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GUEST EDITORIAL

Achieving Sustainable and Equitable Consumption of Wild Meat

Ensuring sustainability and equity within the global wild meat sector is key to achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets

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Abstract

1. Governments around the world have committed to ensuring that biodiversity is sustainably used and managed as part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) adopted to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2050. However, achieving sustainable wildlife management in circumstances when wild animals are consumed as food is an intractable challenge that straddles conservation, health, livelihoods, culture, governance and equity.
2. This special feature brings together studies from across the world that aim to progress our understanding of the contemporary prevalence and drivers of the use of wild animal meat, and potential pathways to sustainability. This editorial synthesises the insights from these studies as to how the KM-GBF targets on sustainable use of wildlife might be achieved.
3. Future research efforts must inform management practices, including the monitoring and evaluation of wildlife use and management effectiveness, advancing just interventions that improve sustainability, creating effective mechanisms to ensure equitable access and benefit sharing, and creating the enabling environment for inclusive participation in decision-making, management and governance.

KEYWORDS

bushmeat, conservation, food systems, interventions, policy, wild foods, wildlife

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The unsustainable use of wildlife is a major driver of biodiversity loss worldwide (IPBES, 2022). Recognising the need to reconcile the use of biodiversity with its long-term conservation, the 196 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), which aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and includes the sustainable use and management of biodiversity among its four long-term goals (CBD, 2022). One widespread form of wildlife use is the hunting of wild animals for food and the subsequent consumption and trade of their meat, commonly referred to as wild meat or bushmeat. Hereafter, we use the term 'wild meat' to refer to the meat and other edible body parts of wild terrestrial and aquatic animals (excluding fish) used for food (Ingram et al., 2021). The scale of this use is considerable: across the Global South, Nielsen et al. (2018) estimated that 150 million households from 24 countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa harvest wild animals for food.

Because of its importance to both people and biodiversity, wild meat use is directly relevant to several targets of the KM-GBF. Two targets are important for determining how the harvesting, consumption and trade of wild meat can be reconciled with biodiversity conservation and human needs. Target 5 addresses the sustainability, safety and legality of wildlife harvesting and trade, whereas Target 9 focuses on ensuring that the sustainable use of wild species continues to provide benefits to people, particularly those most dependent on biodiversity. Specifically, these targets state:

Target 5: Ensure that the use, harvesting and trade of wild species is sustainable, safe and legal, preventing overexploitation, minimising impacts on non-target species and ecosystems, and reducing the risk of pathogen spillover, applying the ecosystem approach, while respecting and protecting customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.

(CBD, 2022)

Target 9: Ensure that the management and use of wild species are sustainable, thereby providing social, economic and environmental benefits for people, especially those in vulnerable situations and those most dependent on biodiversity, including through sustainable biodiversity-based activities, products and services that enhance biodiversity, and protecting and encouraging customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.

(CBD, 2022)

Target 5 focuses primarily on ensuring that the harvesting, use and trade of wild species are sustainable, safe and legal, thereby preventing overexploitation of target species and reducing the broader

impacts on non-target species and ecosystems. Target 9 complements this ecological focus by emphasising the social, economic and environmental benefits humans derive from the use of wild species, with a particular focus on safeguarding use by those most dependent on biodiversity. Other targets bolster the enabling environment required for sustainable wildlife management by making governance more inclusive (Target 22), increasing the involvement of women—who are key actors in the wild meat trade—in decision-making (Target 23), ensuring that industry acknowledges its role and takes responsibility for altering wild meat system dynamics (Target 15), recognising the role of wild meat in food systems and the impact of broader societal changes on wild meat use through mainstreaming complementary and coherent wild meat policies across sectors (Target 14), and enabling wild meat consumers to make more sustainable consumption choices when consumption is more preference- than dependence-driven (Target 16).

Achieving targets 5 and 9 simultaneously for wildlife hunted for food is a complex task. There is extensive evidence that wild meat and other wild-sourced foods contribute to food and nutrition security, dietary diversity (Carignano Torres et al., 2022; Friant et al., 2020), sociocultural practices (Huber, 2019) and resilience during global crises (e.g. COVID-19; Hall, 2021). However, socio-economic change and the expansion of market-based economies have made wild-sourced foods a nationally and internationally traded commodity, leading to sustainability and health concerns (e.g. Ingram et al., 2025). Unsustainable use is not only a conservation issue but also one that affects food/nutrition security, livelihoods and public health, raising legitimate issues about rights, access and food sovereignty. Yet despite global political awareness of the growing impacts of unsustainable wildlife use, few robust assessments exist of the conditions under which use can be deemed sustainable (Ingram et al., 2021). Achieving these targets depends on strengthening capacity and technical/scientific cooperation (Target 20) and ensuring access to the best available data, information and knowledge to inform decision-making (Target 21) (CBD, 2022). Current indicators to monitor progress towards Target 5 on the sustainable use of wildlife rely on a single headline indicator on fish stocks (<https://www.gbf-indicators.org/>), with terrestrial species unrepresented in the current monitoring framework (Spinelli & El Bizri, 2024). Similarly, the Target 9 indicators on the benefits of sustainable use inadequately capture equity dimensions (CBD, 2024).

