

ETHNOZOOLOGY OF AETAS IN PEÑABLANCA, CAGAYAN

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the local animals used by the Aetas as food, medicine, decorations, wearing apparels, and toys or amusement, body accessories, and for other purposes. It was found out that local animals used by Aetas consist of 39 for food, 10 for medicine, 5 for decoration, 6 for body accessories, 21 for toys and amusement, 8 for cultural practices, beliefs, and rituals and 19 for other purposes. The fauna based traditional knowledge of using animals is a continuous practice in the community on the animal resource use and practices of indigenous people that will provide vital information for sustainability required as the guiding principle for biological conservation,

Keywords: *Ethnzoology, Aetas, Penablanca, Cagayan*

INTRODUCTION

Animals are unique, diverse, and abundant life forms that serve as the material basis of human culture by their contributions to energy, medicine, and clothing. Ancient civilization indicated animals having part in their religion, medicine, and arts of the people. Animals have not been only considered as their staple foods. Animals have also been used for religious ceremonies, body accessories, toys, and decoration purposes and like plants, animals and their products possess medicinal properties that can be exploited for the benefit of human beings. Alves, Rosa, & Santana (2007) reported that all human civilization with a structural medicinal system will utilize animals as medicine. Indeed, animal based medicine has always played a significant role in healing practices, magic, rituals, and religions of indigenous and western societies all over the world (Jamir & Lal, 2005; Dash & Padhy, 2007). Animals are therapeutic arsenals that play significant roles in the healing practices of people (Mendoza, 2003).

Furthermore, Mahawar & Jaroli (2007) reported that the medicinal uses of animals vary greatly from place to place. Gupta, Silori, Mistry, & Dixit (2003) reported that farmers attested to the fact that when some ailment or diseases are not curable through orthodox medicine, they are usually treated locally with the use of animals.

Animals and the products derived from different organs of their bodies have constituted part of the inventory of medicinal substances used in various cultures; such uses still exist in ethnic folk medicine. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that as many as 80% of the world's population rely primarily on animal and plant based medicines. Of the 252 essential chemicals that have been selected by the WHO, 8.7% come from animals.

In the Philippines, different tribal and ethnic communities are dispersed all over the country; people of these communities are highly knowledgeable about the animals and the medicinal value, and they also provide considerable information about the use of animals and their byproducts as medicine. In most of the rural areas where hospital and other modern medicinal facilities are not available, they use their traditional knowledge for medicinal purpose and this knowledge is passed through oral communication from generation to generation.

More than anything else, the time has come to record the indigenous knowledge about ethnozoological domains of ethnic groups for biodiversity conservation because there is growing trend of depletion of biodiversity in the country. Therefore, there is an urgency to initiate organized scientific study and document such valuable and time tested ethnozoological knowledge before these culturally rich people and important faunal resources disappear.

Thus, the ethnicity of Aetas of Penablanca, Cagayan and their use of animals was deemed ideal for this qualitative research because of their closeness to nature and their remoteness from the existing healthcare delivery system. Furthermore, to investigate the local animals used by Aetas as food, decorations, wearing apparels, toys, medicines, body accessories, and for religious practices.

METHODS

This ethnozoological study made use of qualitative descriptive type of research through the use of in-depth interview and field walk conducted in the Aeta community of Barangay Agugaddan, Penablanca, Cagayan which exhibited a great ethnic, cultural, flora and fauna diversity including highly rare and endangered species. The informants were carefully selected based on their experience, recognition as expert, and knowledge concerning the uses of faunal resources. The name of animals and other information related to this study were documented. Some photographs of the Aetas at their local place and in their traditional life style in the study area were taken; discussion was also recorded with the help of voice recorder. Both vertebrate and invertebrate animals were included in this study. The identification of animals was based on fauna manuals and other zoological references. Descriptive statistics like frequency counts and ranking were used to interpret and analyze the abundance and diversity of faunal resources and its ecological distribution.

