

African WILDLIFE & ENVIRONMENT

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The state of our water resources

Managing resources in a constrained environment

World class iSimangaliso

An ancient mystique culminating in a sense of place

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WESSA

PEOPLE CARING FOR THE EARTH

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Consulting Editor

John Ledger
john.ledger@wol.co.za

Production Manager

John Wesson
john.wesson@wessa.co.za

Design & Layout

Marlene McKay
mmckay23@gmail.com

Cover photo:
Verreaux's Eagle
Albert Froneman



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Destination



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Birding

Email info@wessa.co.za
Tel +27 11 462 5663
www.wessa.org.za



Howick Office

Umngeni Valley Nature Reserve
1 Karkloof Road, Howick, 3290
PO Box 394, Howick, 3290
Tel +27(0) 33 330 3931
Email howickadmin@wessa.co.za

East London Office

Shop 12B, Beacon Bay Crossing
North Wing, Cnr N2 & Bonza Bay Rd
Beacon Bay, 5241, East London
PO Box 2909, Beacon Bay, 5205
Tel +27 (0) 043 748 5798
Email eladmin@wessa.co.za

Durban Office

100 Brand Road, Glenwood,
Durban 4001
Tel +27 (0) 31 201 3126
Email dbnadmin@wessa.co.za

Bryanston Office

18 Blackwood Street
Bryanston x3, 2191
PO Box 435, Ferndale, 2160
Tel +27 (0) 11 462 5663
Email jnbadmin@wessa.co.za

Cape Town Office

31 The Sanctuary, Kirstenhof, 7945
PO Box 30145, Tokai, 7966
Tel +27 (0) 21 701 1397
Email admin@wessa.co.za

Published by:



ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA

Morgan Griffiths

The Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) has been actively involved in elephant and rhinoceros conservation since the early years of our Society. In 1896 President Paul Kruger's Bill for creating what was to become the Kruger National Park was passed by the Transvaal Republic Parliament. This was in response to calls by the then Transvaal Game Protection Association, which was to later morph into WESSA, to create a game reserve to protect the remaining wild game from going locally extinct. 1898 saw the resulting proclamation of the land between the Sabie and Crocodile Rivers. In 1926, after much lobbying by WESSA, then The Wildlife Protection Society of SA, the National Parks Act was passed, which established a national system of preserving and conserving South Africa's biodiversity.

At the time of this proclamation, one of WESSA's main objectives was to support the proper management of wildlife for hunting purposes. Since then WESSA has continued to recognize the intrinsic value of wildlife, the importance of wildlife to humanity, and views wildlife and people as interrelated components of an ecological-cultural-economic complex. We recognise that wildlife may be used in consumptive or non-consumptive manner, and our stance does not preclude the management of animal populations or use of animals for food or other cultural uses, as long as the loss of life is justified, sustainable, and achieved through humane methods. WESSA upholds the principle of sustainable utilisation of natural resources. And this includes elephants and rhinos.

The harvesting of elephants and rhinos for their tusks and horns has continued unabated since the start of colonial times. Elephants and rhino populations across Africa have been subject to relentless and predominantly illegal harvesting, driven by high prices for ivory and horn in consumer states. The 2015 Great Elephant Census has estimated that 70% of African Forest Elephant population has been wiped out in the past 10 years. And the Savanna Elephant population has declined by 30% in the past seven years. Up to 30 000 African elephants are killed, nearly all poached, each year for their tusks. That is one every 15 minutes, a rate that natural population growth cannot sustain. In the aftermath of CITES-approved 'once-off' sales of

Can elephant ivory and the rhino horn trade sustain these species and conservation agencies?

ivory stockpiles in 1997, 2002 and 2008, poaching rates escalated sharply across Africa, attributed to stimulated consumer demand for ivory trinkets and carvings. Our Kruger National Park has recorded a recent spike in elephant poaching, with 22 poached in 2015 and 36 to date in 2016! The illegal wildlife trade has become the fourth most lucrative transnational crime after drugs, arms and human trafficking, worth as much as \$20 billion per year. According to TRAFFIC, the illegal international trade in ivory is controlled by highly organised and adaptive international crime syndicates, facilitated by local corruption and driven by complex supply and demand relationships. The situation is mirrored by African rhino populations.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora is an international trade agreement between governments. The agreement aims to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. African elephants are currently listed under Appendix 1 of CITES, which bans all trade, except for the populations of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, which are included in Appendix 2 and allows for domestic trade only. Trade in Appendix 2 listed species is premised on the trade being tightly regulated and the harvesting undertaken at a sustainable level. All rhinos are listed under Appendix 1, except for rhino populations in South Africa and Swaziland, where trade is allowed for the exclusive purpose of allowing international trade in live animals to appropriate and acceptable destinations and hunting trophies.

