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TRANSCRIPT OF "FILE ON 4"

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"BUSH MEAT"

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REPORTER: Angus Stickler

PRODUCER: David Lewis

EDITOR: David Ross

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THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A RECORDING AND NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

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ACTUALITY AT HACKNEY MARKET

TEINAZ: Tell me what you've got. Have you got any monkey in that, in the freezer?

MAN: No, no monkey.

TEINAZ: You've got no monkey?

STICKLER: Dr Yunes Teinaz, an environmental health officer, raids an archway shop front in Hackney, East London – a market where the flesh of wild animals from West and Central Africa has been sold as food. File on 4 investigates the slaughter and sale of endangered species from the forests of Cameroon to the tabletops of Britain. It's a story of poverty, organised crime and slaughter – a trade with the potential to spread deadly disease; a trade which governments here and abroad seem either unwilling or unable to stop.

STICKLER: So we have to be careful here.

ARREY: Very careful.

STICKLER: So as we are walking past here ...

ARREY: That is elephant skin.

STICKLER: That's elephant skin there?

ARREY: Yes

STICKLER: But don't people here know that elephants are endangered species?

ARREY: They do. And yet the only means for them to live.

STICKLER: Overlooked by the huge modern presidential palace, Yaounde feels like one large shanty-town. There's a few ugly concrete tower blocks scattered in the centre, but in the streets market-traders sit in the dirt, hawking their wares. Everybody is selling, few are buying. Anything and everything is for sale. We went to another market, again we had to use a hidden microphone.

ACTUALITY AT MARKET

STICKLER: We've got what – one, two, three, four monkeys – four whole monkeys here.

ARREY: There's about five whole monkeys.

STICKLER: Five whole monkeys is it? And they are black and they are smoked. So they cut the monkey in half.

ARREY: It is just folded back. The only thing which is not here is the internal organs. Apart from that you can see it.

STICKLER: How much is it for these monkeys?

ARREY: [Speaks to trader in French] Two thousand five hundred, that's two pounds fifty.

STICKLER: Two pounds fifty. It's swarming with flies here – is this safe to eat?

ARREY: When it is smoked like this it is difficult for maggots to penetrate.

STICKLER: This is the stark reality of the bush meat trade. And LAGA is one of the few organisations trying to bring the traders to book. It's largely staffed by volunteers – local people with a fervent commitment to their cause. They scour the markets looking for endangered species, animals like gorilla and chimpanzee, these are the big prize. Their flesh is an expensive, much sought-after delicacy. It's used at banquets and in rituals. Afanwi, like Arrey, works undercover. She explained how she infiltrated a group of poachers trying to sell gorillas. She was taken to someone's hut to broker the deal.

AFANWI: I couldn't see because of the smoke. So I had to wait. When the smoke went down then I saw these two gorillas clinging to each other and running away crying, because when they see somebody coming they are scared. They were all babies, very small, about two or three months, I don't know. We went back to the sitting room to beat the price and finally we ended. They said they can't give it for less than 100,000 Francs.

STICKLER: That's a hundred pounds?

AFANWI: A hundred pounds - yeah for the two.

STICKLER: Afanwi rescued the two baby gorillas, despite considerable risks.

AFANWI: If these people find out that you are not a buyer and that you are a spy, they will squeeze your neck there and then and they will bury you dead – your family will not even know. It is a source of living. If you tamper with it they kill you, they eliminate you to have their oxygen.

ACTUALITY OF CHIMPS AT MFU RESERVE

STICKLER: This is the Mfu reserve in the forests of Cameroon. Here orphaned chimpanzees and gorillas live in massive 2,000 hectare compounds. It's one of only a few truly safe havens in Cameroon, protected by soldiers, paid for by charity, part-funded by Bristol Zoo. Tafon Bibila Godwin is the chief veterinarian here.