RESULTS

Local Animals Used by the Aetas

Table 1. Local Animals Used by the Aetas

VERTEBRATES			INVERTEBRATES	
Alligator	Dog	Parrot	Ants	Native Snail
Bat	Dove	Pig	Bees	Shells
Bird	Ducks	Rabbits	Beetle	Shrimps
Carabao	Egret	Rat	Butterflies	Snails
Cat	Frog	Snake	Clams	
Cat Fish	Goat	Tilapia	Cockroaches	
Chickadee	Horse	Turkey	Crabs	
Chicken	Japanese Eel	Turtle	Dragonfly	
Cow	Million Fish	Wild Pig	Earth Worm	
Civet Cat	Monkey		Leech	
Deer	Owl		Mole Cricket	

As reflected on the table, there are 47 local animals found in the Aeta community. These animals are classified as vertebrates and invertebrates. There are 31 vertebrate animals and 15 invertebrate animals.

Table 2a. Local Animals and their Uses

Vertebrates	Invertebrates	Uses	No. of Animals
Alligator, bat, bird, carabao, cat fish, chickadee, chicken, cow, deer, dog, dove, ducks, egret, frog, horse, Japanese eel, million fish, monitor, lizard, monkey, owl, pig, civet cat, goat	Ants, beetle, clams, crabs, grasshopper, mole cricket, native, snail, shells, shrimps, snail	Food	39
Bat, cat, monkey, snake, turtle, wild pig, civet cat	Clams, native snail, shells	Medicine	10
Carabao, chicken, deer, owl	Butterflies	Decoration	5
Carabao, cow, snake, wild pig, civet cat		Body accessories	6
Bat, bird, cat, chickadee, dog, dove, ducks, frog, monkey, parrot, rabbit, rat, turtle, civet cat	Beetle, butterflies, crabs, dragonfly, grasshopper, mole, cricket, native snail	Toys/amusement	21
Cat, deer, dog, monkey, snake, turtle, wild pig, civet cat		Cultural practices/beliefs/rituals	8
Bat, carabao, cat, chicken, cow, dog, ducks, frog, horse, monitor lizard, monkey, pig	Ants, bees, calms, cockroaches, earthworm	Other Uses	19

As shown in table, Aetas utilize animals found in their community primarily for food. Also, they are also using different species of animals for medicine, decoration, body accessories, toys/amusement, and as part of their cultural practices.

Table 2b. Local Animals and Parts Uses

Vertebrates	Invertebrates	Animal Part Used	No. of Animals
Bat, bird, carabao, chickadee, deer, dog, egret, horse, monitor lizard, monkey, owl, rabbit, snake, turtle, wild pig, civet cat, goat	Clams, crabs, native snail, snail	Flesh/meat	22
Alligator, bat, cat fish, chicken, cow, ducks, frog, Japanese eel, million fish, pig, tilapia	Bees, beetle, cockroaches, grasshopper, shells, shrimps	Whole body parts	18
Cat, snake, turtle, wild pig		Blood	4
Carabao, cow, deer		Horn	3
Deer, civet cat	Butterflies	Tail	3
Monkey, snake		Bone	2
Chicken, owl		Feather	2
Monkey, turtle		Head	2

Vertebrates	Invertebrates	Animal Part Used	No. of Animals
Monitor lizard, civet cat		Skin	2
		Shell	2
Bat	Clams, native snail	Feces	1
Wild pig	Ants	Egg	1
Snake		Teeth	1
		Scale	1

As reflected in table 2b, the most frequently used parts are the flesh/meat of the animal. The least frequently used parts are feces, egg, teeth, and scale of the animal.

Table 2.c. Methods of Preparation

Vertebrates	Invertebrates	Uses	Method of Preparation	No. of Animals
Alligator, bat, bird, carabao, cat, fish, chickadee, chicken, cow, deer, dog, dove, ducks, egret, frog, horse, Japanese eel, million fish, monitor lizard, monkey, owl, pig, rabbit, snake, tilapia, turkey, turtle, wild pig, civet cat, goat	Ants, beetle, clams, crabs, grasshopper, native snail, shells, shrimps, snail	Food	Cook	38
Carabao, cat, cow, monitor lizard, owl, snake, turtle, wild pig		Medicine, body accessories	Removing the body part	8
Bat, monkey, snake, turtle, civet cat	Native snail	Medicine	Cook	6
	Clams, native snail, shells	Medicine	Pulverize	3
Carabao, deer, wild pig		Decoration	Display	3
Monitor lizard, snake, civet cat			Drying	3
	Butterflies		Frame (body parts)	1

As gleaned in Table 2.c, the most common preparation done by the Aetas involve cooking the animal for food. For medicine, the animal's body parts are either cooked or pulverize, while it is framed or simply displayed for decorations. Aetas dry the body parts which are to be used as body accessories.

