

Community perspectives on the prospect of lion (*Panthera leo*) reintroduction to Comoé National Park, Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract

The civil war in Côte d'Ivoire between 2002 and 2010 led to a hike in human disturbances and the disappearance of African lions (*Panthera leo*) from the Comoé National Park (CNP). After the crisis, many efforts to conserve and restore this ecosystem and its biodiversity have been made and the management authority is considering the reintroduction of lions. We assessed the acceptance of the reintroduction of the lions by the local populations; through a sociological survey, we administered questionnaires to 307 people in 23 villages bordering CNP. A large majority (71%, n=218) were in favor of the return of the lions, with significant variation among ethnic groups. A general linear model analysis (GLM) revealed that apart from ethnic group, profession and origin (village) are significantly determinant for the acceptance of lion reintroduction to CNP. Most respondents had knowledge of the species (96%, n=296). The majority of respondents (81%, n=250) acknowledged having coexisted with lions, with previous conflicts with lions reported by 16% (n = 49) of respondents and a willingness to coexist with future lions reported by 81% (n = 248) of respondents. More than 84% (n=260) of respondents believed that there would be benefits associated with lion return to CNP and 52% (n=161) and 14% (n=44) of respondents believed that the potential benefits would be greater and less than the possible risks associated with lion return. Just under half of respondents (42%; n=129) confirmed the current participatory management of CNP while the majority (91%; n=280) confirmed the possibility of taking own precautions to prevent attacks from future lion. We recommend the improvement of the involvement of indigenous communities in any reintroduction and the implementation of environmental education projects as a condition for the potential reintroduction of lions.

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