownership and belonging to the entire ecotourism project and they are able to provide through their perceptual and practical senses how best the conduct of tourism in their inhabited community (Chen, 2017).

The Study Area

Kainji Lake National Park which is located 560 km north of Lagos and 385 km north east of Abuja, the federal capital represent the first attempt at establishing and developing a wildlife environment into a tourism destination in Nigeria. The park is located at Latitude 9° 50' 19" N and Longitude 4° 34' 24" E. The Park is bordered on the east side by the Kanji Lake and by the Republic of Benin on the west side (Lameed, 2007). Being the largest in terms of size in the country, it covers a savanna land area of about 5,340.82 square kilometers (Marguba, 2002). It came into being by the merger of two former game reserves, Borgu game reserve (located in Niger and Kwara States) and Zurguma game reserve (located in Niger State). The Borgu sector covers a land area of about 3,970.02 square kilometers and it is situated in Borgu and Baruten

local government of Niger State, while the Zugurma sector covers a smaller land area of about 1,370.80 square kilometers and it is situated in Mariga Local Government of Niger state (Lameed, 2007).

Topographically, the Borgu sector is characterized by a gentle undulating land and a few small hills of about 100m in height. It has its highest elevations of about 300-350m above sea level near the western boundary of the sector, which decreases to about 142m above sea level from west to east across the sector border (Lameed, 2007). The Zugurma sector is a low plateau with an elevation of about 240m above sea level (Osemeobo 1979). The landscape of Kainji Lake National Park is covered by a variety of natural growing plant formations ranging from dry grassland to swamp grassland, to gallery forest that harbours diverse flora, fauna, hydrological, cultural and human resources. Lameed, (2007) noted a faunal density comprising of Baboon, Patas monkey, Green monkey, Lion, Buffalo, Grimm's Duiker, Elephant, Warthog, and Red flanked Duiker as the major representative species.

Methodology

A qualitative research paradigm was chosen and used for this study, which is a departure from previous research on the subject. This is because qualitative data are not subjective and afford the researcher the possibility of obtaining in-depth information about a phenomenon. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 staff from the six departments of the ecotourism destination. Purposive sampling technique is widely used in qualitative research for the selection of samples with requisite knowledge about the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002).

To obtain data, in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected staff in the premises of their office environment which lasted for an average of 20 minutes. Before the interviews, the consent of the staff was sought for permission to record, and it was given. Thus, all the interviews were recorded with the aid of digital recorder to enable the capturing of all vital conversations and ease of analysis. The whole interviews were conducted in two days and immediately after that, they were transcribed verbatim, which took two weeks.

Thematic qualitative data analysis technique was employed to study patterns in the transcribed data and analyzed it in a way that make meaning and reveal vital information that addresses the research objectives. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thus, themes were generated and supported with their associated quotes. A theme grabs something pertinent about the data that have some relationship with the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke (2006). Table 1 shows few characteristics of staff of Kainji Lake National Park interviewed.

Table 1. Characteristics of staff of Kainji Lake National Park interviewed.

S/N	Code	Position	Departmental Unit	Duration
1	R1	Assistance H.O.D Ecology	Ecology and Resource Management Unit	25Minutes
2	R2	Ass Inspector In Paramilitary Settings	Human Resources and Management Unit	30Minutes
3	R3	Tourism Officer	Ecotourism Department	25Minutes
4	R4	Ranger	Ecology and Resource management Unit	20Minutes
5	R5	Park Statistical Analyst	Planning research and ICT unit	26Minutes
6	R6	Chief Park Warden	Ecology and Resource Management Unit	45Minutes
7	R7	H.O.D Ecotourism	Ecotourism Unit	16Minutes
8	R8	Ranger	Ecology and Resource Management Unit	22Minutes
9	R9	Intelligent Officer In the Paramilitary setting of the Park	Human Resources and Management Unit	35Minutes
10	R10	H.O.D Planning Research and ICT	Planning and Research Unit	15Minutes

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1

What are the Categories of Wildlife in Kainji National Park?