GODWIN: We got hunters. They go to the bush, they kill the mother of these animals. So they get now the infant and take it to other people around town to sell it as live animal for them to get it as pet.

STICKLER: And what sort of condition are the animals in when they come to you?

GODWIN: They are very, very stressed, there are the presence of wounds, some come with bullets.

STICKLER: And what about actually trying to get them back into the wild?

GODWIN: Generally that is actually the main role of the project. But for the meantime much has not been done on that. We cannot send them back for hunters to hunt them. And as soon as we have got an area which is protected and we are sure about it, we are going to release these animals.

STICKLER: There are areas that are meant to be protected areas already, yet you seem to be saying that you are going to keep the animals here rather than introducing them back to the wild because they are just going to get hunted?

GODWIN: There are some clandestine hunting – poaching – still going on in areas like that. So we are not comfortable using areas like that because we are not quite sure it is protected.

ACTUALITY IN CAR

STICKLER: It's the crack of dawn and we've set out for the lowland forest deep into south east Cameroon - the Djar reserve - home of the great apes.

ACTUALITY OF LOGGING LORRY

STICKLER: It only takes a day to get here, and that's thanks to these thundering great trucks and their hard wood cargo. The largely European owned logging companies have carved roads deep into the forest. These red dirt track carriageways are hardly the autobahn, but they open up otherwise inaccessible parts of the jungle.

ACTUALITY IN JUNGLE

STICKLER: Every three or four miles there are small villages – wattle and daub mud huts with raffia palm leaf roofs. Smoke ekes out of the rafters. This is where the pygmy hunters live. Posing as white men wanting to hunt gorilla, we've come to try and see how easy it is to strike a deal.

ACTUALITY WITH HUNTERS

STICKLER: For the gorilla's head and hands – how much is it going to cost us?

ARREY: They are ready to provide us with the skull, the palms and the legs free of charge provided we give them the bullets. The meat, they consume it themselves. To be sure to go, they need about ten of that cartridge at 800 Francs the price to kill one and bring for you.

STICKLER: Why does it need so much ammunition?

ARREY: They are very wild animals. To kill them you need a very serious fight with them. You can shoot – one gorilla with five bullets to kill it.

WITCH DOCTOR: Ooooh oooh ohhh.

ARREY: He is crying like a gorilla. If you don't have courage you can not attack him. Take courage – you kill it and you come back home with him.

STICKLER: How many gorillas has he killed?

ARREY: We have killed so many gorillas, we cannot tell you exactly how many.

STICKLER: These people live in abject poverty. They didn't want money, they wanted food and ammunition to hunt. They eat gorilla, chimpanzee, whatever they can kill. Bush meat accounts for 95 per cent of their protein requirement – it's their staple diet.

ACTUALITY IN ABONGMBANG

STICKLER: We've driven back to the nearest town, Abongmbang. This small anarchic place has a real sense of a frontier town. On one side of the main thoroughfare there's a market – again bush meat for sale. Laid on the floor in the dirt, seven recently slaughtered monkeys. It's swarming with flies. Down a dark alley, just in front of me, there's another stall selling steaks – not beef, but drill – an extremely rare member of the baboon family. On the other side of the road, nestled between two bars is a

STICKLER: Ridley Road Market in Dalston, Hackney. It's reminiscent in some ways to the markets of Cameroon. You have to squeeze through the throng. The stalls and archway stores cater for the tastes of the local community. Boxes of yams piled high, imported from Ghana, racks of brown-dried fish, plantains. You can buy virtually anything here – and until recently that included the flesh of gorilla.

ROBINSON: A colleague on a routine visit to Ridley Road Market entered one of the shops, noticed a sign advertising bush meat for sale. And among the items that was on the price list was gorilla and tiger – another endangered species.

STICKLER: Richard Robinson is Principal Environmental Health Officer for the London Borough of Hackney. He accompanied police and Customs on a raid.

