

FEATURES

Hunting for a wildlife solution

Part 2
By KRIS SOOKDEO

IN A previous article we spoke of the dangers of the commercialisation of wild caught meat, in that by allowing the sale we facilitate the demand that drives poaching and hunting for sale. To this end, we propose that a five-year moratorium on the sale of wild caught meat be implemented. But is there a way to commercialise our wild game resource safely?

The farming of indigenous species for meat has been happening for many years throughout the neotropics and includes species such as capybara, caiman and guinea pig. In Trinidad and Tobago we have successfully farmed more familiar species such as agouti, deer, lappe and wild hog.

Despite the practice being far from common, extensive research has been conducted into commercial farming of our game species, perhaps most notably by Prof Gary Garcia of the University of the West Indies. But, is the rearing of indigenous species a wise thing to do?

Indeed, there may be significant benefits from the point of view of sustainable wild game management.

For one, it has the potential to reduce the pressure on wild game populations by producing a supply of farm raised animals. If people can get meat in a farm, it provides an attractive alternative to hunting wild animals. This can, in turn, reduce the demand that drives commercial poaching and hunting.

Secondly, it has the added benefit of allowing farmers to rear livestock that are better suited to our climate and available food sources, rather than temperate species such as cattle and pigs. If these animals are raised on locally available food sources then this helps to reduce the cost of production for farmers while producing a product that should fetch a relatively high price (as wild meat in TT general does).

But this brings us to a significant hurdle for farmed wild meat. It stops being "wild" meat.

Animals raised in intensive systems are fed a relatively limited range of food items (as compared to what they would get in the wild). This, combined with limited exercise and shorter lifespans until they are harvested, will impact on the quality and texture of the meat.

Will wild meat consumers be willing to accept farm raised meat as a substitute?

Perhaps a rough comparison can be drawn to ducks. Wild ducks are a threatened resource in TT. It might be that the availability of farm-raised duck serves to lessen the exploitation of wild birds. For most people (other than recreational hunters), it is certainly much easier to buy a duck at the pluck shop rather than slough through a marsh to shoot one. If so, then people may be willing to accept ordinary farmed duck meat and forgo their fetish for wild duck meat. Then, once it becomes commonplace, the fetish loses its appeal.

Can we bring about a similar shift for game mammal consumption? Will people, in this increasingly urban, instant gratification-seeking society willingly accept an easy to buy, cleaned, farm-raised agouti instead of a wild one?

Cost will be a big factor. If farmers can produce a farmed animal below the cost of wild caught meat, then it may work very well. This in turn has the added benefit of driving down the

Naturalists' Club proposes 5-year moratorium on wild meat sale

profitability of wild caught meat and ultimately reduces the attractiveness of commercial poaching. The National Wildlife Policy provides for commercial farming and sees it as part of the overall plan to ensure sustainable wild game populations, noting that the Government and stakeholders "shall encourage wildlife farming, and development of a system of certification, monitoring and regulation for wildlife farms and wildlife meat shops to ensure such farming does not lead to trafficking of wild caught game including the use of genetic testing to determine identity".

Farms (it would appear) will be required to obtain two permits for operation – a Flora and Fauna Propagation Permit and a Partially Protected Fauna and Flora Permit as per the Draft Forestry, Protected Areas and Wildlife Conservation Bill 2014.

But there are potential problems which need to be addressed. Unless proper restrictions and enforcement are in place, farming game mammals can exacerbate the problem of unsustainable game management.

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Source:www.treeoflifecostarica.com

LAPPE can be farmed on a commercial scale.



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When wild meat stops being 'wild'

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If the demand for real wild caught meat continues, then unscrupulous farms can become a convenient way for poachers to move illegal wild game into the legitimate system – in much the same way that money launders introduce dirty money into the financial system, poachers can launder their illegal wild caught meat.

Law enforcement can similarly become a means to introduce smuggled wild caught meat into the country.

But perhaps a more important question is whether we want to or can afford to allow the culture of eating indigenous game species to persist and spread. Will farming game mammals only encourage a "wild meat" culture? Can we afford to be in a situation in which more and more citizens demand wild meat? Or is it that a growing wild meat culture can actually become sustainable

once farming gets underway? What happens if, one day, our border security tightens up to the point where smuggled wild meat is no longer available? Suddenly there will be an awful lot of pressure on our local populations. At that point, farming our game mammals could provide a timely solution.

So, while farming our neotropical game species can offer several benefits, there has to be effective enforcement of associated laws to prevent farming operations from being easily exploited by poachers and smugglers.

Furthermore, serious consideration may have to be given as to how we make that cultural shift from a fetish for wild caught meat to one that accepts farm-raised indigenous animals.

As part of the overall drive for proper wild game management, the T&T Field Naturalists' Club would like to propose a five-year moratorium

on the sale of wild caught meat. In our opinion, this would not only help to cripple commercial poaching in TT, but will also facilitate the development of commercial farming operations under the guidance and restrictions laid out by the state authority.

The development of commercial farms could, if properly controlled, become one more important tool in our quest for sustainable wildlife management.

For more information on our natural environment contact the T&T Field Naturalists' Club at admin@ttfnc.org, our website at www.ttfnc.org, Facebook and YouTube pages. The club's next monthly meeting and lecture is on May 14 at St Mary's College, Port-of-Spain and the lecture topic is "Guppy mate-choice behaviour" by Heather Auld, Carleton University, Canada.



PHYTONCIDES, substances released by trees, can help boost your immune system.

Forest trips reduce anger

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"Phytoncides significantly enhance human NK activity... All of these findings suggest that forest environments (forest bathing trip) have beneficial effects on human immune function," stated Qing Li (Environmental Health & Preventive Medicine 15, p.10, 2010).

To sum it up, the scientific work of Qing Li and his team has shown that spending time in forests is good for your health and may play a role in preventing cancer from generating or progressing. His research has been

published in many places including the *New York Times*, *The Japan Times*, Bloomberg TV and even *Oprah* magazine. Many agencies and organisations in Japan, the US and other countries are incorporating forest-bathing trips as part of a healthy lifestyle.

So, to all who thought that previous articles regaling the joys of nature activities such as hiking were just the romanticised ramblings of a outdoor hippee, there is solid scientific evidence to support such ramblings.



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