Findings of this study reveals that the wild animals present in the park are bush buck, lion, crocodile, hyena, roan antelopes, monitor lizard, baboon, dickers, and monkeys. The park also has large species of birds and reptiles, and it was also observed that majority of the reptiles and aquatic animals like hippopotamus her harbored in Oli River. The following comment by some of the interviewees confirmed Kainji Lake National Park as a tourism destination that is very rich in various class of wildlife. *"The wildlife species that are in the park are hippocampus, crocodiles, buffalo, lion, bush bug, dickers, monitor lizard (R1: Assistance H.O.D Ecology),"* *"antelopes, baboons, cheetah, and leopard are animals that can be found in Kainji Lake*

National Park. Elephants exist in the park before but have gone on extinction as a result of noise from the activities of man like logging and aircraft noise of air force route that pass through the park (R5: Statician of the Park)". Furthermore, another interviewee commented, "the park harbors different species of birds which is made of 253 species, 28 species of amphibians, 62 species of mammals, and 52 species of fishes (R4: Ranger)". The above narration affirms the existence of varieties of wildlife that tourists from all over the world would want to see and possibly have contact with, which further confirm Nigeria as a country with abundant potentials in wildlife resources for tourism development.

Knowledge of the remaining existing wildlife in the park is usually gotten through the strategic location of cameras in the park to capture the activities of animals. According to an interviewee "a research that involves placing camera in different strategic positions of the park in order to capture the activities and bountiful nature of the park was conducted in 2016 (R10: H.O.D Planning Research and ICT)". The figure 1, 2 and 3 below shows the location of the camera traps and pictures of some wildlife species obtained through the camera traps in the park.