The aim of this Special Feature is to advance our understanding of the sustainability and equity of wild meat use. It also examines interventions that can improve outcomes across these dimensions and considers the indicators needed to track progress towards relevant KM-GBF targets. 'Sustainable' specifically refers to the ecological sustainability of harvest, whereby the number of animals removed does not exceed the capacity of harvested populations to replace those losses over time, allowing populations to persist at viable levels (Salo et al., 2014). 'Equitable' refers to fairness in access to wild resources, the distribution of costs and benefits, participation in decision-making and the recognition of rights (Schreckenberg et al., 2016).

The Special Feature is not intended to provide an exhaustive account of current research and thinking on wild meat. Most contributions focus on the hunting and consumption of wild terrestrial vertebrates, although some consider these alongside fish, insects and domesticated meats. The geographical context is broad, and covers Africa—Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Admettons et al., 2026; Bauld et al., 2026; Bersaglio et al., 2026; Cisse et al., 2026; Figuié et al., 2026; Ickowitz et al., 2026; Li et al., 2026; McNamara et al., 2026; Sackey et al., 2026; Simo et al., 2026), Asia—Brunei Darussalam, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR (Kader, 2026; Mannion et al., 2026; Nijhawan et al., 2026; Spencer et al., 2026), North America (Mahoney & Honor, 2026; Mason et al., 2026), South America—Brazil (Chaves et al., 2026) and the tropics in general (Willis Key et al., 2026). First authors of Special Feature articles had affiliations in 11 countries.

In this editorial, we synthesise the findings of the Special Feature and consider their implications for achieving the relevant KM-GBF targets (Figure 1), drawing on the wider recent literature to place these findings in context. We identify common challenges and opportunities for making wild meat use more sustainable and equitable, and examine the interventions that may contribute to these goals. Finally, we highlight important gaps in knowledge and implementation and consider the indicators needed to assess progress towards the relevant KM-GBF targets.

2 | IMPROVING THE SUSTAINABILITY, SAFETY AND LEGALITY OF WILD MEAT SYSTEMS (TARGET 5)

2.1 | Quantify and monitor wildlife use to inform management decisions (targets 20 and 21)

Ensuring access to the best available scientific data and local knowledge to inform sustainable use decisions is a key enabling condition for achieving Target 5, as outlined in the KM-GBF Target 21. Quantifying wildlife use is a key component of estimating its sustainability (Weinbaum et al., 2013), yet in many parts of the world, measurements of wildlife use remain rare (but see Bessone et al., 2026; Ingram et al., 2021). Several studies in this Special Feature fill gaps around the world by quantifying wild meat consumption among rural and/or urban populations (Admettons et al., 2026; Bauld et al., 2026; Chaves et al., 2026; Kader, 2026; Li et al., 2026; McNamara et al., 2026; Nijhawan et al., 2026; Sackey et al., 2026; Simo et al., 2026; Spencer et al., 2026). Furthermore, as part of the Wild Harvest Initiative® (<https://thewildharvestinitiative.com/>), Mahoney and Honor (2026) produced the first estimates of the magnitude and economic replacement value of wild meat obtained from 'recreational' big game hunting in the United States of America. National level datasets remain rare, however, especially in tropical countries, largely in the absence

