

**PREFERENCE OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND WILDLIFE SPECIES BY TOURISTS IN  
YANKARI GAME RESERVE, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The study surveyed socio-economic characteristics of visitors in Yankari Wildlife Park, identified preferred recreational activities and wildlife species among tourists, and assessed repetition of visits in the destination. Data used for the study were obtained through structured questionnaire, indepth interview of selected knowledgeable staff and tourists, and observation. A set of structured questionnaire was administered to 515 randomly selected tourists, however, 450 were retrieved. Data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics in form of frequency counts and percentages. Some information were presented in the form of pie chart while Chi-square was used to test for associations. The results of study revealed that most respondents were 35-54 years (52.2%) had tertiary education (77.1%) and were employees of private companies (58.9%). Most tourists visit the reserve for the purpose of game viewing (36.0%) and swimming (34.0%). Lion (47.1%) and elephant (31%) were the wildlife species preferred by most tourists. Buffalo, Hippopotamus and Roan Antelope were preferred by only 8.0%, 5.1%, 4.7% and 2.9% of the respondents respectively. Majority of the respondents (71.8%) have visited the park more than once. On-site expenses were found to have significant relationship with preferred wildlife species ( $p < 0.01$ ;  $\chi^2 = 395.27$ ). Chi square test of association showed that preferred recreational activity significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ;  $\chi^2 = 250.67$ ) affected repetition of visits by respondents. The management of the reserve needs to improve on the current wildlife and habitat conservation efforts. There is also need to improve on the game viewing tracks in order to make game viewing more interesting and memorable to tourist.

**Keywords:** Preferred wildlife species, Yankari Game Reserve, game viewing, tourists, conservation

**Introduction**

Millions of people visit protected areas among other reasons to interact with natural environment including the wildlife species therein. These interactions could be in the form of trekking, swimming, enjoyment of cool breeze from a water body or riparian environment, game viewing, sport fishing, boat cruising especially during a hot weather condition, walking along nature trails to appreciate different micro habitats, observing and comparing the vegetation and landscape of different

parts of park destination, observing and attempting to understand the lifestyle or culture of the indigenous people in park host communities, and sometimes assessing the level of development in rural and natural environment where animals have right of ways by law. In fact these interactions always raise many questions in the mind of tourists about survival of indigenous communities and sustainability of biodiversity conservation in the park. The diversity of attractions and aesthetic value of resources in national parks and game reserves contributes greatly in increasing popularity of protected areas among many nature - loving tourists. Protected areas such as game reserves, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and strict nature reserves present great opportunities to utilize wildlife species for tourism and recreational purposes (Gandiwa, 2011). This has popularized wildlife - based tourism as many tourists crave to interact with nature. Ecotourism, an aspect of environmental tourism is currently one of the fastest growing sectors of global tourism industry and has become a major foreign exchange earner particularly in countries rich in diverse wildlife species, unique landscapes, wilderness area, waterfalls, lakes and primary forests. The search for vivid experience by many tourists has increased the demand for destinations that are protectively untouched, thus the number of tourists yearning for interactions with wildlife resources in their natural setting is progressively increasing on annual basis, worldwide. This increase creates an avenue for ecodestination host countries to generate a lot of revenue and empower local communities when tourism development is properly planned.

Thus, the number of world's national parks, game reserves and other land – based protected areas has increased from just over 1,000 in 1962 to over 200,000 sites representing about 12% of the total land surface of the earth while over 2,000 marine parks covering about 4% of global marine ecosystem (IUCN/UNEP-WCMC, 2012) has been established. The marine national parks are established for the purpose of protecting the aquatic wildlife species and their environment which also offers recreational opportunities for tourists. Many African countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa have benefitted immensely from protected areas through tourism (Williams *et al.*, 2000; Kruger, 2005).