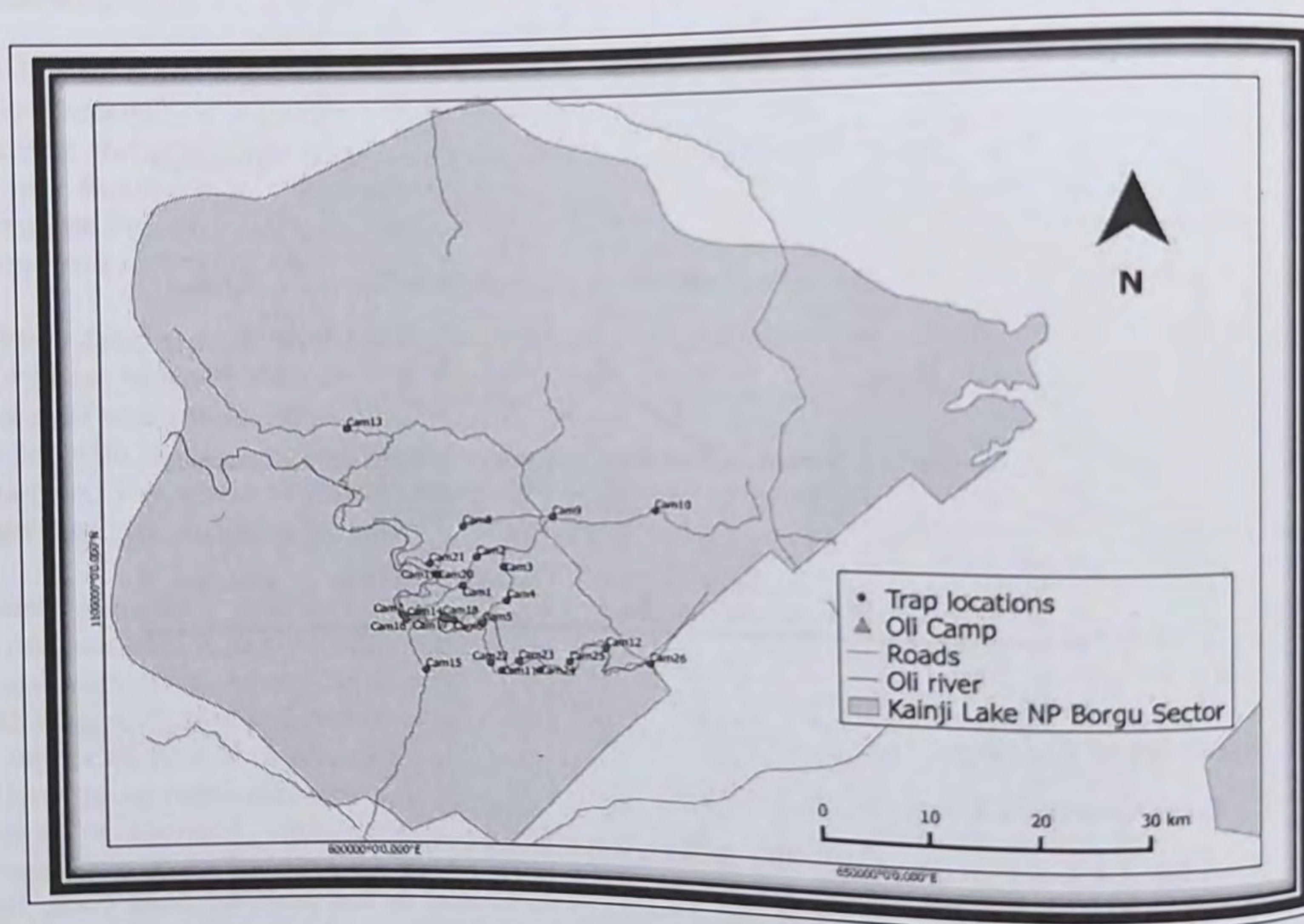


Fig. 1 Location of Camera Traps in Kainji Lake National Park

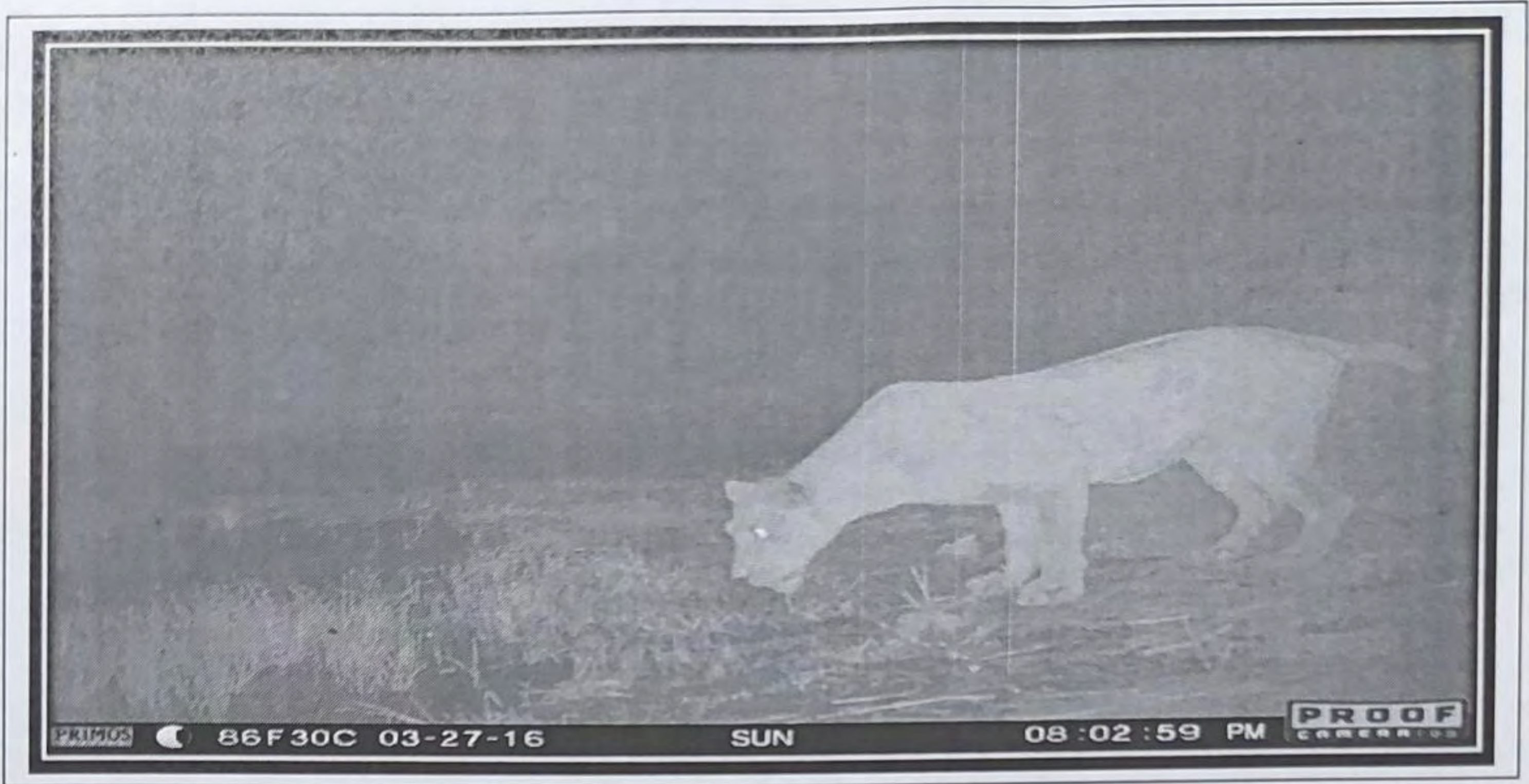


Fig. 2: A Female Lion Picture Captured Using Camera Traps

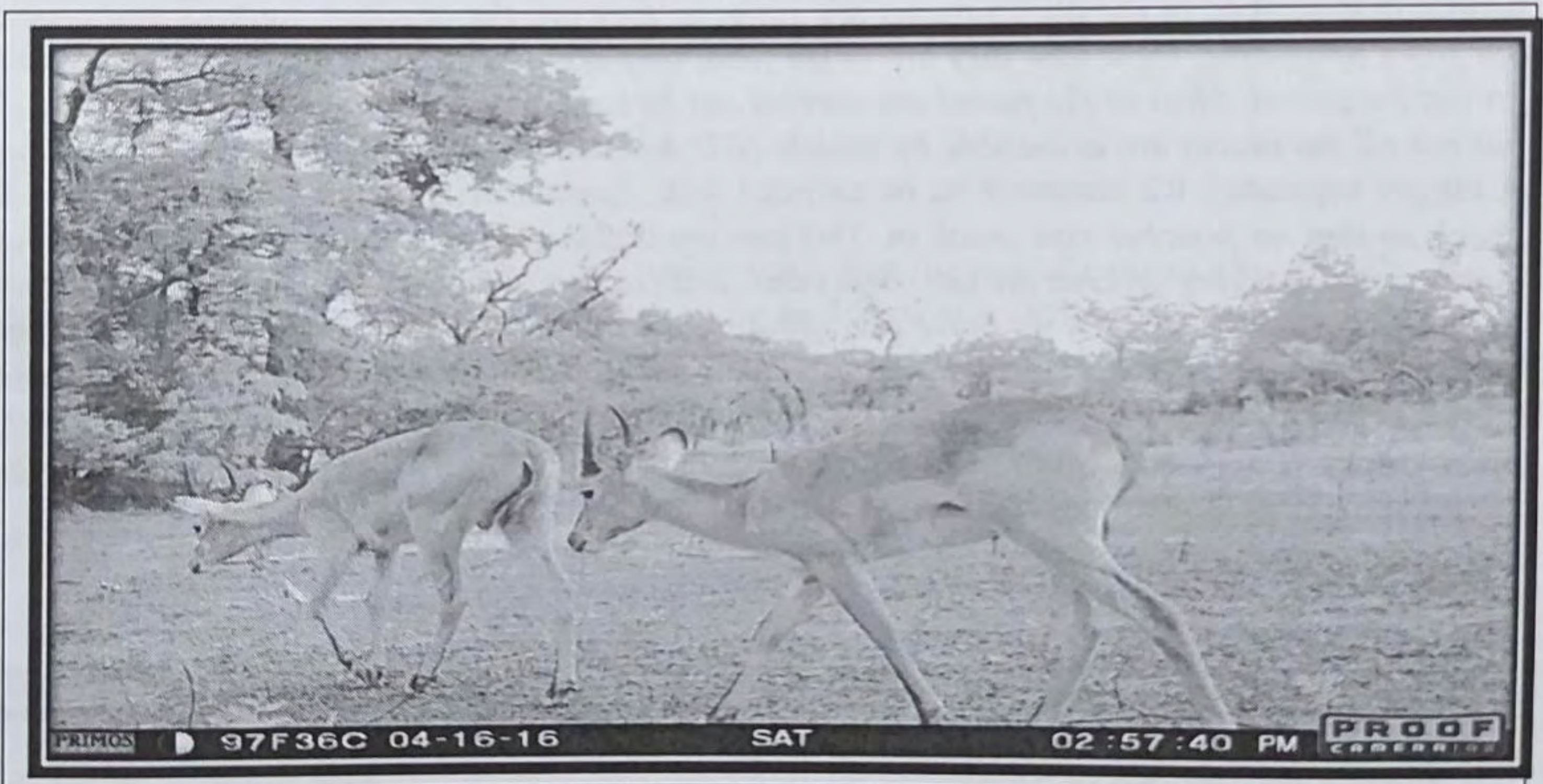


Fig. 3: Antelopes Picture Captured Using Camera Traps

Research Question 2

What are the existing wildlife management Practices of Kainji Park?

Three principal management practice are currently being practiced in Kainji Lake National

Park, and they are: the free range, the patrol approach and the use of cameras.

The Free Range

This is the main management practice in the park, where animals are left to move freely in their natural habitat without any confinement and hindrance. In this case they move in search of food of their taste and breed by themselves at their own will. This practice is not different from what obtains in wildlife tourism parks in other part of the world. To substantiate this claim, the Assistance H.O.D Ecology commented that *"the animals are managed through free range, they are not confined, animals we have here are not confined, and they are managed through free range (R1)."* Similarly, another interviewee mentioned that *"animals here are free, we are not keeping them as it is done in a zoo (R6: Chief Park Warden)."*

The Patrol Approach

