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Indigenous Ecological Knowledge of a Human-Elephant Interaction in Transmara District, Kenya: Implications for Research and Management

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) of the Maasai community in the context of their interaction with elephants around Masai Mara National Reserve (MMNR), Kenya is explored. Although Maasai community land sustains a huge elephant population, it is experiencing increased human-elephant conflict (HEC). Focus group discussions combined with scientifically collected data were used in assessing the relevance of IEK to elephant related ecological research. The Maasai narrated their experiences with elephants which were then formulated into hypotheses and tested scientifically by designing experiments that were monitored to prove the authenticity of IEK. Respondents had in-depth knowledge of some key ecological processes. Drunken people were more likely to be attacked by elephants, and elephant movement into adjacent group ranches increased with increasing wildebeest density. Elephants mainly raided ripe or mature crops while pupils within the elephant range performed poorly in national examinations. Based on this, there is strong evidence that IEK could be used to design sustainable conservation strategies. It is recommended that understanding of IEK in mitigating HEC and its subsequent integration into HEC decision support system is necessary in order to resolve conflicts.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous Knowledge; Masai Mara; Human-Elephant Conflict

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