Visitors could be attracted to a protected area to view many scenic sites and wildlife species,

however the order of preference to recreational activity, animals and scenic sites in a destination differs. The preference of a tourist could depend on culture, background, experience and perception. Knowledge of tourists' socio economic characteristics and preference in terms of desired recreational activities is very vital in tourism management and marketing, as sustainable tourist satisfaction –the easiest strategy to dominate tourism market, can hardly be achieved without availability of these information. Yankari game reserve is one of the most popular wildlife parks in Nigeria (Ijeomah and Odunlami, 2013) but there is dearth of information on visitors' preference in terms of recreational activities and wildlife species, number of nights spent by visitors and the percentage of new visitors that patronize the destination. This study therefore evaluates the socio economic characteristics of visitors to the park, assesses tourists' preference to recreational activities and wildlife species in the park, investigates the number of nights spent by tourists and percentage of visitors who repeats visits in the park.

## Methodology

### The study area

The Yankari Game Reserve (YGR) is located in the Dagudi, Gwana and Pali Districts of the Alkaleri Local Government Area of Bauchi State and occupies an area of about 2,244.10km<sup>2</sup>. It lies on longitudes 9<sup>0</sup>30<sup>1</sup> N and 11<sup>0</sup> 00<sup>1</sup>E (Ubaru,2000). The tourist camp at Wikki is 43km from the main entrance at Mainanmaji, 110km from Bauchi, 200km from Gombe, 240km from Jos, 411km from Kano and 579km from Maiduguri (Odunlami, 2005)

### Data collection

Data used for this study were collected through personal and group observations, two sets of questionnaire, and In-depth interview with selected tourists and officials of Yankari game reserve (including administrative and operative staff). A set of structured questionnaire was administered

randomly to 515 tourists. The questionnaire was used to elicit information on socio-economic characteristics of tourists, and visitors' preference to wildlife species. Another set of structured questionnaire was administered to 35 officials of the ecodestination. In all, 450 questionnaire forms from tourist respondents were retrieved and eventually used for analysis.

### Data Analysis

Data for the study were analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency of counts and percentages while Chi square was used to test for associations.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows that majority (64.9%) of tourist respondents were males while few (35.1%) were females. More than thirty percent (32.2%) of the tourist respondents were between 45 and 55years. Those between 35 and 44 years were 30.0% while above 55 years accounted for 26.8% of the tourists sampled for the study. Respondents of age between less than 25 and 34 years were least in number (Table 1). Table 1 also revealed that majority of tourist respondents were educated up to tertiary level (77.1%), those that had secondary and elementary education formed only 20.2% and 2.7% respectively. According to Table 1 greater percentage of the respondents (58.9%) were employees of private and multinational companies while civil servants were 21.6%. Respondents who were self-employed and students formed only 14.0% and 5.6% respectively. Table 1 also shows that many (38.0%) of the tourist respondents visited from a distance less than 500 km<sup>2</sup> from the reserve. The Table further shows that the number of tourists decreases with increase in distance to the destination. Respondents from distances of between 500 and 800km<sup>2</sup> were 29.6% while those who travelled more than 1100km<sup>2</sup> to visit the reserve accounted for only 14.4% of the respondents.

**Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of tourist respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	292	64.9
Female	158	35.1
Total	450	100.0
<b>Age stratification</b>		
<25	15	3.3
25-34	35	7.7
35-44	135	30.0
45-54	145	32.2
55 and above	120	26.8
Total	450	100.0
<b>Level of education</b>		
Elementary	12	2.7
Secondary	91	20.2
Tertiary	347	77.1

Total	450	100.0
<b>Employment status</b>		
Self employed	63	14.0
Employee	265	58.9
Civil servant	97	21.6
Student	25	5.6
<b>Average distance travelled (Km<sup>2</sup>)</b>		
<500	171	38.0
500-800	133	29.6
801-1100	81	18.0
>1100	65	14.4
Total	450	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2014

**Preference to Recreational Activities and Wildlife Species**

Results on tourist preference to recreational activities and wildlife species are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 shows that game viewing is the preferred recreational activity by most tourists (36.9%) to the reserve. Those who indicated swimming in the Wikki warm spring as their

preferred recreational activity were 34.0%. Similarly, about 25% of the tourists sampled claimed that they visited the reserve for the purposes of outdoor sport and party/Bonfire. Those who preferred wilderness experience were only 4.0% of total tourist sampled. It was observed that there were overlaps in the recreational activities of tourists.

