

A SURVEY OF DRY SEASON HERBIVORY OF *ADANSONIA DIGITATA* BY *LOXODONTA AFRICANA* IN TARANGIRE NATIONAL PARK

Dana Fjare, St. Olaf College

ABSTRACT

The elephant population in Tarangire National Park is at a historic high and during the dry season the park is home to over 2,500 individuals. Tarangire is also famous for its baobab trees, *Adansonia digitata*, the bark of which is consumed by elephants in search of food and water during the dry season because a baobab's bark contains a very high volume of water. Investigation into whether distance from Tarangire River influenced baobab utilization found that baobabs near the river experience less utilization by elephants during the dry season than trees far from the river. Individuals in dense stands also experience greater utilization than lone individuals, irregardless of proximity to the river. Average baobab circumference is also smaller near the river, suggesting that decades of intense utilization by elephants may be having an effect on the recruitment of young baobabs. It is possible that the baobabs far from the river are consumed more by elephants because they provide a source of water where there otherwise is none. Baobabs are very important to the ecosystem of Tarangire because they provide habitat and food for many organisms; therefore, it is important to examine what the effects of increasing elephant population may be having on the ecological community in Tarangire.