



The Mali elephants: local attitudes & relevance for conservation

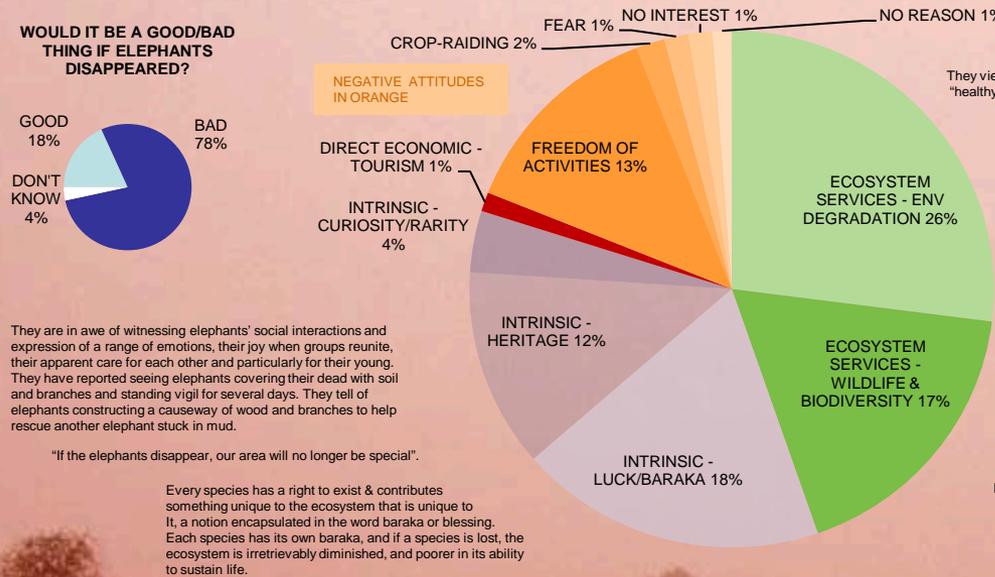
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This iconic population of around 550 elephants has survived through an annual migration to cope with the widely dispersed and variable nature of the Gourma's resources, but recent drought and increasing human impact are changing the relationship between elephants, people and the Sahelian ecosystem. The elephant range is inhabited by a diversity of ethnicities, with pastoralism the predominant activity in the drier north grading to wet-season agriculture in the south.

Research into local attitudes revealed that 18% of the population would think it a good thing if elephant disappeared, mainly because of the restriction in carrying out day-to-day activities. 78% thought it would be a bad thing and 4% didn't know. The professed first reasons for valuing elephants are shown in the large pie-chart below, with the positive values grouped into conventional categories - intrinsic (34%), ecosystem services (35%), and direct economic (1%) - although deeper questioning suggested that this was artificial as for the local, predominantly subsistence, people these values were closely inter-linked., and were aspects of a greater value. This, together with some surprise findings were used to direct conservation activities.

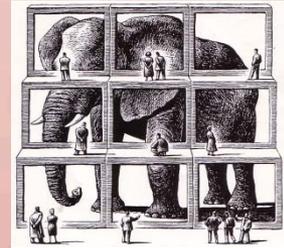
Local attitudes to elephants with a classification of value



However...

..... deeper exploration suggested that not only were these values closely interlinked and that in many cases were aspects of a greater value, A sense of identity from feeling deeply embedded within the wider environment (e.g. the notion of Baraka, luck and ecosystem services), that is less obvious to urban, industrialized cultures. Making the links between superficially different values through discussion resulted in the emergence of a strong support for elephant conservation.

CONSERVATION IMPLICATIONS: all activities begin with a discussion of values to create and affirm a shared vision for elephants



Surprise findings

No correlation between attitudes towards elephants and whether individuals were native/migrant, level of education, sex or age.

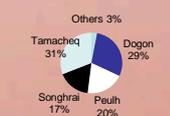
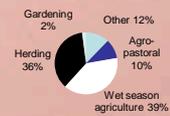
Pastoralists were less favourable to elephants than agriculturalists (despite the cost of crop destruction)

Negative attitudes were more likely among the Tamasheqs; while none of the Dogons showed negative attitudes, despite being agriculturalist.

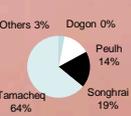
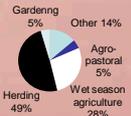
There was also a cultural difference in the degree to which it was felt whether it was possible to mitigate human-elephant conflict, with the Tamacheqs showing a more fatalistic attitude.

CONSERVATION IMPLICATIONS: The pastoralist, predominantly Tamacheq north was a priority, as was the need to demonstrate solutions.

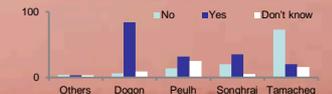
WHOLE SAMPLE



THOSE WITH NEGATIVE ATTITUDES



CAN ANYTHING BE DONE ABOUT CONFLICT?



METHODS - To gain a preliminary understanding of local attitudes to the elephants 351 people were surveyed at 23 markets spread over the elephant range, by trained, local surveyors. The survey questions were based on 22 key informant interviews and a pilot study of 55 individuals. Markets were chosen as a way of reaching dispersed populations. Unfortunately despite great effort, only twenty-four women would agree to be interviewed.