

RESEARCH CONCERNING RAPTOR POPULATIONS, ref. 400269

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For my master thesis for the master Sustainable Development, I've performed a study in the agricultural region in northern Cameroon for investigating the impact of land cover characteristics on biodiversity. Raptor populations have proved to be a good indicator species in savannah landscapes, since they are vulnerable to different types of disturbance, on the top of the food chain and cover a wide range of ecosystems. Thus, for analyzing impacts of land use change on total biodiversity, raptors can be investigated since they give a good indication of the response of the rest of the ecosystem.

For analyzing the effects of land cover characteristics on raptor densities, road surveys have been performed where for every raptor spotted the type and activity of the raptor has been written down, together with the land cover characteristics below the raptor. These land cover characteristics were also analyzed for each kilometer, to have an overview of how the habitat looks like and make comparison of raptor habitat with overall habitat possible. Moreover, counts of locust, birds and lizards were performed within sorghum and cotton plantations, villages and natural woodland areas, for investigating response of prey species to land cover characteristics within these different areas. Overall, results of this study indicate that focus of conservation on a micro habitat scale should lie on maintaining/stimulating a diverse landscape with a wide range in land cover characteristics. The current increase in fragmentation, reduction and degradation by cattle grazing, fires and woodcutting could largely influence the raptor populations current present in the region. Without a policy restricting the increase of villages, agricultural areas and tree logging, many raptor species might need to migrate to other areas, since outcome of this research shows, in general, a strong preference for the more natural (woodland) areas, a broad range in preference regarding agricultural areas, a strong preference for the uninhabited areas and a wide range in preference regarding tree densities.

