

News from Botswana

Botswana is often chosen as a venue for international conferences largely due to its political neutrality, but also because it is a stable country with the necessary infrastructure. Two important conferences were recently hosted in Gaborone; the first was a SADCC* Conference on Wetland Conservation, and the second was a meeting of IUCN's African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group. Both were significant developments in their respective fields.

*SADCC stands for the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference, subscribed by 10 southern African countries in 1980.

Wetlands: reservoirs of biodiversity

As man's understanding of his environment has expanded, so there has been a move away from single species protection to the conservation of whole systems. Nevertheless, today prominent species such as Wattled Cranes and Servals still remain as symbols of ecosystems. In this case, both species serve as indicators of the health of wetlands, one of the most productive and diverse environments in subtropical regions of the world.

Recognising the importance of wetlands, a SADCC Conference on Wetland Conservation was held in Gaborone from 3rd to 5th June this year. It was attended by 20 delegates and 20 resource persons from all 10 SADCC countries, and 27 observers and representatives of international organisations. This was the first meeting of its kind and it was therefore heartening to see the interest shown by all member states.

A major focus of the conference was a draft Wetlands Conservation Programme for SADCC states which

was presented to the meeting. This was followed by a series of presentations which examined the importance of the wetland resources of the region, and the critical conservation issues they faced.


On the basis of the discussion, a draft SADCC Wetlands Action Plan for the region was considered, amended and accepted. In adopting the SADCC Wetlands Action Plan, the meeting resolved:


1. that wetland conservation is of critical importance for sustainable economic development in the region.
2. to pursue the goals set out in the SADCC Wetlands Action Plan, in the fields of information and research; policy and legislation; planning and manage-

ment; awareness, education and training; and organisational and institutional arrangements.

3. accordingly, to promote the SADCC Wetlands Action Plan at national, regional and institutional level, so that SADCC States, the secretariat and international organisations might identify how they can most effectively contribute to wetland conservation and management.
4. the SADCC Technical Co-ordination Unit should consider and seek to pursue with all urgency the SADCC Wetlands Action Plan, and to facilitate this, liaise with the delegates and organisations represented at the conference.

As with all conferences, the importance of this initiative depends on the outputs; the Action Plan is a tangible strategy for conserving





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wetlands but it remains to be seen to what extent it is implemented by member states.

82A Elephants and Rhinos: the crux of the matter

IUCN's African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group met recently for the first time after a few years of inactivity. AERSG is essentially a scientific group comprising elephant and rhino specialists from throughout Africa and further afield; it includes biologists, wildlife managers and ivory trade experts from both Francophone and Anglophone countries. The objectives of AERSG are to provide technical information and advice on the conservation of Africa's elephants and rhinos to a variety of clients including government and Non-government Conservation Agencies.

The Gaborone meeting was an attempt to revive AERSG and put its activities back on a sound footing. At the outset of the meeting, it was agreed that while it had originally been useful for one specialist group to include both elephants and rhinos, this was no longer the case; on this basis, two separate groups were formed.

The deliberations of the Rhino Specialist Group, under the guidance of its newly-elected chairman, Martin Brooks (Natal Parks Board), fared far better than that of the Elephant Specialist Group. This was, ironically, due to the fact that rhinos are far more endangered than elephants; they are fewer in number and only remain in countries which have well-organised management agencies (which are consequently able to provide relatively accurate and reliable estimates of rhino numbers). This group was able to define its objectives and provide an up-to-date account of numbers and distribution of both the black and the white rhino.

The Elephant Specialist Group

was beset with difficulties from the beginning; no suitable chairperson could be identified, partly because of the split between the Francophone and Anglophone countries. Two working groups were therefore established along these lines, with Won Wa Musiti Bahini (Zaire), being unanimously elected as leader of the West and Central African Group. Chris Gakahu (Wildlife Conservation International, Nairobi) chaired the East and Southern African Group discussions, an unenviable task considering the paucity of data for many countries in the region. A large amount of time was spent on country reports on elephant population estimates

and trends, in order to update the massive "African Elephant Database" in preparation for the 1992 CITES meeting. Estimates of population sizes were qualified by the inclusion of indices of data quality, which showed that although the database is unusually comprehensive for any species of large mammal, there is still a long way to go before any reliable trends can be ascertained – especially over as short a period as the two years since the last CITES meeting. This period proved to be the crux of the discussions, with Iain Douglas-Hamilton (who is responsible for compiling the database) actually asking the

POPULATION ESTIMATES FOR BLACK RHINOCEROS *Diceros bicornis* AND WHITE RHINOCEROS *Ceratotherium simum* IN AFRICA IN 1991 AND TRENDS SINCE 1987