This approach involves daily movement of staff in the park to check for illegal activities. It is carried out by protection staff known as rangers, who are under the Department of Ecology and Resource Management. According to one of the park staff, *"We managed them through our rangers because we have people in the office, then we have rangers in the field and majority of people that worked in the park systems are rangers, they are the one that controls and protect our flora and fauna, right now they are in the field, they are in their various stations where they go out for patrol. Most of the patrol are carried out by trekking, in some places they use vehicle but not all the places are accessible by vehicle (R2: Assistant Inspector of Paramilitary Settings. A ranger supported R2 comment as he narrated that, "patrol means going around the park to check so that no poacher can sneak in. This process is done either through the use of vehicles, motorcycles, trekking or even the use of bicycles. It is carried out by being in uniform, patrol van and then ammunitions, then we move in a group of not less than ten(10) inside the park for like three to five days to comb the park just to know what is happening and to observe any illegal activities within the park (R8: Ranger)".* To further exemplify the patrol approach, the following photographs (fig. 4 and 5) shows rangers trekking and moving in vans to check for illegal encroachment by hunter, loggers, farmers, and fishermen.





Fig 4. Rangers Trekking in the Park to Check Illegal Encroachment

Fig 5. Rangers in a Van for Daily Anti-Poaching Patrol

Camera Capture Approach

Conversation with staff of the national park reveals that the use of camera strategically fixed at different locations in the park has proven to be an effective wildlife management approach. To this end, a ranger remarked that, *“We fix camera in hidden locations in the park to capture the activities of those involved in illegal doings in the park, and it has yielded results (R3: Tourism Officer)”*

Research Question Three

What are the challenges of the Existing Wildlife Management Practice in Kani Lake National Park?

The findings of this research revealed that inadequate funding is one of the main challenge of the existing wildlife management practice. This has led to inadequacy in implements required to handle various logistics in the park. Almost all the interviewees lamented on insufficient fund allocated to the park for management of the fauna and flora. As mentioned by one of the interviewee, *“The challenge of funding has affected the whole system of the park. Our operations cannot be effective without enough funding. Because of insufficient fund, regular patrol is hampered, so also is tackling illegal hunting, grazing, and logging (R7: Head of Department, Ecotourism)”*. In addition to this view, another interviewee commented that, *“Funding has always been a major management challenge here, the park cannot operate without funding. We need sufficient money for maintenance of patrol vehicles, jeep track and training of our staff on the modern management practices (R1: Assistant HOD, Ecology)”*.

