




# Ecotourism in Nigeria, challenges and prospects: a review

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Abstract	Article History
<p>Ecotourism is a portmanteau word made from ecology and tourism. It fully means ecological tourism commonly referred to as ecotourism, which is a field of study is considered as a sub-component of sustainable tourism. Ecotourism’s potential is an effective tool for sustainable development which is why developing and third world countries are now embracing it and making it a tool in their conservation strategies and economic development. Nigeria is blessed with a lot of wildlife which technically includes; vegetation, insects, spiders, birds, reptiles, fish, amphians and mammals. These found all over the country in national parks and game reserves, The major ones are Chad Basin, Cross River, Gashaka Gumti, Kainji, Kamuku, Okomu, Old Oyo and Yankari. Lack of will and dishonesty are among the major hindrance affecting ecotourism development in Nigeria. In addition to that, local communities also heavily deplete the flora through logging off of trees for fuel and timber which ultimately affect the ecosystem dynamism Nigeria has the potential to be a major player in ecotourism and wildlife conservation due to the abundance natural environment capable of sustaining wildlife. This can be achieved by creating proper awareness especially among the communities close to game reserves and national parks on the importance of every organism in the micro and macro ecosystems.</p>	<p>Received: 25/01/2022 Accepted: 27/03/2022 Published: 01/04/2022</p> <p><b>Keywords</b> Ecotourism; Wildlife; National parks; Reserves; Nigeria</p> <p><b>License: CC BY 4.0*</b></p>  <p><b>Open Access Article</b></p>
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## 1.0 Introduction

The world is full of natural resources that people exploit and appreciate but it is import to use these resources in a sustainable manner so that we can enjoy them and also make it possible for our future generation to enjoy it. Ecotourism as a field of study is considered as a sub-component of sustainable tourism. Ecotourism’s potential is an effective tool for sustainable development which is why developing and third world countries are now embracing it and making it a tool in their conservation strategies and economic development (Briassoulis, 2002). Sustainable tourism is a sustainable practices in the tourism industry. It looks at all the impacts of tourism, either positive or negative with the aim to maximize the positive and minimize the negative impacts. The United Nation (UN) Environment Program and UN World Tourism Organization, defined sustainable tourism as the tourism that takes full account of the current and future

social, economic, and environmental impacts while addressing the needs of the visitors, the environment, the industry and host communities. They further stated that sustainable tourism also refers to the economic, environmental and socio-cultural part of tourism development, and a suitable balance needs to be established between these three dimensions in order to guarantee its long-term sustainability (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005).

## 1.1 Concept of ecotourism

Ecotourism is a portmanteau word made from ecology and tourism. Ecology is the study of the relationship living organisms and their environment (Allaby, 2010). While tourism is the short-term movement of people that is temporary to locations outside the places where they usually work and live, including their activities during their stay at these locations which might be entertainment,

education or for medical purpose (Guerra *et al.*, 2015). With its individual meaning of the words that make up ecotourism clearly stated, it will be easier to understand the meaning of the word “Ecotourism”. Ecotourism has been defined by various authors and organisations but here are a few definitions: Ecotourism is the intentional travel to areas that are usually natural to understand the natural and cultural history of the environment; taking precautions not to change the integrity of the ecosystem; which produces economic opportunities to the local populace due to conservation of natural resources (Wood, 1999).

Fennell described it as such that: “Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally-oriented. It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas” (Fennell, 1999). Ecotourism is environmentally friendly and responsible visitation and travel to relatively undamaged or undisturbed natural areas, to appreciate and enjoy nature including any cultural features that promotes and encourages conservation, has a visitor impact that is negatively low, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of the local populations (IUCN, 1996). Ecotourism is also defined as a responsible visitation or travel to area with natural properties that conserves the natural environment, which is used in interpretation and education, and equally sustains the well-being of the local populace (TIES, 2015).

Ecotourism could have a negative and positive impact in an environment. The negative impacts to a destination includes; damage to the natural environment, economic leakage and overcrowding. While the positive impacts includes; preservation of cultural heritage, job creation, wildlife preservation, landscape restoration, and more (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005).

