

The Sisia Cave Bats of Bamenda, Cameroon

The ever-growing population and extending towns in Cameroon have a very adverse effect on wildlife and its habitats. Early settlers in Bamenda, Cameroon, remember, with nostalgia, those good old days when Abakwa, or the 'Old Town Quarter' was the centre of town and the business hub of the region — when most of the present quarters were either farmland or virgin bush. These senior citizens recount how bushmeat was abundant and how farmland was plentiful and fertile.

Today the story is very different, as most of those farmlands and virgin bushland tracts have been built on as the urban population increases with more and more births and the influxes of opportunity-seekers from the rural areas. The wildlife that provided those people with bushmeat also disappeared with the virgin bushland. Sisia Quarters at the foot of Station Hill must have been one of those virgin bushland areas which were invaded by the human population. However, not all the animal wildlife of Sisia was forced to leave when the human beings came along — any more than did some wild plants, despite the preponderance of human habitations and agriculture (Fig. 1).

Above the new residential area is a cave that is occupied by thousands of bats. This cave is beside a waterfall (Fig. 2) and is not only home to these bats but a wonderful natural sight as well. Most of the original vegetation around the entrance to the cave has been cut down to provide land for farming, and people have farmed right up to the very entrance to this cave. Most people in the vicinity do not understand why anyone would want to protect bats, or even know that they are quite beneficial, eating up mosquitoes and other harmful insects. In Cameroon, where the natural vegetation is being degraded at an alarming rate, these bats could help in the regeneration of some natural forests, as they live mainly on fruits such as figs, the seeds of which they help very much to propagate. Bats also help to pollinate many plants, including Bananas (*Musa sapientum*) and some cacti. For these reasons it is very important that those bats should be protected.

The Amateur Horticulturists Association (AHA) of Cameroon, which is based in Bamenda, is a non-profit



FIG. 2. Entrance to Sisia Cave seen over poor cultivated Maize and Plantain, etc., to left of waterfall in Bamenda, Cameroon. Photo: J.Y. Musa, July 1994.

NGO that promotes organic horticulture and addresses various environmental issues, including celebration of Biosphere Day and dissemination of its spirit. They are hoping soon to purchase the entrance into this Cave and to make this roosting area inaccessible to the public — particularly to poachers. Their modest budget does not permit them to make this purchase just at present, however, particularly following the current economic condition of Cameroon and the recent devaluation of the CFA Franc. Any assistance towards the realization of this project would be greatly appreciated and put to the best use. For further information contact the undersigned.

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FIG. 1. Mainly cultivated area on hill in foreground with growing town on plain below. Plantain (*Musa paradisiaca*) on left with Eucalyptus trees behind and, on right, poor Maize (*Zea mays*) cultivation. Photo: J.Y. Musa, July 1994.

The Foundation for Environmental Conservation: President's Report for the Year 1993 [updated]

(Projects etc. generally in order of latest Annual Report, and updated to early Autumn 1994)

1. **Environmental Conservation:** — Quite gratuitously we continue to be sent submissions, especially of lon-

ger papers, from practically all over the world, leading to an embarrassing backlog especially of 'full' papers