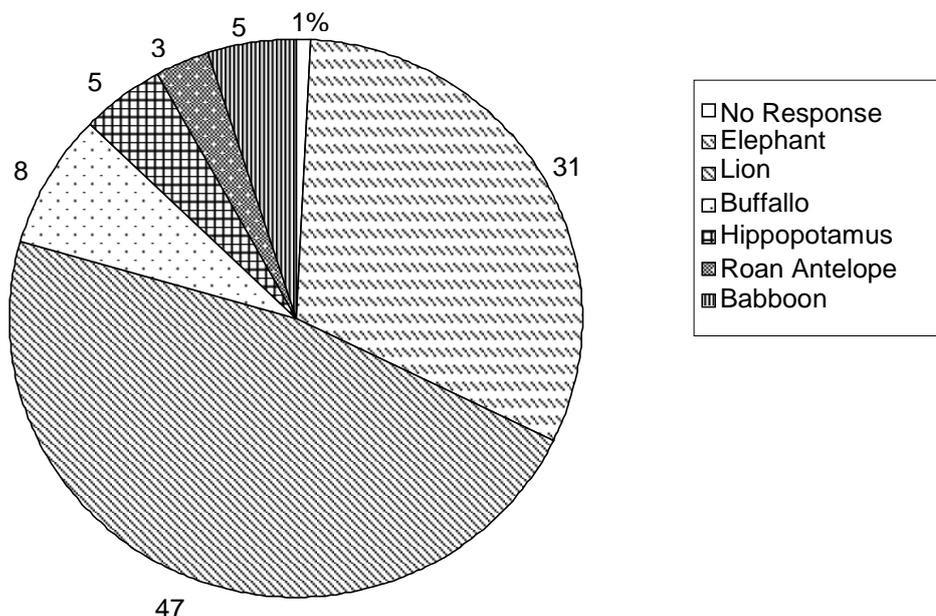
**Table 2: Distribution of tourist respondents based on preference to recreational activities**

Preferred recreational activity	Frequency	Percentage
Game viewing	166	36.9
Swimming	153	34.0
Party/bonfire	36	17.1
Outdoor sport	36	8.0
Wilderness experience	18	4.0
Total	450	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Results on Figure 1 show that most visitors to YGR (47.0 %) preferred Lion (*Panthera leo*) to other wildlife species while Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) was preferred by 31.0% of respondents.

Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) and Baboon (*Papio anubis*) were preferred by only 8.0% and 5.0% of the tourists respectively.



**Figure 1:** Distribution of respondents based on Preferred Wildlife Species in Yankari Game Reserve

A Chi square test of association between respondents' sighting of preferred wildlife species and tourists level of expenditure on the site showed significant relationship ( $p < 0.01$ ;  $\chi^2 = 3395.226$ ).

#### Duration of Stay in the Park by Tourists:

Table 3 shows that most tourists stayed for at least 2 nights (32.4%). Respondents who stayed for 3 nights were about 20.4% while those who stayed for 5 and 4 nights accounted for 12.9% and 12.7% respectively.

**Table 3: Distribution of tourist respondents based on number of nights spent in YGR**

Number of nights spent	Frequency	Percentage
1	56	12.4
2	146	32.4
3	92	20.4
4	57	12.7
5	58	12.9
>5	41	9.1
Total	450	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2014

#### Repetition of Visits by Tourists

Table 4 reveals that tourists who have visited YGR before this study accounted for 71.8% of the

respondents while 28.2% have not visited the reserve before the commencement of this study.