### 1.2 Concept of wildlife

Wildlife definition is overshadowed by the diversity of wildlife concepts adopted by various organizations and institutions worldwide. Wildlife is all non-domesticated vertebrates, especially mammals, birds and fish. It is also defined as animals that are not tamed or domesticated; may be small organisms only visible to humans if seen through a microscope, or animals as large as a dinosaur. Wildlife includes, but not limited to, vegetation, insects, spiders, birds, reptiles, fish, amphibians and mammals, if not domesticated. It is virtually anything living, both plants and animals, which is not domesticated (Harris and Brown, 2009; Zhou *et al.*, 2016).

Wildlife conservation deals with the preservation of both species and species diversity and animal welfare, which is the main aim of wildlife in captivity (Lu, 2009; Zhou *et al.*, 2016). Conservation education is one of the important components of environmental education, which is aimed at expanding the awareness of biodiversity conservation

among humans and changing environmental behaviors and attitudes in order to promote conservation through practical activities and education (Zhou *et al.*, 2016).

### 1.3 Antiquity of ecotourism

The term ecotourism emerged and started getting proper attention in the late 1980s as a result of the increase in criticism on the negative impacts of mass tourism the world over as well as the acknowledgment and reaction to sustainable global ecological practices. Due to these concerns, the natural-based element of traveling and holiday activities plus the increased awareness to mitigate the ‘antagonistic’ impacts of tourism to the environment contributed to the international demand for ecotourism holidays. This demand gained more support by concrete evidence that consumers had changed focus from mass tourism towards experiences that were identified to be more individualistic and enriching. This led to the development of the concept of “soft” tourism in Rio 1992 (Kusler, 1991; Hvenegaard, 1994; Dowling, 1996; Diamantis, 2010).

Ecotourism gained a lot of momentum in the 1990s due to environmental conservation and considering the fact that the planet’s resources are exhaustible resource. Now ecotourism continues to develop as more people travel with more environmental consciousness. The United Nations declared the year 2002 as the year of ecotourism, and in 2003 the Center for Responsible Travel was formed. Since from that time, ecotourism became a \$263 billion industry, with up to 65% growth rate between 2009 to 2013 (Diamantis, 2010).

### 2.0 Ecotourism in Africa

Africa as a continent doesn’t have a large share of tourism growth, with 2% growth based on 2014 statistics (UNWTO, 2015; Backman and Munanura, 2015). With its introduction some years back, ecotourism became central to tourism growth in Africa. Gossling (2000) suggested that ecotourism is presently the fastest growing component of the tourism industry. Ecotourism growth particularly in Africa is exceptional due to wildlife diversity and abundance of some captivating wildlife species (Lindsey *et al.*, 2007). In the last 30 years, Africa has experienced a significant success in the application of ecotourism. The success manifested through foreign investment, significant revenue generation, and some other socio-economic benefits, which led to significant appeal of ecotourism in the continent (Boyd and Butler, 1996). In fact, these economic opportunities of ecotourism also led to the generation of support for wildlife conservation from non-traditional actors in private and public sector institutions.

Ecotourism has also tremendously enhanced community wellbeing, support and development for wildlife conservation in communities living together with wildlife in Africa (Scheyvens, 1999). Ecotourism is currently an important source of revenue for many countries in Africa

such as South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Namibia, Botswana and Zambia. These countries have work with special private operators that conduct visitors throughout the national parks or game reserves and provide lodging in luxury tent camps or lodges, which are usually developed close to but outside the core areas of the parks or reserves (Backman and Munanura, 2015).

### 2.1 The big five

These are the charismatic wildlife animals that tend to attract tourist the most. They include: Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), Lion (*Panthera leo*), Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) and Leopard (*Panthera pardus pardus*). South Africa's private companies and publicly run parks guarantee a sighting of the big five, that is, the Elephants, Lions, Buffalos, Rhinoceros and Leopard as a result of the keen attention to proper management and conservation (Mnini, 2019). Due to the revenue generated from tourism the survival of endangered species is a high priority for the following countries; South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Namibia, Botswana, Congo, Madagascar, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles and Zambia. Example in Kenya, a lion is worth around \$7,000 per year in tourist income, compared to an elephant herd that is worth \$610,000 annually. Hunting of some members of the big is legal in some of the above mentioned countries when a tourist is given a permit (Christie, 2015).

The local communities are offered a participatory role in the planning processes as well as a share of the proceeds from tourism. This sort of program is adopted by some countries in managing wildlife in order to get the support of the community for conservation. Another example is that of Zimbabwe called the communal Areas Management programmed for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) which provides the farming communities in elephant hunting locations a portion of the trophy fees paid by foreign trophy hunters. In order to make it a sustainable approach to management, each location sets an annual limit on the number of certain animals that are approved to be killed legally (Mberengwa, 2000).