Perceived Individual Status of Animals

The ecological status of animals as perceived by Aetas is varied. Majority of Aetas perceived that most of the identified animals are still abundant in the locality but few Aetas perceived parrots, turkey, and goat to be abundant. Moreover, some of the Aetas also perceived that bees, clams, earth worm, million fish, and native snail are threatened. In like manner, Aetas perceived that chickadee, cockroaches, cow, dragonfly, and grasshopper are endangered due to hunting for food and for toys/amusement.

DISCUSSION

The present study indicates that there are 47 local animal species used by Aetas as food, medicine, decoration, body accessories, toys/amusement and cultural practices/beliefs/rituals. There are some animals that are identified by some Aetas that are not found in their locality which include alligator, chickadee, egret, mole cricket, parrot, turkey, and turtle.

Based on the results, there are 31 vertebrate animals that are found in the Aeta community. The vertebrates commonly used as food are birds, cat fish, chicken, deer, ducks, Japanese eel, million fish, monitor lizard, monkey, pig, tilapia, and wild pig. Most of the Aetas cooked these animals by sautéing, boiling, frying, and roasting the body part of the animal. Cat, parrot, and rat are not consumed for food because most of the Aetas prefer to use it as toys/amusement. For medicine, the broth of a boiled bone of monkey is commonly used by women who just give birth to become strong.

As for decoration, owl is commonly used. The feather of an owl is placed in a bow of arrow used for hunting animals. Chicken is the least frequently used for decoration because not all Aetas utilized the feathers of a chicken to be placed in a drupe of coconut shell. For wearing apparels, there were no identified animals being used. Civet cat is the most frequently used as body accessories. The skin of the civet cat is used as hat. The least frequently used as body accessories is the horn of a carabao used as goggles in diving in the river and also a very strong material in making handles for *bolos*. On the other hand, bird is the most common vertebrate used as toys/amusements.

As for cultural practices, beliefs/rituals, deer is commonly used. The tail of a deer is used for security to the baby during the attacks of bad spirits. The tail of civet cat is also used by babies or children as necklace to protect them from bad spirits while the teeth of wild pig are hung inside the house to propiate evil spirit. Dog is frequently used for many of Aetas but they do not believe that when a dog barks during night time in a very different sound, it means that there is a wandering spirit.

The commonly used invertebrate animals for food are clams, crabs, and shrimps. These animals are cooked mostly by sautéing and boiling the whole body parts of the animal. The least frequently used as food is grasshopper. A clam is used mostly by Aetas as medicine. Aetas use the shell of clams in making lime powder mixed with a leaf of a plant to make their teeth stronger. As for decoration, butterflies are used as frame to be decorated inside the house. There were no identified invertebrates used for wearing apparels. Butterflies, dragonfly, and grasshopper were commonly used as toys/amusement. There were no identified invertebrates used for cultural practices and beliefs. Earthworm is commonly used for catching fish.

The perceived ecological status of animals reveals that the Aetas manage properly their fauna resources in accordance to biological conservation. However, certain animals become endangered due to hunting for food, toys/amusement, and for medicinal purposes. Monkey is considered threatened because of hunting. One of the most endangered local animals is the parrot. Thus, human interaction must be established for sustainable utilization of faunal resources. However, dissemination of information for domestication and conservation of faunal diversity are the most prevalent factor for maintaining the traditional knowledge of indigenous people. This has to be done so that awareness of legal and ecological status of the fauna resources they use can be reliable source of information for food, medicine, income and other purposes.

CONCLUSION

The Aetas in Penablanca, Cagayan have very rich ethnozoology, as evidenced by their utilization of the different animals in their locality vis-à-vis the variety of use and their knowledge of the different methods of preparation. Moreover, the Aetas are aware of the status of the diversity of fauna in their locality.

IMPLICATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH/RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research in the field of ethnozoological knowledge of Aetas in relation to traditional medicine must be conducted.

Further studies are required for scientific validation to confirm medicinal value of animals and to include this knowledge in strategies of conserving and managing animal resources.

The local government officials and Non-Government Organizations must provide many opportunities to Aetas to articulate their perspectives on ethnozoological diversity for their own development.

Scientific investigations to test the efficacy of some local animals used as medicine from animal sources as developed by Aetas for wider application may be undertaken and if found feasible, large-scale sustainable product development may be recommended.

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