ROBINSON: We found a quantity of antelope, monkey and gorilla, which were confirmed the speciation from the DNA. Most of it was stored in a tatty freezer out the back, which I wouldn't have used for keeping dog food in.

STICKLER: Could you actually tell you were looking at bits of monkey, bits of gorilla, bits of antelope – what did the meat look like?

ROBINSON: Well certainly some of the monkey was quite obvious because it was a whole monkey. The antelope could have been any deer or venison, I wouldn't have known it from, for what it was. What was pointed out to me as gorilla was just a very very dark meat with dark fur on it.

STICKLER: It still had the fur on?

ROBINSON: It still had the fur on, yeah.

STICKLER: This was one the first bush meat cases to come before a British court. The two shopkeepers were jailed for four months for trading in endangered species. But this wasn't a one-off. In neighbouring Haringey in January of this year, Paulina Pepra, from Ghana was jailed for three months for selling produce unfit for human consumption. Two tons of rotting meat was seized from her shop – it included

TEINAZ: So I would like to see that freezer there. If you move that stuff out for me, I would like to inspect the freezer please. What is this? I'm asking you what is this?

TRADER: It's not grass cutter.

TEINAZ: I know what is grass cutter – now what is this?

TRADER: It's cow food.

TEINAZ: Now this is a cow hide - this is illegally imported cow hide. You know it is not legal to sell in this country.

TRADER: They are not selling here.

TEINAZ: Then what you have it here for - decoration? Sir, this could be kind of bush meat here?

TRADER: It's not bush meat.

TEINAZ: What is it then?

TRADER: It's not bush meat.

TEINAZ: What is it?

TRADER: It's snails – not bush meat.

TEINAZ: Snail?

TRADER: Yes.

TEINAZ: I need to investigate them further due to the fact that they are rock frozen. I need to defrost them and see what they are.

STICKLER: There's a cockroach there so it's not particularly hygienic here, and the freezer is disgusting.

TEINAZ: Sir, you don't have only cockroaches here, you have got rat infestation. You need to close and you need to clean up the shop, right?

STICKLER: The meat Dr Teinaz seized was sent away for analysis. He's still awaiting the results. There were small lumps of what looked like blackened gristle in plastic bags, also the skin of a cow smuggled from Africa – a common dish. The snails were not escargots, but giant African land snails, again smuggled from the continent. The condition this food was kept in was atrocious. The half-defrosted freezer was covered in grime – it stank. And Richard Robinson, from Hackney Environmental Health, says this is all too common.

ROBINSON: We have found it on sale, to some extent or another, in almost every West African shop in the area. We were finding 40-50 kilos at a premises at a time. You could go back a month later and seize exactly the same amount again – it's a huge business.

STICKLER: Because of the action Hackney has taken, the trade has moved under the counter, the meat stored in different locations. If you know the right people it's readily available. And despite the all too obvious health risks from poor hygiene, Richard Robinson also believes bush meat itself poses a threat to those who eat it.

ROBINSON: There's a whole list of infectious diseases that potentially are being spread. Very little work is being done to find out what is actually being brought in on these animals. The bacteria and viruses will survive in a viable state all the way through until they are delivered in this country. The other health risk is actually from the way some of these animals are killed, particularly the grass cutters. A frequent way of killing grass cutters is poisoning them with strychnine, and if you go and check with the health authorities in Nigeria and Ghana, you will find that they have thousands of deaths from strychnine poisoning – from eating grass cutters.

STICKLER: And that same strychnine is being brought over here to these shores?

ROBINSON: Yes, because strychnine is cheap, a very easy way to kill rodents, and they don't care who they are poisoning – what they want is the money.

STICKLER: In July 2002, the House of Commons Select Committee for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published a report into illegal meat imports. It was as a response to the outbreaks of swine fever in 2000 and of foot and mouth disease in 2001. It recommended that the Food Standards Agency - the government body responsible for protecting public health – assess the risk posed by illegal meat smuggled into the country, including bush meat. Sarah Appleby is head of Food Imports.