A number of countries, such as South Africa, China and Japan, have legal, regulated domestic trade in ivory. This domestic trade is claimed to be based on stockpiles acquired prior to the CITES international trade ban, from mammoth ivory or from the 1997, 2002 and 2008 'once-off' sales. CITES approved these sales on the appeals by Southern African countries to be able to sell their stockpiles of ivory, gained from natural mortality, culling operations and confiscated poached ivory. They had argued that they had managed and protected their herds well, and were in many instances having to cull growing elephant populations in their fenced reserves. They pleaded the need to sell the stockpiles to generate conservation income as their conservation



agencies were experiencing shrinking budgets from central government funds, increasing anti-poaching costs and to fund development projects in neighbouring communities. Much emphasis has been placed on funding these socio-economic projects as compensation for damages caused by elephants or otherwise to show the benefits of conservation for local communities and hence discourage poaching. For these reasons, WESSA joined WWF and TRAFFIC in supporting the CITES 2002 decision to allow for this 'once-off' sales, calling it "an African solution to an African problem". But domestic ivory stockpile regulations have been heavily criticised for its various loopholes which have allowed the poached ivory to fraudulently enter consumer markets. In 2000 CITES agreed to the establishment of two systems to inform on the status of illegal killing and trade in elephant ivory. The two systems, Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) and Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), have been highly criticised for not being able to prove or disprove any direct link between ivory stockpile sales and poaching levels. But it is clear that poaching significantly increased after each sale, as well as after episodes of burning of ivory stockpiles. Contrary to the advice of CITES that prices may be depressed by these 'once-off' stockpiles sales, which would reduce demand of poached ivory, the price of ivory in China has greatly increased. Some believe this may be due to deliberate

price fixing by those who bought the stockpiles. It may also be due to the exploding number of affluent Chinese. Ivory consumption has at least decreased in Japan, apparently due to consumer education on elephant poaching.

The issue of a total ivory trade ban is a highly contentious issue within and between range and consumer states and the global conservation community. Range states South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia are arguing for regulated trade in ivory, along with Japan. Opposing them are 29 other range states, the two main historical consumer states: the USA and China, which have both recently banned their domestic ivory trade, and nearly all the international NGOs working in the elephant conservation space. Their argument is that while they recognise that funds could be realised for conservation through ivory sales, their best hope of reducing global elephant poaching is to put an end to all ivory trade and consumer demand for ivory. At the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress, the overwhelming majority of the global conservation community voted in support of a global ban on all domestic trade in elephant ivory. The IUCN now calls on all nations to legislate against domestic elephant ivory trade, although not including legitimate hunting trophies.

Rhino poaching has reached crisis levels in South Africa, driven by extremely high prices for rhino horn (and increasing demand for other rhino body parts)

fuelled by growing Eastern demand. Currently tens of millions of Rands are being spent on security for rhinos in South Africa, from donations and from government and private game reserve operating budgets. It is recognised that these efforts, while they appear to have slowed the rate of poaching, are inadequate and unsustainable in the long-term (especially due to donor fatigue). Amongst the suite of proposed solutions, the National Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) is considering requesting CITES to down-list rhinos so as to allow restricted trade in rhino horn. Horn can be harvested from the rhinos, without killing them, and since the horn regrows, it represents a sustainable resource. The DEA and other pro-trade proponents argue that this will allow South Africa to reap millions of Rands on an annual basis which can be used for affording security, funding the reserves on which they occur as well as expanding the community-based projects that take place around reserves. Pro-traders argue further that a restricted trade will replace the illegal trade and largely nullify the poaching problem.

Anti-trade proponents argue in the main that the restricted trade is very likely to result in a repeat of the escalated poaching that happened after the ivory once-off sales – because of the resurgence in consumer demand. The ivory sales were also reported to have been corrupted by ivory smugglers – demonstrating that the criminal syndicates were not prepared to give up an extremely lucrative product and how adept they are at perverting the mechanisms that were meant to dissuade poaching and smuggling. Anti-rhino horn trade proponents fear that this may similarly happen with our rhinos, given that resumption in sales would legitimise what has been an illegal trade for many years. WESSA voted in favour of the IUCN ivory ban and has opposed the horn trade idea. While we would have preferred to have seen the recent CITES meeting ban all ivory and horn trade, we understand why this did not happen. A total ban would have encouraged certain member states to opt out of complying with CITES restrictions, and the floodgates would have been opened. At the Southern African regional level, WESSA recognises that South Africa, Botswana and Namibia conservation authorities have done well to conserve and protect their national elephant and rhino herds. We also recognise that these countries' stockpiles of ivory and horn represent a potential renewable source of funds for the conservation agencies of these nations. WESSA is sympathetic to these agencies' plight in facing increasing budgetary constraints, as well as increased pressure to show tangible monetary benefits from conservation to the growing human populations outside the protected area fence lines. This social context is further complicated with colonial and/or apartheid resettlement policies and restitution claims.