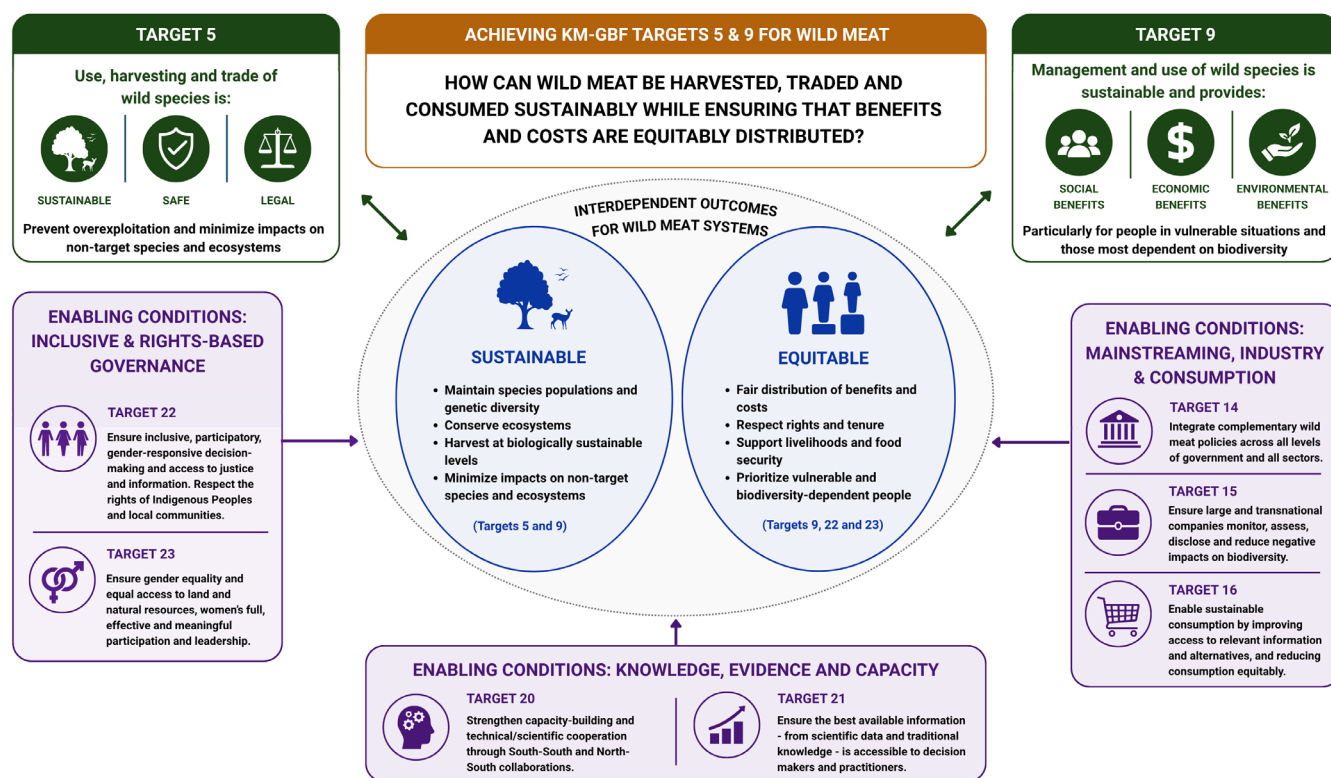


FIGURE 1 The two main KM-GBF targets (targets 5 and 9) relevant for achieving sustainable and equitable wild meat trade systems, with other enabling targets indicated (targets summarised from CBD, 2022). ChatGPT Edu was used to inform the initial style and layout of this figure, which was then extensively edited in Canva.

of clear legal frameworks around wild meat and fully established national management and governance systems. As such, most information on wild meat use in the tropics is collected by academics and NGOs as part of standalone academic or conservation projects. These often single-site studies are now being collated in the WILDMEAT Database to provide an evidence-base and research toolkit (monitoring methods and indicators) for researchers, practitioners and policymakers (Bessone et al., 2026; Ingram et al., 2025; www.wildmeat.org). While this provides a valuable resource for synthesising existing evidence, the collation of studies generated through diverse projects does not readily support the needs of adaptive management which requires monitoring in real time to inform harvesting decisions on the ground, or national-level monitoring, which require standardised approaches and a systematic sampling design. As Spencer et al. (2026; this feature) also highlight, data on levels of wild meat use alone cannot be used to infer sustainability; low levels of use may reflect a post depletion situation rather than one of sustainable levels of offtake. Data on wild meat use therefore needs to be collected and interpreted in conjunction with information on wildlife populations.

