



Fundraising No. 011006250001

REF NEWS

RHINO & ELEPHANT FOUNDATION • NEWSLETTER No. 12 • NOVEMBER 1994
P.O. BOX 381 BEDFORDVIEW 2008 • TEL (011) 882-0606 • FAX (011) 882-0666



FROM THE REF DESK...

A "bumper" issue this time. Enclosed with our compliments is **ON TRACK** – the first issue of a new magazine. At the time of writing, we are not aware of its overall content but we are sure it is great and that you will enjoy reading it.

The story on the Knysna elephants is covered in **ON TRACK**. The project was co-ordinated by the Rhino & Elephant Foundation in conjunction with the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry but would have not been possible without sponsorship from the Mazda Wildlife Fund. Special collars and telemetry equipment for the monitoring of the elephants were designed and built by Derek Ritchie of the EWT.

Was it a success? This is difficult to answer as yet – the translocation from Kruger National Park to the Knysna State Forest went very smoothly and the elephants settled down well in their specially built enclosures – but the moment we were all actually waiting for was the final release of the elephants into the forest, the only area in South Africa with elephants and no fences.

We had visions of elephants going window-shopping in Knysna, of people phoning us from Plettenberg Bay with elephants in their gardens, of elephants swimming in the sea at Mossel Bay – a few anxious hours were experienced until we heard that they didn't venture too far away from the forest. Read on for the latest news (Sadly, not all of it is good) in the enclosed magazine **ON TRACK**.

The 9th Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) takes place in



Photo: Petra Mengel

November in the USA. A factual article on what CITES is and why CITES is of special interest to the Foundation accompanies this editorial.

If it were not for the African elephant, CITES would be a non-event for most people. However, the subject of the African elephant is an emotive one as this majestic animal – like no other – represents Africa with its many complexities!

The report on the ecological feeding comparison of elephants and mopane worms is a serious research project and the results are fascinating – the calculations are correct, however unbelievable they may seem.

The Foundation has designed a new T-Shirt. It is colourful and fun... and for wildlife enthusiasts we have produced the same design in bush colours.

Why not buy two, one for the city and one for the game reserve?

To all our members and supporters, a peaceful and happy Christmas season!

CITES

Ninth meeting of the conference

During the 1970s the environmental consciousness in mainly the western world realised that wildlife populations in the developing countries of Africa, south east Asia and South America were being depleted at an alarming rate to satisfy the desire to acquire the byproducts from these animals.

The world's wildlife was disappearing with the developing world blaming the rich demands of Europe and America. The cause of the problem was universal and both sides were to blame. This led to the drawing up of the Washington Convention, better known as CITES – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora – in 1973. Today 123 countries (including South Africa) have accepted the Convention which is widely recognised as the most important international body to control the trade in wildlife. →



"The rhinoceros is an animal that we do not eat and that does not eat us, an animal that does not ruin our crops or threaten our children – in short, an animal that we ought to be able to live with in peace". – Glenn Tatham



In terms of CITES regulations, there are three principal listings as follows:

Appendix I: Any species that is likely to become extinct unless the factors surrounding its decline alter. No product of this species may be traded internationally for commercial purposes;

Appendix II: Limited trade in wildlife products permitted providing certain conditions are met and necessary legal permits issued – controlled trade.

Appendix III: Monitoring the trade in wildlife products.

CITES is a complicated legal instrument which is binding on each country as a signatory. However, countries which disagree with the listing can enter a reservation to continue trading with other CITES members who have also entered reservations, or with non-CITES members.

In November, the Ninth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES takes place at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA – running for nearly two weeks when various proposals are debated and voted upon.

Of specific interest to the Foundation are two proposals submitted by South Africa, requesting the downlisting of both the African elephant and the white rhinoceros from Appendix I to Appendix II. Obviously both these proposals will produce considerable if not intense debates – with politics and animal rights groups making significant contributions. What do these two proposals entail?

With regard to the downlisting of the **African elephant** one recalls the 1989 CITES Conference when, against the wishes of the southern African nations including South Africa, the African elephant was moved to Appendix I. This was against a background of burning ivory stockpiles together with an unprecedented world-wide media hype but the whole crux of the matter was an ivory trade that had become out of control.

Five years have passed, during which time South Africa has continued to "manage" its elephant population. In spite of relocating animals nowadays a certain number are still being culled each year and the resulting ivory stock-

piled which could provide considerable funding for the future conservation within national parks. As South Africa's elephants are not endangered, an Appendix II listing would be the obvious category. There is, of course, one problem and that is an Appendix II listing permits limited trade.

The proposal specifically excludes the sale of ivory and deals with meat and hides only. Clearly, the intention is that at some later date, once the necessary controls have been established, to submit an additional application to permit limited trade in ivory.

A similar situation pertains to the **southern white rhino** which is listed on Appendix I with South Africa's full support since 1977. Since that time white rhino populations declined outside South Africa's borders but the opposite occurred within South Africa. Although excess rhinos have been sold and donated to neighbouring countries, and more recently to Kenya, South Africa has a white rhino population of 5 300 which represents more than 90 percent of the continent's white rhino population.

The cost of protecting the remaining rhino populations, both black and white, is becoming a major problem. The rationale behind South Africa's proposal is based on a policy of sustainable utilisation to enable the Natal Parks Board to profitably utilise the large quantities of perishable white rhinoceros products such as hides.

Again, and similar to the ivory issue, no marketing in rhino horn would take place until such time it is generally accepted that the illegal trade is under control and/or South Africa is satisfied that it can in future provide a trade system that would be as secure as possible and sustainable.

In conclusion, it must be stated that there can be little criticism of South Africa's management record of either species. With the new reconstruction and development programme now in place, considerable pressure is likely to impact upon the national parks. However, it is hoped that whatever decision will be taken in November, it is based on scientific data and with real concern for the two species and not on politics alone.

ELEPHANT DEBATE

Earlier this year, the animal rights group, FALCON (Front for Animal Liberation and Conservation of Nature), attempted to put a court interdict on the National Parks Board in order that a moratorium be placed on the elephant cull in the Kruger National Park for a year. The interdict was too late, but this action nevertheless placed emphasis on the annual elephant cull and both a television and radio discussion took place between the two parties. During these discussions, the National Parks Board agreed to a debate on the elephant cull and associated issues (the sale of young elephants, the use of scoline etc.).

The Rhino & Elephant Foundation has been accepted as the facilitator of the meeting which will probably only take place early next year. Both National Parks Board and FALCON will select experts to make presentations in support of their viewpoint in the hope that a satisfactory conclusion can be reached for all concerned.



Mr Bernhard Mhlanga, receiving the Keith Calder Rhino Bronze Floating Trophy as best overall student at Kruger National Park's recent game scout para-military training course. Well done!

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