

What the Tropical Trappers Leave Behind

While living with trappers (snarers) of wild game in the Cameroun rainforest preserve at Lake Tissongo (south of Edea on the Sanaga River, October 1974), we had the opportunity to observe two aspects of hunting that should be of importance to archaeologists that are attempting to understand hunters' impacts on game by analysis of fossil kitchen middens. First, it was common practice to remove the heads of pigs, porcupines, duikers, sitatunga, etc. before bringing the animals back to camp. Since teeth were about the only portions of the animals in the kitchen middens that appeared likely to survive camp dogs and weathering, this act should greatly bias a picture of hunters' kills derived from kitchen middens. Second, the trappers lost many animals to carrion flies before they could be removed from the snares. For example, one line of 28 traps had caught a four-pound giant rat, a two-pound ibis, and a 100-pound sitatunga (estimated weights). All had been reduced to carrion by flies and other small decomposers before the trapper got to them. If the trappers lose 50% of their take in this manner, which seems a conservative estimate, the area required to provide adequate protein to a village would be greatly underestimated by making counts of animal remains in middens or estimating required daily protein intake needs.

D. H. Janzen and D. McKey

Department of Zoology,
University of Michigan,
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104 U.S.A.