**Table 4: Distribution of tourist respondents based on frequency of visits**

If respondents had previously Visited YGR?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	323	71.8
No	127	28.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Table 5 shows that 40.0% of the respondents had made between 1 and 5 previous visits to the park while 10.2% made between 6 and 9 visits to the reserve in the past. Similarly 9.6% have previously

visited the park between 10 and 14 times. Between 15 and 19 previous visits were made by 8.0% respondents while only 1.6% have visited the park more than 25 times before.

**Table 5: Distribution of tourist respondents based on their number of previous visits**

No. of previous visits	Frequency	Percentage
None	127	28.2
≤5	180	40.0
5-9	46	10.2
10-14	43	9.6
15-19	36	8.0
20-24	11	2.4
25 and above	7	1.6
TOTAL	450	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Chi square test of association showed that preferred recreational activity significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ;  $\chi^2 = 250.67$ ) affected repetition of visits by respondents. The respondents who had many previous visits were tourists whose preferred recreational activities are intact in the destination.

#### Discussion

##### Socio-economic characteristics of tourist respondents

The fact that the respondents were drawn from different gender and age classes shows that the

information collected from the sources were not biased but authentic and reliable. The domination of males can be ascribed to the fact that traditionally in Africa, males enjoy more freedom of mobility than females. Males are mostly heads of households in Nigeria, have higher chances of earning income, control family resources and therefore decide projects the family money should be spent on. This agrees with Ijeomah and Alarape (2009) that even in rural agrarian communities like Pandam, Namu and Kayarda of Quaan Paan Local Government Area of Plateau state where males marry many hard working

females to be used as labourers (while they move about enjoying pleasures from one drinking parlour to another), the husbands still decide on how proceeds from farming are spent. Females are always closer home being saddled with the responsibility of raising children. Females hardly embark on tourism except when supported by household heads who are mostly males. Moreover, the domination of male tourists in Yankari Wildlife Park reflects global trend with respect to gender participation in tourism and ecotourism in particular as reported in previous studies - IUCN (2002), Drumm and More (2002) and Gusset *et al.* (2008) reported that men are generally more adventurous and interested in physical activities and therefore participate in tourism activities more than women.

The study also showed that tourist respondents between 35 and 54 years represents over 60% of the sampled tourists. At 35 years respondents are mature and financially independent. Respondents between 35 and 54 years old are young, active and can embark more on adventure tourism before being saddled with much responsibility of raising children. These age groups have more disposable income. The zeal to embark on pleasure tours decreases as respondents gets older and approaches 55 years of age due to increase in family and community responsibilities; which reduce the amount of money budgeted for travels. At 60 years of age respondents tend to desist from self-sponsored tours because of limited financial resources as retirees. This agrees with the observation of Plumtre and Roberts (2006) on tourists in Queen Elizabeth National park, Uganda.

The fact that most respondents had tertiary education (77.1%) and about 20% attended secondary school shows that the respondents can reason constructively and give valid information and judgment on the subject matter. The high educational level of most respondents shows that elites understand the social, educational and health benefits of tourism more than non formally educated persons, and therefore tend to make monetary provision for tours in personal annual budgets. Besides, more tourists presently seek life - inspiring experiences involving learning while traveling. Learning activities such as game viewing, festivals, cultural shows and nature studies have therefore become increasingly popular among many tourists in recent times. This agrees with Ijeomah *et al.* (2005) that the perceived high educational value of tourism reflects in its inclusion in the curriculum of most schools in Plateau State. It also agrees with Eagles (2000), and Kuenzi and McNeely (2008) that tourists who engaged in wildlife based tourism are usually highly educated. The study corroborates the report of Wearing and Neil (1999) that those who are most interested in park tourism and nature related tourism are not just educated ones but those with higher education. The high educational level of respondents is in line with

the observations of Wood (2001) that those with higher education appreciates nature better and are usually more adventurous and more positively disposed to learning more about nature than others with lower educational status. Simply put, participation in wildlife-based tourism is influenced by ones level of education - Most tourists to the KwaZulu-Natal National park, South Africa are highly educated (Di Minin *et al.*, 2013).

