

Sarah Diekroeger
October 11, 2020
Week 01, Assignment #3

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I chose the article, “Spatial analysis of aerial survey data reveals correlates of elephant carcasses within a heavily poached ecosystem.” This piece uses R, continuous autoregressive models, graphs and maps to describe and analyze elephant poaching in Southern Tanzania’s Ruaha-Rungwa ecosystem. Aerial survey data identified living elephant populations as well as carcasses. The data was used to find correlates of elephant carcasses in order to gain important information on poaching in the area. Covariates that were considered include proximity to water, tree canopy cover, travel costs from all villages, and distance from ranger posts. Contrary to the hypothesis, results showed that ranger posts were not a strong deterrent for poaching in this area. It was found that poachers act near water sources and during the dry season. In conclusion, the Ruaha-Rungwa area simply does not have enough resources or rangers to cover the vast area of land.

While this article doesn’t directly relate to urban planning or my research interests for this class, I was drawn to the multitude of ways that poaching can be spatially analyzed. I have an environmental studies background and hope to become an environmental planner. The piece does a good job of quantitatively assessing the poaching situation in Ruaha-Rungwa. The maps of live and dead elephants are helpful to visualize where they thought the elephants and carcasses would be and where they actually were found. I would have liked to have heard more about why they believe the ranger posts to be ineffective. If ineffective, why are they suggesting more

ranger posts? Personally, I have spent some time in Zambia working and volunteering with an anti-poaching conservation organization. I am interested in conservation generally but more specifically human wildlife conflict. A lot of money goes into conserving animals and natural areas, but little research is done on the people surrounding the Parks. It is often the people from the surrounding villages that are doing the poaching. Elephants often raid village fields and eat the crops. If that is their only experience, there is no desire to conserve animals. The temptation of poaching for a relatively large sum of money makes sense. What this article does not do is look qualitatively at the ecosystem.