Evidently, adequate fund has not been made available to upgrade and purchase management facilities to protect the wildlife resources in the park, which has affected the maintenance and procurement of gadgets needed for effective management of wildlife in the park. Funding issues has affected the maintenance and procurement of essential tools such as walkie talkie for communication with the protection staff, firearms for protection against poachers, patrol vans use for patrolling, life jackets for safety when crossing a river. Also, the ranges where the protection staff stays in the bush are not conducive, and the parachute used for aerial surveillance in the park is out of use as a result of lack of maintenance. This inadequacies have negatively impacted on the durability and functionality of implements for management of wildlife in the park, thus making it vulnerable to illegal farming, hunting, logging and fishing. To support this claims, some interviewees remarked, "There is currently the issue of inadequate vehicles, difficulty in fueling the available patrol vehicle, use of outdated guns, lack of communication gadgets and the use of outdated guns by rangers (R9: Intelligent Officer, Paramilitary Setting of the Park)". "We are facing lack of equipment thereby exposing our rangers to the threat of poachers. They kill our rangers nearly every time. We lost three staff this year as a result of lack of equipment for self-defense and protection (R8: Ranger)", "Most of those involved in illegal activities in the park are those in the neighboring communities and the Fulani grazers who as a result of poverty believe they can make money by killing animals, grazing on the park vegetation or cutting of tree in the park (R7: Head of Department, Ecotourism)". Figure 6 and 7 shows a Fulani poacher with animals encroaching the park.

The finding of this research agrees with the result of a similar research by Mgonja, Sirima and Mkumbo, (2015) in Tanzania. Their research also reveal that Tanzania protected areas have suffered from funding struggles and other impediments of wildlife tourism growth such as deforestation, poaching, and human encroachment due to rapid population increase. In addition, research has shown that wildlife population have been seriously decimated by hunting, poaching, human encroachment, habitat fragmentation, drought, and veldt fires in Botswana (Chase, 2011).