Table 1 shows that about 60% of the respondents were employees of private companies while only 21.6% were civil servants. This cannot be unconnected with the fact that employees of many private companies are better paid than civil servants. The few civil servants who embarked on tours may be among the very senior ones whose salaries are relatively high, the ones on annual leave who were paid leave allowances or workers who attended officially sponsored conferences, seminars or workshops in Bauchi, the host state of Yankari Wildlife Park. Other civil servants, students and self-employed workers can hardly embark on tours due to paucity of money.

Most of the respondents visited the park from locations that were less than 500km<sup>2</sup> (38.0%). This shows that many potential visitors to the park may have been hindered by lack of money. The study reveals that because of proximity, tourists from Bauchi, Plateau and Gombe states visit the reserve more than tourists from other states. Apparently, tourist from farther distances will incur higher traveling cost to and from YGR.

This implies that those living closer to YGR will not only visit the park more frequently, but their number will also be higher than those from far destinations due to relatively lower cost of travel and time involved in travelling to YGR. This trend is also in agreement with the findings of Wearing and Neil (1999), Wood (2001) and IUCN (2002) on global trend regarding travel to ecodestinations. In fact, it was observed that most tourists who came from a distance of about 500km<sup>2</sup> were noted to visit the reserve more frequently than other tourists outside this range of distance.

#### **Preferred recreational activity by respondents**

The fact that most tourists to YGR indicated game viewing as their most preferred recreational activity reflects a global preference of tourists visiting wildlife protected areas. This is because many tourists visiting wildlife protected areas always show keen desire to see wild animals they have been seeing in films or books. This agrees with previous studies (Eagles, 1997; Lindsey *et al.*, 2005; Gusset *et al.*, 2008) that safari/wildlife viewing is the primary motive for majority of visitors to National parks and wildlife protected areas, Africa inclusive. About 56% of tourists to the KwaZulu-Natal National park, South Africa, visited the park for game viewing (Di Minin *et al.*, 2013). Viewing of native Australian

wildlife species were the major attractions to 67.5% of international tourists who travelled to Australia (Fredline and Faulkner, 2009). Over 95% of the visitors to the Serengeti National Park of Tanzania do so primarily for game viewing (UNEP / CMS, 2006). YGR is the only protected area in Nigeria where reasonable number of charismatic animals could easily be viewed due to its high species diversity and relative population. Most tourists who are interested in seeing wild animals such as Lion and Elephant will prefer YGR. Additionally, YGR is the premier Nigeria wildlife protected area and the most popular eco-destination in Nigeria (Olokesusi, 1990).

However, it was also noted that many tourists who choose game viewing as their most preferred recreational activity also swim in the Wikki warm spring. This also corresponds with the findings of Lindsey *et al.* (2007) who noted that many tourists usually engage in more than one recreational activity. The Wikki warm spring also makes the reserve a special eco-destination because it offers a unique experience to tourists as it maintains a constant temperature throughout the year. Similarly, some of those who choose swimming in the Wikki warm spring as their primary recreational activity in the reserve were also noticed to have engaged in game viewing. Similar overlapping of activities were also noticed among many visitors who chose various recreational activities as their most preferred recreational activity. A very important observation made concerning those who choose partying/Bonfire as their most preferred recreational activities is that they are almost entirely from Jos - Bauchi- Gombe axis. It is also important to state that there is a relationship between the number of previous visit and most preferred recreational activity as shown in Table 8. This underscores the fact that the more visitors visit YGR the more they demonstrate preference for their most preferred recreational activity.

