

africa at a



TIM JACKSON

SOUTH AFRICA

The power of panting

Throughout much of the country, flowering plants are in short supply during the dry, cool winter months. At this time of year, bees must rely on species such as aloes and red-hot poker for nectar, but their flowers produce a relatively diluted brew, and carrying it back to the hive requires a lot of energy.

Now, researchers from the University of Pretoria have found that bees have a novel solution to the problem. They discovered that the nectar in the stomach of a returning bee is twice as concentrated as that in the flowers it visits. This is because, as the bee returns, it regurgitates some of the nectar from its crop onto its tongue, which allows over half the water in the nectar to evaporate. Not only does this kick-start honey production, it also reduces the weight of the cargo, saving the bee valuable energy as it flies back to the hive. *Biology Letters*

SOUTH AFRICA, NAMIBIA, BOTSWANA AND ZIMBABWE

Stockpiled ivory auctioned

These four nations auctioned some 108 tonnes of stockpiled ivory in late October and November 2008. The sales are the first to be sanctioned in nearly a decade. With the approval of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Japan and China were the two countries that bid for the ivory.

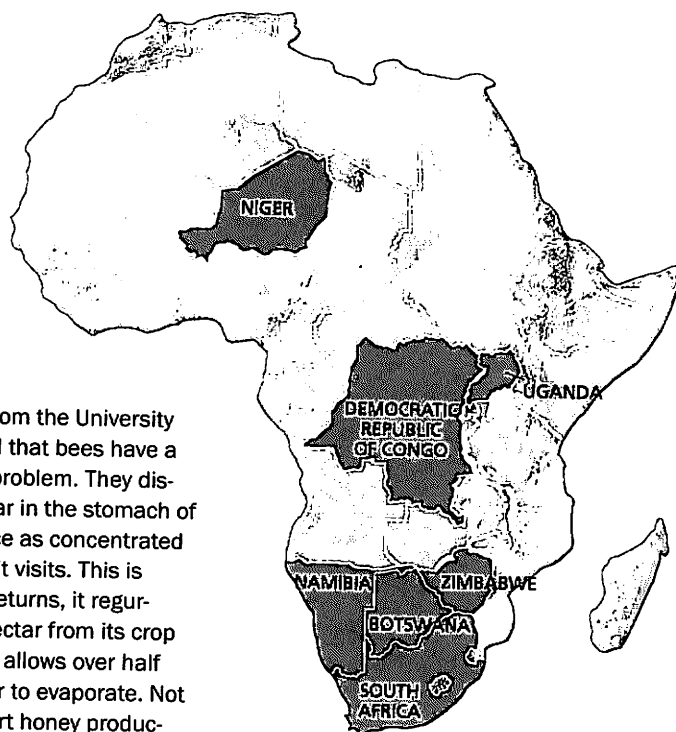
Since its 1989 ban on the ivory trade, CITES has twice allowed countries with growing and well-managed elephant populations to sell stockpiles, requiring them to reinvest the proceeds in elephant conservation. Each sale has sparked

controversy, with many conservationists arguing that such transactions encourage elephant poaching and fuel the illegal ivory trade. While strong in some countries, elephant populations are still struggling to rebound from near decimation in others. www.cites.org; *African Wildlife Foundation* www.awf.org

UGANDA

German investor to manage wildlife

The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) has signed an agreement with Uganda Wildlife Safaris to manage wild animals outside national parks. According to a UWA statement, the deal will see the operator take charge of animals in the districts of Luwero and Nakaseke. It is hoped that this will reduce human-wildlife conflict in the area by making the animals economically profitable. Christian Weth, owner of



WATERBERG ICON MEETS TRAGIC END

Moëng, a prematurely born black rhino calf, was found severely injured in South Africa's Waterberg mountains in 2003 and staff at Lapalala Wilderness took her into their care. The incontinence that resulted from her injuries meant that it was doubtful that she would be able to raise calves in the wild and she was moved to the Waterberg Living Museum.

She soon established herself as the museum's icon, becoming a favourite with children visiting the neighbouring Lapalala Wilderness School. Sadly, in September this year she was brutally killed and her horn removed.

More recently, another rhino was shot in the Waterberg and its horn removed while the animal was still alive. Rangers had to shoot it as it was found walking around, bleeding profusely. 'Unfortunately rhino poaching in the area seems to be on the increase,' says Lapalala's owner, Duncan Parker.



CLIVE WALKER