APPLEBY: The Agency has looked at the risk to public health from bush meat. But we haven't identified any particular problems with eating bush meat or bush meat being the cause of serious food-borne illness in the UK.

STICKLER: Have you actually tested the meat that's coming in?

APPLEBY: Well one of the problems is that if meat comes into the country illegally then it's not allowed to be tested - it must be destroyed straight away.

STICKLER: How can you say that you've done a risk assessment when you haven't even tested the meat?

APPLEBY: Well certainly we've got a fair view of the sorts of diseases that might be spread through meat – whether it's things like salmonella, those types of things – and tried to identify particular problems associated with illegal imports of meat.

STICKLER: Some of these animals are killed with poison such as strychnine. That could be passed on in the food chain, couldn't it?

APPLEBY: We have strict rules about meat production to ensure that legally imported meat is fit to eat, and when the controls aren't in place, such as you're saying with strychnine and things like that, there are risks, and this applies to any imports.

STICKLER: But this is an issue than not only puts the health of humans at risk. Illegal meat imports are a major threat to our domestic livestock. The foot and mouth outbreak devastated the farming community in the UK. The clean-up operation cost £8.4 billion. It's now accepted that smuggled meat was the most likely cause. Following a government review, responsibility for illegal meat imports was handed from Port Health Authorities to Customs. The government invested an extra £25 million over three years, providing four new mobile anti-smuggling teams and six sniffer dogs. There are more on the way. The number of seizures has more than doubled to nearly 16,000. It sounds good - that is until you put these figures in context.

ACTUALITY AT HEATHROW AIRPORT

STICKLER: Heathrow airport. There are four terminals here alone. These new anti-smuggling teams have to service every air and seaport in the land, small or large. Last year they seized just over one half of one percent of the 12,000 tonnes of illegal meat imports that the National Audit Office estimates are brought into this country. That means 99.4% got through onto the open market, an unknown risk to human or animal health. Environmental Health Officers like Richard Robinson are left picking up the pieces. And as if to add insult to injury, it appears that under the new regime led by Customs, the flow of information and intelligence from the ports has all but dried up.

ROBINSON: They do not talk to us. They do not share information. We used to get a report every fortnight from one or other airport of a consignment they'd found. They'd give an address of where it was going to. We could then follow up on that.

STICKLER: Why is it important for Customs to be sharing information with you?

ROBINSON: So that we can follow up at the address in this borough, because previous goods may have been brought in that weren't discovered and may still be on the premises. Since Customs have taken over these duties we have not had a single notification of any consignment bound for this borough. Certainly from the dealings with other local authorities it seems to be fairly common. Very few of them get any information at all from Customs.

STICKLER: Does that shock you?

ROBINSON: It worries me, because I'm sure the trade hasn't stopped.

STICKLER: When you consider the health risks bush meat may pose, this is remarkable. The Food Standards Agency has set up a system of liaison between local authorities and Customs. Sarah Appleby, head of Food Imports, says it's working well. She even applauds its effectiveness. I asked her on what grounds. Has the Food Standards Agency passed on hard information from Customs to Environmental Health Officers on the ground?

APPLEBY: Yes.

STICKLER: How many times?

APPLEBY: A number of times.

STICKLER: It's surprising that Hackney – one of the most proactive local authorities working on this issue - hasn't received a call from Customs, hasn't had a call from your office.

APPLEBY: Certainly that's for Customs to deal with. Obviously if we get information we would pass it between local authorities and Customs to help facilitate investigation.

STICKLER: You said you were liaising between Customs and between Environmental Health Officers, but on the ground it would appear that that liaison doesn't add up to much?

APPLEBY: Well I'm sorry to hear that, but certainly we are doing all we can to work very closely with local authorities to actually draw the enforcement activities together to ensure that these criminals are detected and caught.