#### **Preferred wildlife species by tourist respondents**

Lion and elephant are the most preferred species by tourists. Both are species that have featured several times in many stories about African culture. This observation also agrees with the submission of Olokesusi (1990) who noted that Lion (*Panthera leo*) is the most popular wildlife species many visitors to most Zoos and protected areas in Nigeria delight to view. This is also in line with the report of Eagles (1999) that most tourists to protected areas in Africa usually prefer to view the big cat in its natural environment. Elephant is also preferred because many respondents desire to watch it as the biggest terrestrial wildlife species. Many domestic and international tourists usually visit the reserve because of the relative ease with which to sight lion and elephant due to their relatively large populations in the park. This agrees with the study of Eagles (1999) that African and Asian protected areas are

mostly popular in the western part of the world due to their larger concentration of Lion and Elephant. Many other wildlife species in the park would have been very attractive to tourists but the fact that they could hardly be sited due to their relative small size or nocturnal behaviour.

#### **Average Length of Stay by Tourists**

Majority of tourists to the reserve are short-stay visitors. It was observed that most tourists, who reportedly stayed between 2 and 3 nights were from Jos-Bauchi-Gombe axis. They formed the bulk of weekend visitors to the reserve and visit the reserve more frequently. This agrees with the findings of Plumper and Roberts (2006) on tourists to Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda; and with the findings of Di Minin *et al.* (2013) concerning visitation of tourists to Serengeti National Park, Tanzania.

Visitors who stayed for more than 5 nights per visit were usually from farther distances and were hardly as frequent in the reserve as others from closer distances. These are usually visitors who spent part of their annual leave in YGR unlike those from Bauchi-Gombe axis who are mostly weekenders. Several other tourists to the park were one-day visitors/excursionists; who visit and leave the reserve same day. They usually visit in package tours with YGR as only part of their itinerary and not the final destination. The bulk of these visitors are foreign visitors who visit for conferences in Abuja or Jos and return to Abuja or Jos same day.

The fact that most tourists stay for shorter nights can be attributed to financial and time constraints because the longer a visitor stays at a tourist destination, the higher the cost, and the more benefit the management derives from the visitor. This is similar to the report of Ijeomah and Aiyelaja (2007) concerning an Australian couple who made three years life savings to visit Wase Wildlife Park in Nigeria but spent not more than thirty minutes in the destination because of economic reasons, yet fulfilled. Since most of the tourists who stayed for 3 or lesser nights are from closer distances, it appears they can only afford to stay for shorter nights even though their accumulated number of nights is higher in cost than those from far distances. Table 5 reveals that those who repeated visits accounted for 71.8% of the tourists while 28.2% have not visited the reserve before. Those who have visited between 1 and 5 times are visitors from far distances while those who have made between 10 and more previous visits are mostly from closer distances such as tourists from Bauchi, Plateau, and Gombe states as well as Abuja. This is due largely to time and cost constraints. The number of previous visits to YGR was also found to be significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) associated with availability of priority recreational activities of tourists.

### Conclusion

The study showed that game viewing is the choicest recreational activity among respondents. Lion (*Panthera leo*) and elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) are the most preferred wildlife species among tourists to YGR. It therefore becomes imperative that management should endeavour to maintain a healthy population of these wild games and other popular species in order to encourage repeat visits by previous visitors while endeavouring to attract more tourists to the park. The tracks should be improved on for enhancement of game viewing by visitors. Since an appreciable level of wildlife abundance is necessary to make game viewing satisfying and interesting to tourists, there is the need for the management of the reserve to maintain a reasonable and healthy wildlife population. The protection unit of the reserve should be strengthened by employment of more persons as the present number cannot offer effective protection to the park. Also, the buffer zone regulations should be strictly adhered to by the management of the reserve so that problems caused by encroachment and trespassing would be avoided. Measures such as regular day and night patrol should be more intense by the staff in the protection units. Farming activities close to the buffer zone should also be discouraged as this has led to increase in human/wildlife conflicts resulting in the loss of wildlife species. More activities should be created in the park. The prominent and most popular wild games should be used to promote and market the reserve. There should be increase in environmental awareness.

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