### 3.0 Ecotourism in Nigeria

Nigeria as a country is rich in natural landscapes and biodiversity which makes her an ideal destination for ecotourism especially in the game reserves and national parks. There is a paucity of information and data with respect to ecotourism in National Parks and game reserves in Nigeria despite several research studies have tried addressing ecotourism dynamics in national parks round the planet (Oluwakemi and Jonathan, 2017).

### 3.1 Challenges of ecotourism in Nigeria

Nigeria lost the opportunity to be more attractive to foreign tourist as a result of several factors. First it was

due to the civil war that occur between 1967- 1970 and then the favourable oil prices after 1973. The oil boom led to a change to the Nigerian economy which lead to rapid urbanization, industrialization and rural disinvestment. It also encouraged corruption on an unprecedented scale. The naira was highly valued as currency then, which did not favour tourism due to the fact that tourists had to pay more to visit Nigeria compared to other African destinations. Also the constant take-over of government by the Military discouraged tourist because of the poor image from abroad from 1970's up to the 1990's (Falade, 2000).

Due to economic standard of living and the cravings for bush meat poaching is severely affecting the biodiversity of Nigeria's National parks, game reserves and forest reserves. Local communities also heavily deplete the flora through logging off of trees for fuel and timber which ultimately affect the ecosystem dynamism (Symes *et al.*, 2018).

### 3.2 Prospects of ecotourism in Nigeria

The present and the future government needs to show more commitment to environmental conservation in general and protected area management in particular. In the 1980's the federal government formulated the National Conservation Strategy, establishing the Natural Resources Conservation Council (NARESCON) and subsequently the National Parks system. Nigeria must also show some seriousness in the pursuit of the goals of sustainable development. Since ecotourism is non-consumptive we need sustainable utilization of wildlife. Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) needs to do more (Falade, 2000). Figure 1 below shows the map of Nigeria's ecotourism centers while Table 1 indicates their locations and area covered in km<sup>2</sup>.

Chad Basin which is located in Borno and Yobe States includes the Sambisa game reserve and parts of the Hadejia and Nguru wetlands. It is a relevant sanctuary for migratory birds with a total of 377 species recorded. Cross River National Park located in Cross River State contains the largest rain forest in Nigeria and the oldest surviving one in Africa. It has the highest tropical biodiversity in Africa. Twenty percent of the world's total known species of butterflies reside in Cross River. Gashaka Gumti located in Taraba and Adamawa States is the largest national park in Nigeria that stretch to the Cameroon border. It contains grasslands as well as the country's highest peak, Chappal Waddii known as the "Mountain of Death," with an elevation of 7,936 feet. Kainji in Niger and Kwara States is the oldest national park in Nigeria.