Ensuring the necessary data and information is available to wildlife governance and management structures at all levels requires (1) the strengthening of scientific capacity in-country, (2) the integration of the monitoring practices of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), (3) suitable legal frameworks, (4) inclusion of monitoring and evaluation in management and governance systems and (5) effective approaches for translating this knowledge into workable harvest regulation mechanisms. This aligns with Target 20 of the KM-GBF which emphasises the central role of capacity building, technical and scientific cooperation, and South–South/North–South collaboration. To overcome the fragmentation of existing research and conservation efforts, and to enable the sharing of expertise in-country, regionally and across continents, networks have been established to bring wild meat researchers and practitioners together, such as the Sustainable Use of Wild Species Transformative Partnership Platform (SU-TPP; <https://sutpp.cifor-icraf.org/>). Regionally, the Comunidad de Manejo de Fauna Silvestre en la Amazonía y en Latinoamérica (COMFAUNA) is active in Latin America, and the new Central Africa Bushmeat Research Into Policy (CA-BRIP) network focuses on one geographical region with hub countries in Cameroon, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Community-based monitoring that combines scientific methods with local and traditional knowledge (e.g. Froese et al., 2022) is increasingly recognised as an important approach for ensuring sustainable use, as emphasised in the recent IPBES (2022) assessment on the sustainable use of wild species. The Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) programme is designing and piloting community-led monitoring methods in several countries in Africa, Asia-Pacific and South America (<https://www.fao.org/in-action/swm-programme/en>). Other initiatives have created how-to guides on how to effectively couple scientific and traditional knowledge in practice (e.g. Brittain et al., 2024).

2.2 | Acknowledge the role of customary institutions and cultural norms in regulating offtake (Target 22)

Respecting cultural practices and recognising the role that customary institutions have in regulating resource use is central to ensuring successfully negotiated (between central authorities and customary institutions) and contextualised wildlife management processes as outlined in KM-GBF Target 22. In this Special Feature, Nijhawan et al. (2026) and Mannion et al. (2026) discuss the observance of taboos relative to wildlife use among the Indigenous Idu Mishmi People of Arunachal Pradesh, in Northeast India, and the Malay and Murut communities in Temburong District of Brunei Darussalam respectively. While taboo observance was reduced due to religious and sociocultural change in Brunei and India, taboos still contributed to maintaining the cultural representations of the distinctions between humans and animals, men and women, and living and dead among the Idu Mishmi People in India. Nijhawan et al. (2026) investigated whether cultural taboos regulate hunting in transitioning Indigenous communities and found that (with some exceptions) taboos continue to regulate wild meat consumption. These studies emphasise the importance of considering the cultural and social norms that influence hunting and consumption behaviours when discussing wildlife governance.

2.3 | Focus on reducing demand among those with a preference for rather than a dependence on wild meat (Target 16)

Urban wild meat consumers are increasingly the focus of demand reduction interventions (Willis et al., 2022) because their consumption is typically preference- rather than dependence-based and they have access to affordable alternatives (Ingram et al., 2021). Identifying the varied sociocultural drivers of wild meat consumption in urban contexts, and the role of wild meat in food security—and then crucially applying this knowledge to design interventions that support consumers to make more sustainable choices without hampering the food security of people depending on wild meat—is therefore central to KM-GBF Target 16 on achieving sustainable consumption. However, it is important to distinguish the needs of large cities from those of smaller urban settlements, as highlighted by nation-wide analyses of wild meat consumption in Gabon (Bauld et al., 2026; this feature) as well as studies in Laos (Kader, 2026; this feature), Cameroon (Simo et al., 2026; this feature) and Brazil (Chaves et al., 2026; this feature). In Gabonese settlements with >3500 inhabitants, where most wild meat is bought and alternative proteins are often more readily available, Bauld et al. suggest that market-based interventions and behavioural change campaigns may be suitable. However, smaller towns of between 900 and 3500 inhabitants—close to wild meat source areas and further away from supply chains for alternative proteins—may still have dependencies on

wild meat, and projects to increase domestic meat and other alternative supply may be more appropriate, as discussed further in relation to Target 9 below.

Several papers in this Special Feature provide key evidence of the effectiveness of behavioural change interventions to reduce wild meat demand, which can be used to inform and adapt future interventions. Cisse et al. (2026; this feature) used randomised control trials to test the effectiveness of demand- and supply-side interventions to reduce consumption of wild meat at restaurants in the megacity of Kinshasa, DRC. Showing a demand-reduction video to people that stated they eat wild meat resulted in a 31% reduced likelihood of ordering wild meat compared to a group shown a control video, while a 1% reduction in the price of Moambe chicken reduced total wild meat sales by 0.91%, which, although promising, neither were statistically significant (Cisse et al., 2026). Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic provided insights into how wild meat consumers perceive and respond to health risks, including how they interpret and respond to media messaging around these risks. Li et al. (2026; this feature) showed that consumer trust in the media was low, especially in DRC where consumers trusted the advice of friends and family above all others. While many consumers did reduce their wild meat consumption during the pandemic due to perceived health risks, Li and colleagues found that there was limited public support for wild meat bans in Central Africa, which is likely to limit their effectiveness. Simo et al. (2026; this feature) highlight how different stakeholders in Cameroon are trusted to different degrees by those that eat wild meat and discuss how working with appropriate messengers could improve the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve sustainability.