It is WESSA's considered opinion that the long-term conservation of the remaining African and Asian elephant herds requires the cessation of all trade in elephant ivory. WESSA supports the view of the 27 elephant range states and the global conservation community

that elephant poaching can best be minimised through a global ivory market reduction strategy, which is dependent on eliminating all legal consumer access. This requires a continuation of the international trade ban and a move by all states to adopt the IUCN motion to ban all domestic ivory trade. WESSA's position is based on our sustainable use policy and the latest elephant population data, in that we do not hold that further trade in elephant ivory is sustainable at the global scale. WESSA is opposed to the current trade proposals as in our opinion they carry an unacceptable high risk of being corrupted by the poaching syndicates and illegal traders. The DEA is investigating trade control mechanisms to support applications for CITES trade approval. But the USA and China, supported by France, have stated that there is no realistic mechanism of preventing significant amounts of poached ivory entering the legal trade system, which is why they have all instituted a near-total ban on domestic ivory trade.

WESSA appreciates the increase in the cost of securing these valuable species on public and private lands, but we feel that there are alternatives and issues that need to be addressed first before permitting horn and ivory trade. Importantly, given the increasing importance of tourism to our economy, and the major value our wildlife contributes to this tourism GDP, WESSA holds that our national government needs to reverse its trend of decreasing funding to our conservation agencies.

WESSA believes that revenue from ecotourism, increased hunting (where such is genuine, sustainable and without permitting the export of trophy horns, tusks or other rhino body parts), live animal sales, as well as other uses of rhino and elephant products, such as innovative products like rhino horn infused wines and spa treatments, can offset management costs.

We hold that increasing the sustainable utilisation by approving more hunting opportunities can deliver significant economic benefits, generate significant indirect, local economic returns (principally through tourism-related jobs and services), which can be effectively regulated. The risk of implementing trade without the appropriate measures could not only be a disaster for our rhinos and elephants, but also open a Pandora's Box situation for other wildlife targeted for illicit trade.

Morgan Griffiths
WESSA Environmental
Governance Programme Manager
041 858 9606
morgan.griffiths@wessa.co.za

Wendy Crane

JOBS FOR CARBON

The project aims to improve the rural economy and eco-system health of the Little Karoo by exploring carbon farming as a sustainable use of Spekboom Veld



It's a family affair (Photographs: Hans van der Veen & Steve du Toit)

The Jobs for Carbon project is set in the Little Karoo where three global biodiversity hot spots meet: fynbos, succulent karoo and Maputoland-Tongoland albania thicket. The latter was specifically targeted in this project and it is dominated by the tree-like succulent, *Portulacaria afra*, or Spekboom. Due to over-exploitation and unsustainable stock farming practices, over 80% of the area is in a degraded state, which has undermined vital ecosystem services. This is at its worst in Vanwyksdorp, the specific area targeted for the project; here the local rural economy is in decline, few new employment opportunities exist, the social environment is depressed and predicted climate change are all aspects to likely to worsen the situation. Degraded thicket does not recover naturally if livestock pressure is reduced but can be restored by dry-planting cuttings of *P. afra* harvested from Spekboom shrubs. As the re-established plants grow and begin to restore the vegetation structure, other native shrubs and trees are able to establish, and thicket recovers with time. Apart from the obvious environmental gains of doing so, a primary benefit of restoring degraded thicket is job creation, as the restoration procedure is very labour-intensive, requiring workers to harvest stems from intact thicket, excavate holes and then plant the cuttings.

As the veld recovers, it has been proven that Spekboom shrubs progressively accumulate significant stores of carbon in the underlying litter and soil, as well as in the greenery. Provided that the re-planting and subsequent veld maintenance comply with internationally recognized specifications and that legal requirements are met, the land user stands to earn income by trading carbon credits on the carbon market. While the precise business model of carbon farming is yet to be fully demonstrated, there can be little doubt about the positive impact land restoration has on the environmental sustainability, healthy ecosystems and resilience in the face of climate change, while at the same time promoting job creation, poverty reduction and rural livelihoods.

Jobs for Carbon envisions the restoration of degraded thicket as a means to revive the rural economy in one of the most vulnerable and marginalized areas in the Western Cape. The overall objective is to improve the rural economy and ecosystem health and resilience of the Little Karoo by developing carbon farming as a sustainable use of natural Spekboom veld. Three specific objectives are to:

- restore natural vegetation on degraded thicket land through planting Spekboom;