STICKLER: We asked Customs to show us how they've tightened controls, to show us their new sniffer dogs in action. They refused. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, DEFRA, has overall responsibility for illegal food imports. Its latest annual review highlights the increase in the number of seizures. It says it expects them to decrease as the deterrent effect of the government's policies begin to bite. I went through the figures with the Environment Minister, Elliot Morely. The deterrent you talk about adds up to the seizure of less than 1% of illegal meat imports, so 99.4% of illegal meat imports are getting through.

MORELY: That's an assumption, and I don't quite know how you've come to that figure ...

STICKLER: These are your figures.

MORELY: Well I'm not sure it says it's 1%.

STICKLER: Well if you actually look at the total meat seized, it's 73 tons.

MORELY: Yes, that's right.

STICKLER: The government's own estimate of illegal meat that comes into the country is 12,000 tons.

MORELY: Yes, we have to bear in mind that this is at airports, and in terms of the overall quantities of illegal meat, the bulk of that are probably large scale illegal fraud that comes in through border inspection posts, that you're talking there of container loads of meat. Now they have been seized as well. They aren't in those figures that you quoted there, because they're at points of entry at airports.

STICKLER: I'm not quite with you there. Are you saying that basically more meat is seized than you actually state in your own report?

MORELY: Well I'm not quite sure, to be honest with you, what report you're referring to.

STICKLER: I'm actually looking at the figures, and I'll read from the cover, The Annual Review of Controls on Imports of Animal Products, April 2003 to March 2004, DEFRA.

MORELY: I haven't got that report, I'm terribly sorry.

STICKLER: Contrary to what the Minister said, DEFRA officials later confirmed that the report includes figures for all illegal meat seizures, air and sea. The report also states that the vast majority of seizures made by Customs are of small quantity, from the travelling public. This is not the experience of Clive Lawrence. Up until seven months ago, he was the main contractor responsible for the transport of all organic material – animal or plant, legal or illegal - arriving at Heathrow airport. He believes tons of bush meat enter the country every month, smuggled in on flights.

LAWRENCE: There's also a much larger amount of organised trafficking.

STICKLER: What basis have you got for saying that?

LAWRENCE: I used to monitor Heathrow myself and used to stand in the terminals and watch the organisers get hold of the couriers who were bringing the traffic in, then they used to take them out to the car park in terminal three, and they would all deposit their bags into a van and then just disperse. I monitored on one occasion over fifty bags going into a transit van, and you could tell the vehicle was grossly over-loaded.

STICKLER: Big business, a well-organized trade, which has now come to the attention of the police. Detective Chief Inspector Will O'Reilly of the Metropolitan Police Serious Crime Squad is investigating what's become known as the Adam case. In September 2001, the torso of a five year old boy was found on the banks of the Thames. He'd been sacrificed, his body parts used in a barbaric ritual. As part of this investigation the police have found evidence to link it with the bush meat trade.

ACTUALITY WITH COMPUTER

O'REILLY: This is a computer presentation that we have made. This is a skull of a large rodent about sort of three foot long, which you often see sold, sort of spread-eagled and cooked by the roadside in Nigeria. Now that there is in fact a voodoo artifact.

STICKLER: What we're looking at here is the skull of a grass cutter wrapped in some kind of hair with an iron pin rammed through it.

O'REILLY: Absolutely, and people would pray and worship that as a representation of ancestral gods, and we found that on one of the Adam raids. Indeed it was the trafficker that we arrested on the Adam inquiry who used this as a form of protection for his criminal enterprise.

STICKLER: So really the trade in bush meat, ritual sacrifice of humans, the trade into this country, you believe are all intrinsically linked?

O'REILLY: Intrinsically linked, yes without a doubt.

STICKLER: This testimony adds to a growing body of evidence of the nature and scale of the import, not only of the meat of endangered species, but the involvement of organised criminal gangs. I put this point to the Environment Minister, Elliot Morely.