The use of social marketing approaches to reduce wild meat consumption in large urban centres across Central Africa has been advocated for in recent years by the Wildlife Conservation Society, CIFOR-ICRAF, the SWM Programme and others. Studies from this special feature have highlighted the potential for such behavioural change campaigns to deliver impact, but also the importance of being rigorously assessed for ethics and tested for effectiveness. Interventions for behavioural changes will also likely be more successful if they have trusted, honest messengers and are accompanied by structural reforms to reduce broader food poverty and improve food access.

2.4 | Understand wild meat use in the context of wider food systems (Target 14)

Wild meat use is a cross-sectoral issue, intersecting land use, economy, trade, public health, food security and rural development among others. As a result, effective governance requires coordination across multiple policy spaces. Strengthening policy coherence across these sectors will be crucial moving forward and aligns with KM-GBF Target 14 on the full integration of biodiversity policies across all levels of government and across all sectors.

Given the role of wild foods in the diets of people worldwide, food systems approaches to achieving sustainability need to be explored. Special Feature studies in Indonesian Borneo (Spencer et al., 2026), northern Ghana (Sackey et al., 2026), the Brazilian Amazon (Chaves et al., 2026), Gabon (Bauld et al., 2026; McNamara et al., 2026) and Zimbabwe (Figuié et al., 2026), all consider the role of wild meat within nutrition and food cultures; how wild meat consumption interacts with alternative meat and protein sources, and how the various functions attributed to wild meat consumption interact to influence food choice. For example, Chaves et al. (2026) discuss how urban food transitions in the Brazilian Amazon, while potentially reducing consumption of wild meat, could have negative impacts on natural habitats due to increased demand for pasture and animal feed, as well as potentially impacting the health and food security of urban households experiencing poverty.

All studies demonstrate the importance of fish in local diets. In Ghana (Sackey et al., 2026), fish was the most preferred animal protein. In Gabon, the tinned fish is likely important for food security because it is one of the only animal-sourced foods available in small portions (Bauld et al., 2026). Given the importance of fresh fish in the diets of peoples that also consume wild meat, it is important to preserve and manage fish stocks and protect their aquatic habitats from pollution (as reported for freshwater fish in Spencer et al., 2026).

As highlighted by Figuié et al. (2026; this issue), decisions around access to wild meat have implications not only for conservation, but also for food governance and food sovereignty more broadly. Wild meat use must therefore be included within and governed as part of a complex, dynamic food system, rather than as a standalone issue.

2.5 | Mitigate negative effects of transport infrastructure and extractive industries on wild meat access and demand (Target 15)

Over the last 50 years, the rapid proliferation of extractive industries—and the resulting development of transport networks—has significantly increased hunter access to previously unhunted habitats, while at the same time increasing demand for wild meat from concession workers (Laurance et al., 2009). While the need to reduce the impacts of industrial development on wildlife extraction is clear, there has been little in the way of action (Ingram et al., 2021). In the Special Feature, the role of infrastructure in modifying wild meat access was addressed by Mannion et al. (2026) in Brunei: they investigated the potential impact of a future bridge, as perceived by the local communities. These communities fear that this bridge will increase access for distant hunters to the detriment of local communities, whose knowledge could support a more sustainable use of the local wildlife. McNamara et al. (2026; this feature) discuss extractive industry impacts and the International Finance Corporation's Performance Standard 6 in relation to the impacts of oil extraction on the wild meat trade in Gabon. Encouragingly, they found that with concerted effort by the private sector in

collaboration with NGOs, the direct and indirect impacts of large-scale industrial development can be mitigated with corporate policies aimed at regulating the behaviour of employees, the monitoring of luggage transported on company infrastructure, measures to discourage permanent settlement and the sufficient supply of alternative proteins (McNamara et al., 2026). Regulatory measures such as the International Finance Corporation's Performance Standards, and the incorporation of wildlife use regulations into certification schemes such as that of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), are important for ensuring that large and transnational companies monitor and reduce their direct and indirect biodiversity impacts in line with KM-GBF Target 15.

3 | ACHIEVING TARGET 9 BY ENSURING EQUITABLE BENEFITS FROM WILD MEAT USE

Ensuring the sustainability of wild meat use is central to both targets 5 and 9, but with Target 9 the purpose of this is to ensure continued social, economic and environmental benefits for people, particularly the most vulnerable and those most dependent on wild meat. Therefore, ensuring the equitable distribution of costs and benefits is central to achieving Target 9 and the papers in this special feature explore the concept of equity through different complementary perspectives: equitable consumption of wild meat at the individual, household or social group level; equitable participation in wild meat supply chains; and equitable inclusion in decision-making processes that affect wild meat use and trade.

