OF BUSH MEAT AND VIRUSES

Posted on February 7, 2009 by Eddie

Category: Africa

This post doesn't cover any of the usual ground from Kouya Chronicle but stick with it for a moment. Strange though it may seem, one of my interests is viral epidemiolgy (the spread of virus borne diseases - nothing to do with computers), put this down to my time as a biology post-grad. Less strange, is my interest in all things African - especially Francophone Africa. One of the talks at the recent TED conference managed to combine my two interests:

> *Wolfe studies â€œviral chatterâ€ , the spread of virii between species. Specifically, heâ€™s interested in the spread from animal species to humans via bushmeat, the spread that allowed HIV to cross from primates to humans and caused the AIDS epidemic. He knows that HIV existed in Congo-Brazzaville as early as the 1920s, but it crossed and spread decades later. If we can understand viral crossing, we may be able to anticipate what new diseases we face.*
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> *Studying viral chatter means studying the Bushmeat trade. Wolfe focuses not on bushmeat - forest animals like monkeys killed and eaten for meat - being sold in urban markets, but on bushmeat eaten for survival by extremely poor and marginal people. Itâ€™s madness to blame bushmeat on poor hunters, he argues - we need to understand the systems that make this food insecurity widespread and mean that hundreds of thousands of people are forced to hunt and eat monkeys. (read more)*

Understanding the pressures on minority peoples, those living at the margins of modern-society is increasingly important as our plant comes under more and more strain due to over-population and industrialisation. We should have an interest in the marginalised for their own sakes, but if that isn't enough motivation, self interest should push us to take an interest in them.

Thanks to White African for the link. Ethan's blog, where the story comes from is one for my RSS reader.