

Wildlife Hidden Facts: The Uses of Wildlife in Black Magic and Religions

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Citation: Bashir, M. A., and M. Babar. 2023. Wildlife Hidden Facts: The Uses of Wildlife in Black Magic and Religions. Journal of Wildlife and Ecology. 7: 217-222.

SUMMARY

Wild animals and plants have had a tremendous impact on human societies all across the world, playing a variety of roles throughout history. These resources are more than just food; they are also essential components of cultural identity, spirituality, and heritage. Traditional medicine relies on their healing abilities. They represent unity and wealth in spiritual activities. Black magic has traditionally been characterized as the employment of abilities and/or magic for evil or personal gain. In various cultures various species are used in magic i.e. tiger, golden jackal, pigeon, snow Leopard, black kite, sand boa in India; owl, Asian black bear, black cobra. Animals and plants have been used in spiritual ceremonies all over the world. Animals such as the eagle bear and wolf are considered spiritual guardians and symbols of strength, knowledge, and connection to nature in many cultures.

Keywords: Wildlife, Religions, Magic, Cultures

Received in November, 2023

Accepted in December, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Traditional medicine is defined as the total of knowledge, skills, and practices based on theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as preventing, diagnosing, enhancing, or treatment of physical and mental illness (WHO, 2013). Wild animals and plants have a tremendous impact on human societies all across the world (Chardonnet et al., 2002; Marvin and McHugh, 2014), playing a variety of roles throughout history (Madden, 2004). These resources are more than just food (Chardonnet et al., 2002); they are also essential components of cultural identity (Enticott, 2011), spirituality (Mukul et al., 2012; Ramos, 2018), and heritage (Griffiths, 2017). Traditional medicine relies on their healing abilities (Altaf et al., 2020; Altaf and Umair, 2020; Altaf and Ab, 2021; Hamid et al., 2021; Adil et al., 2022; Faiz et al., 2022; Iqbal et al., 2023). They represent unity and wealth in spiritual activities (Mukul et al., 2012; Oman, 2018). Wild animals (Alves et al., 2013) and plants (Reddy et al., 2007) are used in distinctive recipes in cooking cultures (Dénes et al., 2012). Feathers, skins of animals, and plant fibres have a significant impact on craftsmanship and art (Altaf, 2016). Parts of the wildlife species have been used to make clothes (Dmytryk, 2012), jewellery, and decorative things.

MAGICAL USE

Black magic has traditionally been used to enhance abilities and evil as well as personal gain (Melton, 2001; Chawla et al., 2020; Jugli et al., 2020). In various societies different wildlife species are used in magic i.e. Asian black bear (Altaf et al., 2017), snow Leopard (Haq et al., 2020), golden jackal (Chawla et al., 2020), tiger (Niraj et al., 2019), pigeon (Hamid et al., 2021), black kite (Hassan et al., 2022), owl (Hussain and Akhtar, 2021), sand boa (Parmar and Kaiser, 2022) in India, black cobra (Altaf et al., 2020). Traditional folk cures and ceremonial rites, for example, specifically seek slender lorises (Dittus et al., 2020; Radhakrishna and Singh, 2002; Situge, 2001). In Sri Lanka, for example, the eyes and their tears are supposed to heal eye disease, to be used as a love potion, or to see a deity, while eating their flesh is said to cure leprosy and to be used against the evil eye (Nekaris et al., 2010). Loris pieces are used to treat a variety of maladies and to produce love potions in India (Kanagavel et al., 2013). Slender lorises are used for bad omens (Kumara et al., 2006; Nekaris et al., 2010; Kanagavel et al., 2013).

RELIGIOUS USE

Animals and plants have frequently been incorporated into religious rites and rituals, functioning as symbols, offerings, or important components of spiritual ceremonies in civilizations and belief systems all over the world (Alves et al., 2012; Niroula and Singh, 2015). In Hinduism, for example, the lotus flower represents purity and enlightenment (Battaglia, 2019), while sacred creatures such as cobra (Hanchett, 2022) and elephants (Fernando, 2000) are respected and even worshipped in some areas (Oman, 2018). India is a country with high biodiversity where animals are used for cultural and religious purposes (Lee et al., 2014). Most Indian festivals follow a complex calendar based on moon, sun and star positions, while sacrifices of fauna are associated with these festivals (Fuller, 2004). Animals such as the eagle (De Meo, 1994), bear (Matheson, 1942), and wolf (Golden, 1997) are considered spiritual guardians and symbols of strength, knowledge, and connection to nature in many cultures. Various herbs, such as sage (Dafni et al., 2020), cedar (Stokes, 2001), or frankincense (Al-Harrasi et al., 2019), are also burned as incense during religious rites for purification and to create a sacred atmosphere.

Indeed, as a researcher (Rabelo, 1993; Straker, 1994) points out, the spiritual realm is just as significant in sickness diagnosis as the natural one. This is particularly relevant in nations where many people think that illnesses are caused by physical (e.g., viruses), spiritual (e.g., entities, saints, punishment), or magical (e.g., spells) agents. There is also widespread belief in the holy realm's potential to prevent and heal sickness (Alves and Rosa, 2006; Alves et al., 2010). Necklaces, amulets, cleaning baths, and incense are all part of the activities utilized in the context of Terreiro (an African diasporic religion) offerings to obtain spiritual protection and keep evil at bay. Some of them involve the use of whole animals or animal parts, which can have a variety of meanings in a ceremonial setting (Ferretti, 2001; Alves et al., 2012).