We've been told by the Metropolitan Police that they believe people who are involved in trafficking bush meat, that they've got connections between that and the Adam torso murder. They're talking about really serious organised crime.

MORELY: Oh, there's no two ways about that. Those people who are involved in this kind of illegal trafficking, they are linked to organised crime, and those people who are involved in that kind of area of activity are very unpleasant nasty people and they are hardened criminals.

STICKLER: Well, who's doing anything about it?

MORELY: The fact that the police – I mentioned it to you – makes it very clear that action is being taken. Some people have been put in prison for this activity for the first time in this country, I might say, and I understand that the Customs so far this year have brought four successful prosecutions in relation to smuggling.

STICKLER: One of these was a man bringing in raw turkey and chicken from New York, another a woman from Gambia who attempted to smuggle in goat meat and fish. She was fined £150 and ordered to pay £140 costs. Critics argue that the authorities are failing to stem the flow of bush meat into this country - but if they are failing here, what of the African states?

ACTUALITY IN YAOUNDE

STICKLER: Cameroon boasts some of the toughest wildlife laws in Africa. But as we have seen, the meat of endangered species is openly on sale in the marketplace. You can hire the hunters with ease. So what is going wrong? Why aren't people being arrested and prosecuted through the courts? Behind me are the offices of the judiciary. Justice Nyow Matias Dinga is a senior magistrate here, the equivalent of an Appeal Court Judge.

DINGA: We want the judicial system to understand that the fight against illegal hunting is actually as important as any other criminal matter, so that awareness is not yet there. We need help. If you were to visit the legal department they have bulk and bulk of work – case files are pouring in every day. They don't have paper, they don't have adequate typing machines. The staffing is low. And if you see in the field we don't have vehicles to move around so as to trap the real poachers. The real poachers are far tougher than us as I can see. If we don't have the means, we will not be able to take the fight to the end.

STICKLER: And it's not just a problem of resources – it's corruption too. We've been told that senior officials – in the heart of government – are paid to turn a blind eye. And this isn't hearsay. We've spoken to senior staff in the Ministry of Forestry and Environment, MINEF – the ministry responsible for enforcing the wildlife laws. It's a similar situation with the police. We spoke to a police officer, a superintendent. He told us that many of his colleagues are simply bought off. He didn't want to be named.

SUPERINTENDENT: As far as corruption is concerned, the phenomenon is really there and we battle with it every day. You need a lot of courage, a lot of steadfastness not to fall into it, because every time that we arrest people, somebody is prepared to give me, but you see we resist.

STICKLER: You've been offered bribes have you?

SUPERINTENDENT: Of course.

STICKLER: But you said no.

SUPERINTENDENT: We said no, because we know that we are fighting this thing with conviction, not because we are doing it in order to get money.

STICKLER: This is an illegal and violent trade – it's about money. And if poverty is the driving force behind it, then this is an area where western governments could help. If you alleviate the poverty of the pygmy tribes for example,

STICKLER: So what's our government doing to address this problem, address the fact that we could be looking potentially at another AIDS-type catastrophe spreading across the globe?

MORELY: Well, as I say, there's no evidence of that coming into the UK, but nevertheless we can't be complacent about these things, and we must be on our guard.

STICKLER: Our understanding is that the Department for International Development has been actually reducing funding – pulling out of natural resource projects, the type of project working to stop hunting.

MORELY: It's not so much that they've reduced spending, they've put spending into other areas, and what they have been doing is putting money into governance issues and into strengthening organisation. But they do put quite a lot of money into forest management and, in terms of poverty alleviation, there's a number of big projects that they have, and that also includes the bush meat issue.

STICKLER: But the hunting continues. The bush meat trade is a complex issue. The driving force is a mix of poverty and greed. It involves organised crime. There are obvious and serious risks of the spread of disease to both the human population and domestic livestock on a global scale. As the academics say, we ignore this at our peril.

SIGNATURE TUNE