COUNTRY	Black Rhino				White Rhino				SOURCE
	Pop'n size & reliability	No of pop'ns	Pop'n trend		Pop'n size & reliability	No of pop'ns	Pop'n trend		
Angola	±50	(4)	*	?	0				Hall-Martin
Botswana	10+	(4)	*	?	58	(3)	*	?	Gavor
Cameroon	±50	(4)	4	Down	0				Alers
C.A.R.	±5	(4)	*	Down	0				Doungoube
Chad	0?			Down					Daboulaye
Ethiopia	0?		*	Down	0				Allen-Rowlandson
Kenya	398	(1/2)	19	Up	57	(1)	6	up	Wanjohi
Malawi	6	(3)	1	Stable	0				Hall-Martin
Mozambique	50+	(4)	*	Down	0?				Hall-Martin
Namibia	481	(2)	4	Up	80	(2)	5	Up	Joubert
Rwanda	†				0				Gakahu
Somalia	†				0				Gakahu
South Africa	798	(2)	14	Up	4 700	(2)	171	Up	Hall-Martin
Sudan	†				0				E Martin
Swaziland	6	(1)	1	Stable	80	(2)	3	Stable	Hall-Martin
Tanzania	185?	(4)	*	?	0				Gakahu, Leader-Williams
Uganda	3	(2)	?	Stable	0				Edroma
Zaire	0				28§	(1)	1	Up	E Martin
Zambia	40?	(4)	1+	Down	0			Down	Mvima
Zimbabwe	1 400	(1/2)	±20	Down	250	(3)	10	?	du Toit
TOTALS	3 491			Down	6 231+			Up	

Key:

- * : population scattered
- † : population size unknown, but very small
- § : population of northern species *C.s. cottoni*

Reliability of census :

- (1) Total count
- (2) Estimate based on rhino survey within last 2 years
- (3) Estimate based on rhino survey more than 2 years ago, or recent non-specific survey
- (4) Guess

Source: AERSG

meeting whether AERSG was going to issue a statement of current elephant numbers. It soon became apparent that this would have been naive at best, if not entirely misleading. The margins of error for the methods used are simply too broad to detect anything but major changes; a statement of numbers would have been taken by the general public to indicate an increase or decrease which might not have been real. The effect of the Appendix 1 listing, and the ivory trade ban on elephant populations will have to be sought elsewhere. To this end WWF is undertaking an elephant poaching study and members of the AERSG were briefed on its aims and objectives (a report is due to be completed by early October 1991). As the next meeting of the parties to CITES approaches, it becomes increasingly important that the assumed benefits of the ivory ban for the conservation of elephants are confirmed or refuted and the results of this study should go a long way toward providing the answers.

The future of the elephant thus remains a topical issue, with a high level of interest having been maintained worldwide since early 1989. It is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future, since the issue is not cut and dried – there are many questions for which even the elephant specialists can-not provide satisfactory answers.

Tsetse fly control update

The tsetse fly has long been regarded by many as the greatest conservationist in Africa and by others as the greatest killer of wildlife. Proponents of the former viewpoint maintain that the fly has held the encroachment of man and his ubiquitous cattle at bay and prevented their advance into pristine wildlife areas, far more effectively than any game department ever could have done. By

contrast, there are those who point out that tsetse fly control measures in the past resulted in excessive game and habitat destruction, far worse than any poachers ever could have done. In Botswana, the subject of tsetse fly control (TFC) remains as contentious as ever, despite major technological advances in past eradication, and today the debate centres around the same two issues: viz. preventing the incursion of cattle into areas such as the Okavango following the eradication of the fly, and minimising the impact of TFC on non-target species.

Like most other African countries, Botswana has been involved in tsetse control since the 1940s, using the conventional methods of the time. During the 1960s and even later, insecticides such as the dreaded DDT and Dieldrin were used, and this led to a great deal of local and international concern

about Botswana's TFC programme. During the 1970s, an aerial spraying programme using the insecticide Endosulphan was felt to be the most effective method; its efficacy was improved following environmental monitoring, by halving the Endosulphan level and adding a very small amount of another chemical, Deltamethrine or Alphamethrine. Although this 'cocktail' was an advancement over previous techniques, fish in particular were still being killed under certain conditions, especially during the drought years of the 1980s.

In July 1989, Glenn Merron from the JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology initiated a research programme to monitor the effects of the aerial spraying on fish in the Delta. This project is also supported by the Tsetse Fly Control Unit in Botswana, WWF, and the Kalahari Conservation Society. Already some



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