One of the most prevalent uses of animals in Candomblé and African religions is animal sacrifice (Lugira, 2009). It is a ceremonial component of African people's belief systems, and it is strongly grounded on the idea that cultural entities obtain life

as a counterpart for transmitting axes, largely by the release of their blood (Silva, 2009). The use of flesh and blood in ceremonial sacrifices provides the required linkages for the survival of African religions (Lody, 1987).

Animals and their parts are also used in ceremonies in Nigeria to pray to spirits as well as traditional gods, as shown by the utilization of the head of *Python sebae* to defend against magicians (Sodeinde and Soewu, 1999). In Brazil, similarly, the head of the *Boa constrictor* is utilized for similar purposes. The bird i.e. *Numida Meleagris*, (helmeted guinea), is also utilized in traditional ceremonies in African countries (Léo Neto et al., 2009; Leo Neto et al., 2012; Alves et al., 2012).

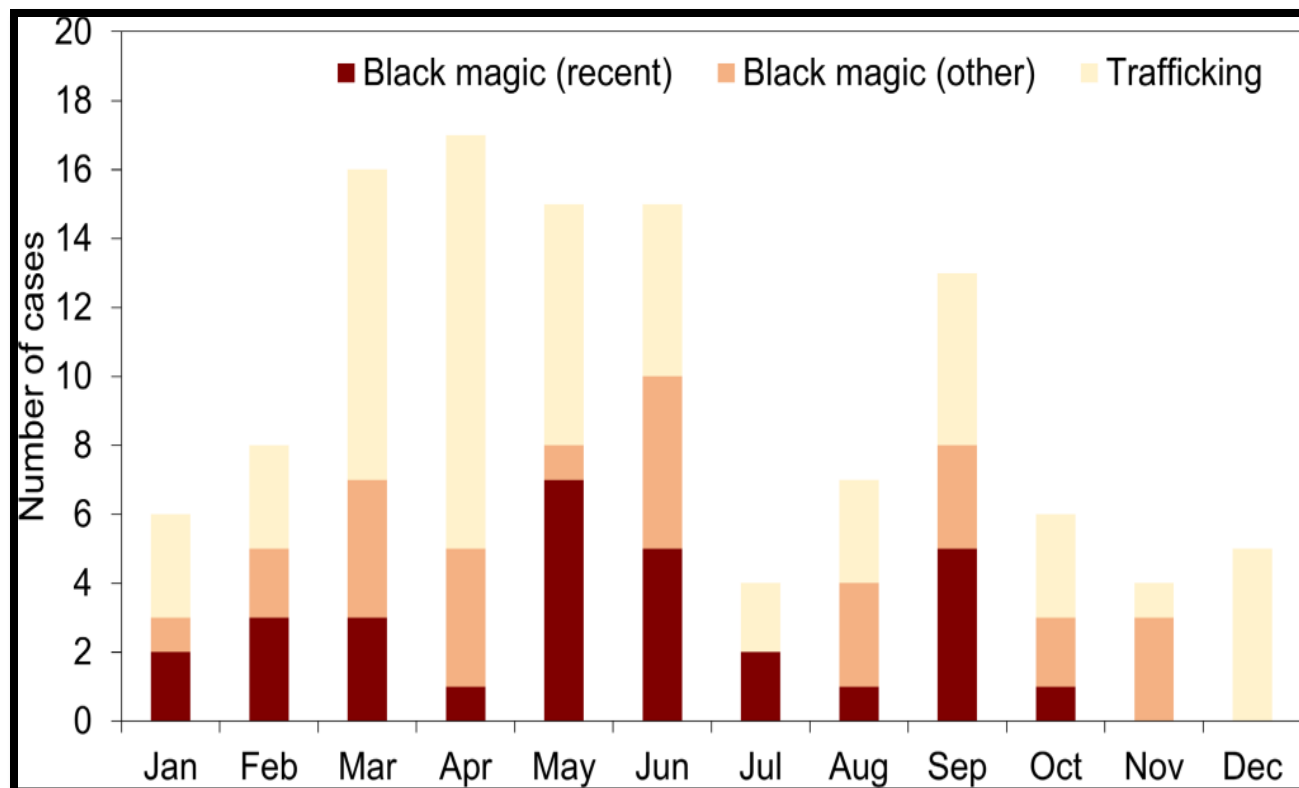


Figure 1: Frequency of usage of Slender Loris for Black Magic in South India (Smitha et. al 2021).

CONCLUSION

The relationship between animals, plants, and human societies shows a complex web of relationships with spiritual, and cultural values. These natural resources have played essential roles in the development of civilizations all across the world, including identity, heritage and spirituality. Wildlife has also played an important role in handicrafts, and arts. This link, however, has led to the misuse of wildlife, particularly in the realms of black magic and religious activity.

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Competing interests: Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Funding: Authors have no source of funding for this work.

Authors' contributions: Both authors have designed this project, collected data and written this article.

