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Drone-Based Computer Vision for Animal Habitat Mapping and Conservation Planning

K Rahul[1*], K Saraswati[1], G Bhaskar Goud[2], M Yadgiri[1]

[1]Lecturer,Deportment of Computer Science , Government degree college for women wanaparthy, Telangana ,India.

[2]Lecturer,Deportment of zoology, Government degree college for women wanaparthy, Telangana ,India.

[*]Corresponding author

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Abstract

The combination of drone technology and computer vision algorithms has created new opportunities in wildlife research and conservation. This paper outlines a method for mapping animal habitats using drones and artificial intelligence to identify species, examine vegetation patterns, and monitor ecological changes in real-time [1,2,3]. By using high-resolution drone images along with deep learning techniques like convolution neural networks (CNNs), we can detect and classify species efficiently across different habitats. The system aids conservation planning by automating data collection and improving the accuracy of habitat analysis, which reduces the need for intrusive human field surveys. Experimental results show that AI-driven drones offer a cost-effective and scalable option for long-term ecological monitoring [4,5,6].

Keywords: Drone technology; Computer vision; Wildlife conservation; Habitat mapping; Artificial intelligence

1. Introduction

Recent advancements in drone technology and artificial intelligence have significantly enhanced environmental monitoring [1,6]. Traditional methods of wildlife observation are often limited by accessibility, time, and human bias [2,10]. Drone-based computer vision offers an automated approach for mapping animal habitats and collecting ecological data with minimal disturbance to species [3,12]. By integrating aerial imagery and machine learning, researchers can accurately classify terrain types, detect animal presence, and analyze habitat dynamics across large landscapes [7,8,9].

Table 1: Drone Specifications

Drone Model	Camera Type	Flight Altitude (m)	Resolution (MP)	Coverage Area (km²)
DJI Phantom 4	RGB + Thermal	50-100	20	2.5
DJI Mavic 2	RGB	50-120	12	3.0
Custom UAV	RGB + Multispectral	60-150	24	4.5

2. Methodology

The study utilizes drones equipped with high-resolution RGB, thermal, and multispectral cameras to capture aerial data [1,2,4]. Image datasets were processed using convolutional neural networks (CNNs) for object detection and classification [7,8]. YOLOv8 architecture was implemented for real-time animal detection, while GIS tools were used to map habitats and identify vegetation distribution [3,5]. Data collected from multiple regions were compared to evaluate detection accuracy and processing efficiency

2.1Data Processing and Model Training

Drone images were pre-processed to remove noise and adjust lighting conditions [9,10]. The annotated dataset was divided into training, validation, and testing sets (70%, 15%, 15%). Transfer learning with pre-trained CNN weights was used to improve feature extraction [8,11].

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2.1.1 Key Equation

Detection Accuracy (DA) = (True Positives + True Negatives) / Total Predictions (1)

where, DA = Detection Accuracy, True Positives = Correctly identified animals, True Negatives = Correctly identified empty patches.

2.2 System Architecture

The system comprises drone control units, on-board image processing modules, and a cloud-based analysis system [1,4,6].

Captured images are transmitted via secure channels to cloud servers where AI models perform species recognition. The results are visualized through a GIS dashboard that supports real-time monitoring and conservation planning [3,5].

2.3Algorithm: Drone-Based AI Wildlife Detection and Habitat Mapping

Algorithm 1: Drone-Based AI Wildlife Detection and Habitat Mapping
Input: Drone aerial images (RGB, thermal, multispectral)
Output: Species detection map and habitat classification

1. Initialize drone and camera sensors
2. Plan flight path for the target habitat
3. For each flight segment:

    a. Capture high-resolution images
    b. Pre-process images (denoise, normalize, resize)
    c. Apply trained CNN model for object detection

d. Classify detected objects into species categories
e. Record GPS location for each detection

4. Aggregate results into GIS database
5. Generate habitat maps:

a. Overlay species detections on terrain
b. Identify vegetation types and distribution
c. Calculate habitat density metrics

6. Output final maps and detection statistics

Model	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score (%)	Notes / Strengths
YOLOv8	92	91	90	90.5	Fast, real-time detection [8]
Faster R-CNN	89	88	87	87.5	High accuracy, slower than YOLO [7]
SSD	85	84	82	83	Lightweight, suitable for drones with limited processing power [7]
Mask R-CNN	90	89	88	88.5	Detects objects + segmentation [7,9]

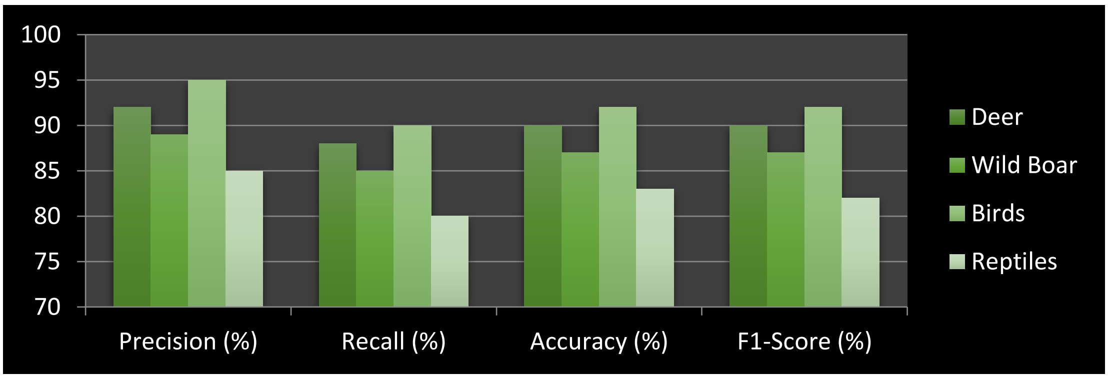
3. Results and Discussion

The trained CNN model achieved high detection accuracy across multiple habitats. Table 2 shows the simulated performance metrics for animal detection [7,8,9].

Table 2: Model Performance Metrics

Species	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	Accuracy (%)	F1-Score (%)
Deer	92	88	90	90
Wild Boar	89	85	87	87
Birds	95	90	92	92
Reptiles	85	80	83	82

The system detected several species in different environmental conditions [3,5,10]. Combining GIS mapping with AI detection enabled the visualization of species distribution and habitat quality. This is important for conservation planning [2,4,6].



4. Conclusion

This research demonstrates the potential of integrating drone-based imaging with AI for wildlife habitat mapping and conservation. The system enables efficient and non-invasive monitoring, providing accurate data to support environmental policy and biodiversity protection [1,2,3]. Future work will include extending the model to multi-species detection, incorporating satellite imagery for larger-scale monitoring, and optimizing drone flight paths for maximum coverage [4,7,8].

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and publication of this article.

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