3.1 | Ensure food security and equitable access to adequate nutrition (Target 9)

In this Special Feature, Admettons et al. (2026) and Ickowitz et al. (2026) highlight the contribution of wild meat to the nutritional quality of the diets of people living in a state of food precarity in rural villages in DRC and Cameroon. In the periphery of Salonga National Park, DRC, Admettons et al. (2026) found that wild meat consumption accounted for up to 18% of protein intake and was the only readily accessible year-round source of protein, with seasonal consumption of fish and insects. Consumption of domestic meat was negligible and exceeded the price of wild meat by >75% (Admettons et al., 2026). Similarly, in both Cameroon and DRC, Ickowitz et al. (2026) determined that wild meat and fish significantly contributed to protein intake (up to 23%), micronutrients and vitamins (up to 57% of B12) for children between 1 and 5 years. In the rural villages studied, wealth was associated with greater consumption of domestic meat, whereas consumption of wild meat and fish was not associated with household wealth.

Papers in this Special Feature also reveal how wild meat served as a safety net during the COVID-19 pandemic. Li et al. (2026) found that a significant proportion of survey respondents in DRC increased

their wild meat consumption as pandemic restrictions reduced the availability and increased the price of domestic meats. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, Figuié et al. (2026) found that to mitigate disruptions to the food supply chains caused by the pandemic, isolated communities drew on knowledge of their natural environment to access edible wild resources. Together, these studies show the importance of wild foods when external food supply chains are disrupted.

Wild meat can also make an important contribution to food systems in the Global North. In the United States, Mahoney and Honor (2026; this feature) highlight the significant quantity and economic replacement value of wild meat generated through regulated recreational hunting. Mason et al. (2026; this feature) demonstrate how wild meat donation programmes (WDPs) in the United States (often supplied with meat from deer and elk culling) can redistribute this resource to reduce food and nutritional insecurity in cities through supplying food banks. Wild meat can therefore contribute to food security across very different socio-economic and geographical contexts.

Interventions to address overexploitation in ways that are both sustainable and equitable will need to consider the contribution of wild meat to local diets, the degree of dependence on wild meat, the availability and affordability of alternative foods and how these factors vary throughout the year. For example, in Laos, Kader (2026; this feature) suggests that interventions should be spatially targeted according to how wild meat is accessed, with hunter-focused interventions relatively closer to protected areas and buyer-focused demand-reduction interventions relatively farther away. For households dependent on subsistence hunting, social protection measures such as cash transfers or insurance may help reconcile conservation objectives with poverty reduction. While in Gabon, Bauld et al. (2026; this feature) suggest that dependence on wild meat could be reduced in villages with greater market access by offering domestic meat in smaller, cheaper and therefore more accessible and affordable units.

3.2 | Acknowledge the distribution of benefits and risks across wild meat supply chains (including the particular challenges for women—Target 23)

Wild meat provides a source of income for various actors along supply chains linking rural with urban areas and other demand centres, such as industrial worker settlements. However, the risks and rewards along these supply chains are often highly uneven. In this Special Feature, Willis Key et al. (2026) specifically looked at the role of women within wild meat systems and identified 34 different roles that they occupy along supply chains in 50 different countries. Women were found to be involved in hunting, processing, trading and consuming wild meat to varying degrees, with over 80% of traders in Central, East and West Africa being women. However, given that trading in wild meat is illegal in many countries, this presents a risk to women who can face income loss, arrest and physical/sexual violence in some cases, with the risk

of zoonotic disease spillover when handling and preparing wild meat being another concern (Willis Key et al., 2026). Hunting by anyone is also a risky activity for various reasons. There are the obvious physical risks from hunting and the risk of arrest if detected hunting in areas where it is prohibited, yet there might also be breaches of social norms or taboos. Nijhawan et al. (2026; this feature) showed the effectiveness of taboos in regulating hunting and wild meat consumption among the Indigenous Idu Mishmi People in northeast India. However, they also showed that this effect is limited because the wealthier Idus bought meat from the less wealthy, thereby using their social power and wealth to transfer the burden of taboo observance to poorer members of the community.

