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## Chimps on the menu in Brussels restaurants

by Annamarie Cumiskey and Richard Woods

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### © Bushmeat chops a favourite in some backstreet cafes

CHIMPANZEES and monkeys are being served up as delicacies at restaurants in the heart of Europe, an investigation has revealed.

Some of Man's closest relatives are being cooked for dining tables in Brussels even though two years ago the European Union declared that it would crack down on the illegal trade in what is known as "bushmeat".

Great apes, some of which differ from humans in only 2% of their genetic make-up, are also on the menu in Antwerp and other large cities, according to sources in the restaurant trade.

Earlier this month at the Cité Mont-Fleury restaurant, which serves Congolese cuisine in the Etainings district of Brussels, the waitress did not hesitate when an undercover reporter asked whether monkey meat was available. "Yes, we have it," she said.

Forty-five minutes later the dish arrived, an array of skinless pieces of meat in a greeny-brown ragout of African vegetables with rice. The meat smelt strongly of being smoked. A customer passing the table recognised the dish as monkey and the restaurant listed the meal as makaku - monkey - on the bill.

The stew was not eaten but sent for analysis last week at the veterinary department at Ghent University. Tests confirmed that it came from a primate and that it contained bones from the elbow and forearm. Hunters had shot the animal: four lead pellets were lodged in the muscle and bone.

The waitress later said the meat had been brought to Belgium by her cousin from the Congo and that the restaurant received supplies every few months. "Customers telephone to know when we will have it next," she said. "In Africa people eat monkeys, so why can they not eat them here?"

At another restaurant in the backstreets, a waiter showed the menu to a reporter and his companion and said: "We also have other dishes: the chimpanzee is very tasty, if you like that type of thing."

In such restaurants four or five matchbox-sized chunks of meat, served with a sauce and fofou (a floury African staple), cost anything up to £40.

Eating chimpanzee or monkey is a sign of status among the black community and reminds expatriates of home. One Nigerian man said: "Some people from eastern Africa would not live here if they could not get the meat." Favoured recipes include cooking monkey in white wine or with peanut sauce.

"It is horrific that the trade in bushmeat has turned up in Europe," said Steve Brend, the British representative of the International Primate Protection League. "It is undoubtedly

the greatest threat to the great apes."

One man who claimed to know Belgian traders importing the illegal meat said that some had been sold to other European countries including Britain.

After steep declines in their numbers, all apes are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites), and any trade in higher primates, such as chimpanzees, is banned. The chimp population in Africa has collapsed by more than 90% this century and is now estimated to be less than 130,000.

But chimpanzees are not safe from the trade in bushmeat. Last month, after a tipoff, armed police and health officials raided 12 African food shops in the Matongé area of Brussels. They were checking hygiene standards and tax evasion but found far worse: in one shop two dead chimpanzees were hanging from the ceiling in a store room. They had been skinned, gutted, dried and salted.

"It was horrible. They were immediately recognisable as chimpanzees," said Sagairadji Chevrement, an officer who took part in the operation. Other primate meat, two antelopes and tortoises, which are also regarded as choice morsels, were recovered.

The Congolese woman who ran the shop was unabashed. "We had antelopes, porcupines and snakeskins and monkey meat," she said. Two chimps were on the premises, she admitted, but were not for sale. "It is something we want to eat with our family for special occasions."

Demand by European residents and the activities of Western companies in Africa is expanding the illegal trade, according to environmental groups.

The Ape Alliance, an umbrella group of conservation organisations, says logging of Africa forests by European and Asian companies has opened up remote areas to poachers. Animals once hunted by locals for subsistence have become profitable to smugglers.

The scandal presents deadly risks to the health of humans as well as our evolutionary cousins. Two years ago the eating of chimpanzee meat in Gabon was blamed for an outbreak of ebola, the highly infectious fever. More than 20 people died. Chimpanzees may also be the source of the virus that leads to Aids.

Despite the evidence on its own doorstep of an illegal trade and possible danger to public health, the European Union appears ineffectual. Ten days ago Tony Cunningham, a British MEP who had questioned what was being done to protect great apes after the earlier European resolution, was told that the EU was aware of the grave threats to great apes and "action has been taken to remedy this". No details were given.

Ann DeGrees, director of Global Action, an animal rights group in Brussels, said: "It is completely unacceptable that this meat is on sale. The state has not done enough to stop the smuggling."

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