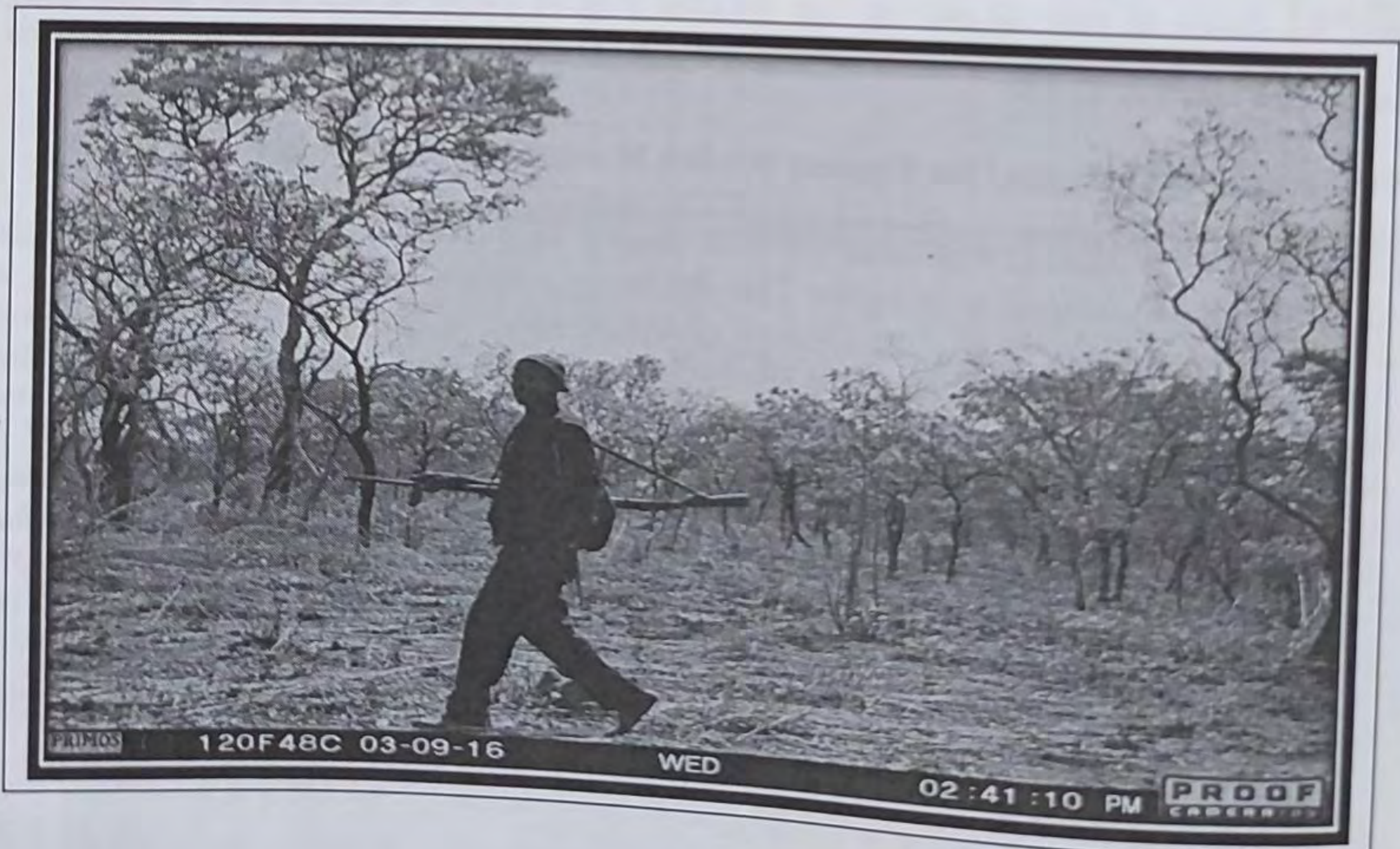




Fig. 6 Shows a Fulani Man with a Gun Encroaching the Park

Fig. 7 Shows Fulani Cows Illegally Grazing on the Park Vegetation

One of the causes of the challenges faced by Kainji Lake National Park is “Government Negligence and Corruption”. Nigerian government appeared not to have given purposeful serious emphasize on taking tourism as an engine for economic growth and development. There is so much over concentration on the oil industry, and neglecting the tourism industry that has been adjudged today to be a large employer of jobs to a varied spectrum of the society. A lot of fund is required in upgrading and maintaining park facilities, which is not often disbursed adequately, and the little disbursement is not been fully utilized as some are diverted into personal use by corrupt officials at the national park headquarter in Abuja. As remarked by an interviewee, *“Nigeria has been relying on crude oil without thinking of other alternatives. Many sectors that would have improved the economic fortunes of the country have been neglected (R1: Assistant HOD, Ecology)”*. Additionally, another interviewee commented that, *“The political will to reform the Nigerian national parks is not there, which is why deliberate effort has not been made to showcase the park to the outside world (R6: Chief Park Warden)”*.

High illiteracy level of people of the host communities of the national park has led to increasing pressure on the park resources. The finding of this research revealed that most of the neighboring community members are not educated, and have little or no knowledge of the significance of conservation of park resources. This makes them feel that exploiting the park resources through hunting, fishing, grazing and logging is their right. The comment of interview R5, who is in charge of statistical data of the park provides further insight on the above claim, *“The people around us have low education. They don't know the importance of the park despite the fact that we have conservation education that have gone round to tell them the importance of conserving*

and protecting this animals. Their own is getting meat or logging, mining and fishing for money, that is their own interest, they don't take cognizance of the advantages of keeping them".

Conclusion and Recommendations

Effective management practice is pertinent in the conservation of an environment characterized by abundant flora and fauna especially those with different categories of wildlife. Since the Kainji Lake National Park is confirmed to have a wide categories of wild animals, essentially, their prudent and proper management is critical to the sustainability of wildlife tourism in Nigeria, as their continuous depletions will bring about extinction, which will negatively impact on wildlife ecotourism.

In order to achieve better management of wildlife and minimize the challenges of the existing practice, the following recommendations are offered: The management of Kainji Lake National Park should not be left in the hands of government alone. A workable and sustainable public-private partnership arrangement that will guarantee adequate funding of the activities of the park should be established. Illegal activities such as encroachment by hunters, poachers, grazing and farming should be properly checked and minimized by community participation in tourism development. In this case, members of host communities of the park should be employed as rangers to protect the existing wildlife as this has the potential to give them sense of belonging and encouraged them to give their all in ensuring that the existing stock of wildlife are maintained. The park management should also create a more sustainable and effective public campaign on the importance of wildlife resources in the park. Lastly, there should be provision of strict rules and regulation to punish trespassers, poachers, herdsman encroaching into the park for grazing purpose.

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