One approach that could lessen the burden of risk on those most vulnerable and dependent on wild meat for their livelihood would be to legalise aspects of the wild meat supply chain where it is deemed sustainable. Bersaglio et al. (2026; this feature) explored the impacts of legalising wild meat supply chains in Zambia. They found that access to legal supply chains remained uneven, with existing game ranches benefitting most. The greatest barriers to access were faced by those who would most benefit from the meat for food security, nutrition and other purposes. The political ecology approach adopted by Bersaglio et al. (2026) to study the wild meat supply chain in Zambia shows that the ability to access and benefit from wild meat is intrinsically linked to the power relationships framing access to land, natural resources, and the institutions that govern this access. This highlights that formalising wild meat supply chains does not in itself ensure equitable outcomes.

3.3 | Ensure inclusive participation in decision making and governance (Target 22)

Understanding how wild meat use and its management differentially affect groups and individuals is crucial, but not sufficient for effective and equitable management. Those affected by wild meat management must also participate meaningfully in decision-making and governance. As Nijhawan et al. (2026; this feature) highlight, many rural communities have their own governance and management systems for regulating wild meat use. In the case of the Idu Mishmi, this includes taboos around wild meat consumption, which also have important functions in establishing and maintaining social roles. The wider social and cultural functions of wild meat and hunting are also highlighted by Figuié et al. (2026) and Mannion et al. (2026). Nijhawan and colleagues call for the strengthening of IPLC land rights and local and customary institutions, while also warning against freezing local governance and management practices in time, and cautioning conservation organisations against 'cherry picking' elements of traditional governance that align with their goals.

While the recognition of existing customary governance and management structures is key for effective and equitable management, certain groups can remain poorly represented. Willis

Key et al. (2026) show that while women occupy significant roles as hunters, processors, traders and consumers of wild meat, there is scant information on women's participation in the governance of wild meat systems, potentially meaning their contributions are overlooked or underrepresented. Willis Key and colleagues further highlight evidence that gendered norms can exclude women from wildlife trade and conservation policy. They argue that '*Active and empowered participation, where women influence decision-making outcomes, is required to ensure that interventions adequately address [women's] needs*' (Willis Key et al., 2026, p. 11).

Enabling active participation will require identifying and addressing barriers to participation. In Zambia, Bersaglio et al. (2026; this feature) argue that easing entry and increasing the participation of game ranches, hunters and retailers in the wild meat supply chain, alongside developing frameworks that strengthen the position of communities, communal lands and customary institutions, will be key to developing a successful and equitable wild meat sector.

4 | WAYS FORWARD: EQUITABLE INTERVENTIONS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

4.1 | Ethics and equity as core components of intervention design

Several articles in this Special Feature highlight the need for equity to be a core component of efforts designed to improve the sustainability of the wild meat sector (e.g. Willis Key et al., 2026), considering the diverse range of actors involved and their differing degrees of dependence on wild meat. Differentiating between dependence versus preference for wild meat is essential for designing targeted interventions that can be considered equitable and fair. However, doing so is not as clear cut as only distinguishing between rural versus urban consumption but instead understanding the specific context at each site in terms of the availability and accessibility of food, income and social alternatives, and differentiating between different and more vulnerable groups living within the same context. This builds upon previous literature where Ingram (2020) discusses a need to incorporate aspects of social justice when designing interventions that may have consequences for people, while van Vliet (2018) argues that approaches to manage wild meat sectors will be ineffective without considering the myriad connections that people maintain with wildlife and their value orientations.

The ethical implications of conservation messaging for behaviour change in relation to wild meat need to be considered. For example, recent studies question the evidence and narratives around health messaging to achieve conservation outcomes in the wild meat sector (Milbank & Vira, 2022; Yoh et al., 2025), including in this Special Feature (Li et al., 2026; Simo et al., 2026). One promising framework for considering the ethical implications of conservation messaging research and practice is that presented by Gregg et al. (2022), who define issues from project design to outcomes. These include being

reflexive, engaging responsibly, considering power, ensuring fairness in audience targeting, using equitable messages, using truthful messaging and authentic messengers, and considering the unintended and intended consequences (Gregg et al., 2022). For thinking about the possible unintended consequences of conservation interventions, Osman et al. (2020) present a helpful typology which could be used by conservation practitioners.

4.2 | Building an evidence base through monitoring and evaluation for intervention effectiveness

Where levels of wildlife use are deemed unsustainable and/or a threat to species, ecosystem functioning, and people, management options and interventions have been recommended to improve sustainability. These include different types of indigenous and community-based management, often highlighting the importance of stewardship and reciprocal conservation (Esbach et al., 2024; Ojeda et al., 2022). Community-based management could include area rotations and seasonal restrictions (i.e. no take; Mockrin & Redford, 2011), restrictions on extraction methods (Denny et al., 2025) and regulation through taboos (Landim et al., 2023). Other options that have been explored include changing laws and regulations (e.g. Santos-Fita, 2018), law enforcement where wildlife use is illegal (Denninger Snyder et al., 2019) and demand reduction campaigns (e.g. social marketing; Chaves et al., 2018). Local and political support for management will be key to effectiveness. All the studies in this Special Feature provide insights from across different elements of wild meat supply chains that will be helpful to management and show how important it is that context is taken into consideration.