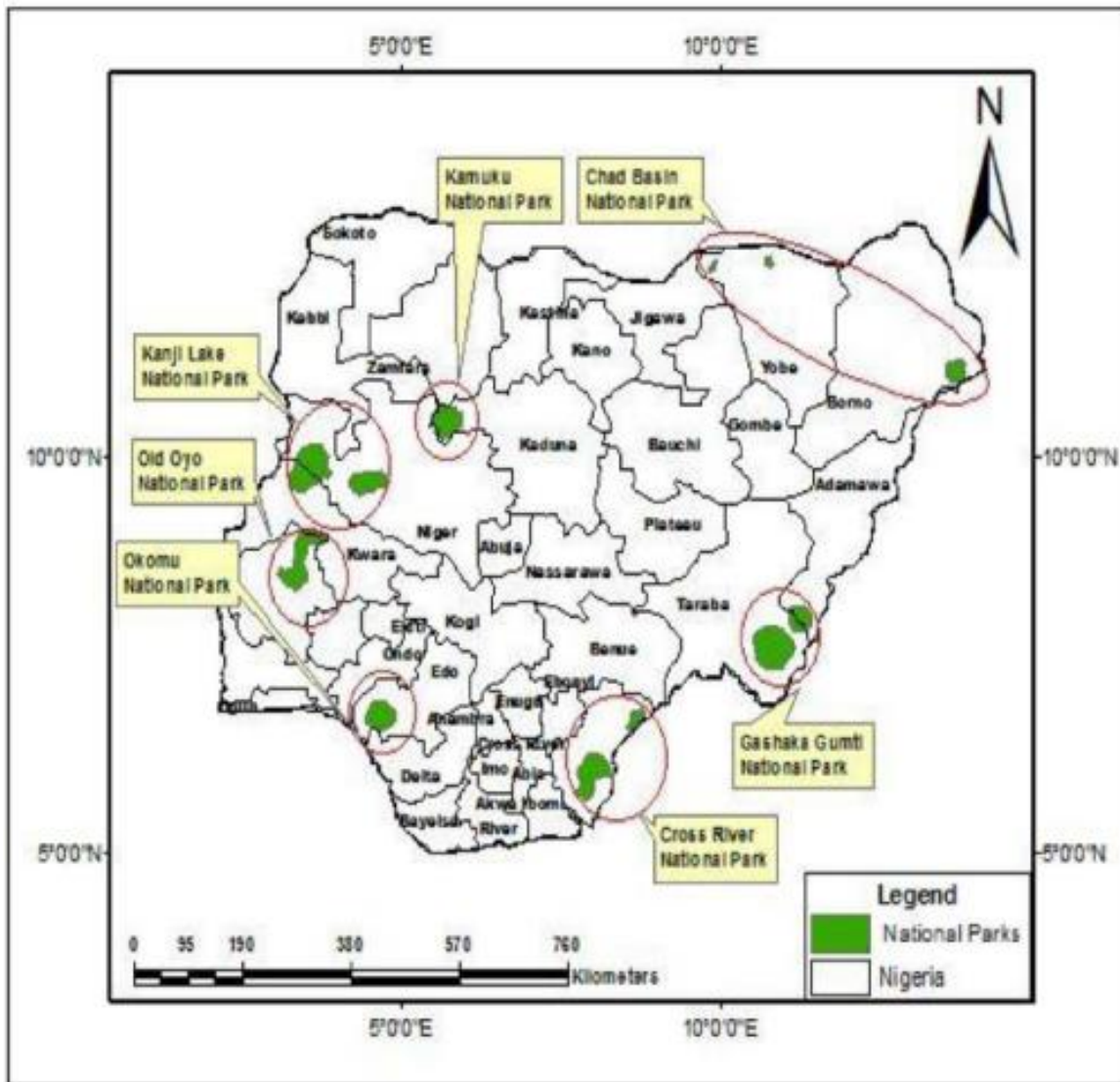


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the location of national parks  
Ogunjinmi, 2015

Table 1: National park and some game reserves in Nigeria

S/N	Parks	Date Established	State(s)	Area Km <sup>2</sup>
1	Chad Basin	1991	Borno, Yobe	2,258
2	Cross River	1991	Cross River	4,000
3	Gashaka Gumti	1991	Taraba, Adamawa	6,731
4	Kainji	1979	Niger, Kwara	5,382
5	Kamuku	1999	Kaduna	1,121
6	Okomu	1999	Edo	181
7	Old Oyo	1991	Oyo, Kwara	2,512
8	Yankari	1962	Bauchi	2,244

Ogunjinmi *et al.*, 2017

The second largest park made up of the Borgu and Zugurma sector or game reserves. Kamuku located in Kaduna State. The park is located close to the Kaduna International Airport. The vegetation is a savannah woodland populated with a large variety of birds and many mammals such as elephants, roan antelopes, mountain reedbucks, side striped hyenas and jackals. Okomu in Edo State is a small park is part of the larger Okomu forest reserve. It is the second largest rain forest in Nigeria and a great place for bird and primate watching as it is largely undisturbed. Old Oyo located in Oyo and Kwara States, has the largest collection of archaeological and cultural sites of Nigeria located in the Old Oyo including the royal cemeteries and the walls that surrounded the former ancient capital city. Yankari in Bauchi State, is the premier game reserve, which first opened to the public in 1962. It boasts the largest population of elephants in West Africa including a lot of ungulates as well as several endangered species like the leopard (Idumah *et al.*, 2009; Ogunjinmi *et al.*, 2017).

#### 4.0 Conclusion

Nigeria has the potential to be a major contributor in ecotourism and wildlife conservation due to the abundance natural environment capable of sustaining wildlife. This can be achieved by creating proper awareness especially among the communities close to game reserves and national parks on the importance of every organism in the micro and macro ecosystems.

#### Declarations

##### Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not Applicable.

##### Availability of data and material

Not Applicable.

##### Competing interests

Author declare no competing interests.

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