While many different types of intervention have been suggested in the literature and in this special feature, there remains few experimental evaluations of intervention effectiveness. Interventions based on behaviour science are often suggested as one set of ways to address sustainability issues within wild meat sectors, for example, Wilkie et al. (2026). However, there is little evidence of the success of such approaches within the wild meat sector, and the few experimental evaluations which have been conducted yielded mixed results (see Cisse et al., 2026 in this special feature; Chaves et al., 2018; Veríssimo et al., 2018). It therefore remains wholly important to build an evidence base for (ethical) intervention effectiveness and ensure interventions are monitored and evaluated, and the results shared to improve learning among practitioners and policymakers.

4.3 | Improving indicators to track progress towards achieving the KM-GBF targets

Efforts are underway to monitor wildlife use in specific sites around the world, and to collate such site-specific studies into an

evidence-base for researchers, practitioners and policymakers. However, several countries do not track use of wildlife at the national level, and as such have few means to estimate indicators of wildlife use sustainability or to track changes over time in a meaningful way. Indeed, the CBD Secretariat (2026) draft global report on collective progress in the implementation of the KM-GBF states '*progress towards the sustainable use of wild species remains limited and uneven*' (p. 307). For example, Target 5 includes ensuring that the use, harvesting and trade of wild species is safe; however, none of the proposed indicators for Target 5 track information on safety, hygiene or zoonotic disease risk (as of August 2026; <https://www.gbfi-indicators.org/>). This is also mirrored in the Special Feature, whereby none of the studies focussed on the safety aspect. With the headline indicator for Target 5 currently only focused on fish, Spinelli and El Bizri (2024) proposed an additional binary indicator, following an expert workshop in Cambridge, UK, that focuses on whether countries have the legal instruments or other policy frameworks in place to prevent overexploitation, minimise impacts on non-target species, reduce the risks of pathogen spillover, and respect, protect and support customary sustainable use, with a secondary question to determine whether each country has the processes in place to monitor and assess progress along these four dimensions. Similarly, the current indicators for Target 9 focus on the proportion of the population using wild resources or engaged in traditional occupations, yet these proportions cannot ascertain equity within these systems and therefore these indicators also require further thought and disaggregation.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

Wild meat lies at the intersection of wildlife and food, of wildlife conservation and use, and of biological and social dynamics. The consumption of wild animal meat is not merely a remnant of tradition, in many parts of the world it connects people, food and animals, and its role is shaped by global changes, including urbanisation, social norms, policies and dietary shifts. Future research on wild meat could benefit from the integration of a relational perspective, considering relationships between people and nature, and how they change over time (e.g. Gould et al., 2026), to more fully understand the role wildlife plays in people's lives. By considering biodiversity conservation through a social-ecological lens, the papers in this Special Feature document the potential short-term side effects of conservation, that is, on food access, and help find more acceptable solutions. More ambitiously still, this approach indicates potential new levers for intervention by including (or at least considering) food system stakeholders in biodiversity governance. To achieve targets 5 and 9 of the KM-GBF biodiversity targets, which links with several other targets mentioned above, efforts should focus on monitoring wildlife use to inform management decisions, advancing just interventions that improve sustainability, ensuring equitable access and benefits, and creating the enabling environment for inclusive participation in decision-making and governance.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Daniel J. Ingram, Juliet H. Wright, Lauren Coad and Muriel Figuié conceived the ideas, led the writing of the manuscript and wrote the draft. All authors reviewed the draft and gave final approval for publication.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Sandra Ratiarison, Lauren Coad, Julia E. Fa, Muriel Figuié and Juliet H. Wright are part of the Sustainable Wildlife Management Programme (<https://www.fao.org/in-action/swm-programme/en/>) which is an international initiative that aims to improve the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife in forest, savanna and wetland ecosystems. Daniel J. Ingram is an Associate Editor for People and Nature, but was not involved in the peer review and decision-making process for this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

No new data were generated as part of this article.

AI DECLARATION

AI was not used in any aspect of writing the article text. AI was, however, used as a literature search tool (ChatGPT), and to help inform the initial style and layout of Figure 1 (Chat GPT Edu, University of Oxford Licence), which was then edited in Canva.

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