
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: AFRICAN ELEPHANT SPECIALIST GROUP

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Ivory issues are once again in the forefront with renewed, sometimes large-scale, poaching reported in parts of central and eastern Africa. Meanwhile, Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe have all submitted proposals for the downlisting of their elephant populations. The CITES Panel of Experts process should present their report in advance of the Range States Dialogue Meeting in Senegal, scheduled for November 1996. The Secretariat has assisted in the technical preparations for this meeting, including the drafting of a briefing document entitled "Conservation of the African Elephant: Issues and Actions" and the design of a questionnaire for the range states. The discussions in the November meeting will be carried forward to the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in June 1997, in Harare, Zimbabwe.

The release of the updated, published version of the African Elephant Database (AED) in January 1996 has stimulated much interest. The document has now been widely distributed and feedback has been very positive. The opinions of all AfESG members are now being sought on the future use and distribution of the primary data which comprise the AED. In this new age of computerised information "highways", the scope for dissemination of data compiled by the AfESG is almost boundless. What remains to be decided is what information should be shared and in what forms and formats it should be accessed by interested parties around the world. Since July 1996, the new AED manager has been preparing the database for potential dissemination as a "user-friendly" product.

Lamine Sebogo, the AfESG Programme Officer for west and central Africa, has been following up on a questionnaire he circulated which aims to collect views on priorities for elephant conservation in those two regions. Lamine has provided regular reports on his activities to date and in one such report, he high-

lighted the worrying rise in elephant poaching in the forests of southeastern Cameroon over recent months. The AfESG closed its triennium at IUCN's World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Montreal in October 1996. Staff of IUCN's Species Survival Commission (SSC) held a pre-congress workshop on networking opportunities within the SSC. I joined many other SSC specialist group chairs in presenting triennial reports, for the period 1994-1996, to a full meeting of the Commission which preceded the official opening of the WCC. It was a sad occasion for SSC as we said farewell to the SSC Chair, Dr. George Rabb, who has held this post since 1989. Dr. Rabb has been a staunch supporter of the AfESG and our work at all levels throughout his tenure with SSC. I know that all members of the AfESG join me in thanking Dr. Rabb for his able and willing assistance over the years. I would never have agreed to take on the daunting task of being the AfESG Chair without his gentle, yet forceful, encouragement in 1991.

But even closer to home, there is a move which will have ramifications for all the members of the AfESG, the broader membership of the Asian and African elephant and rhino specialist groups and all those who have benefited from her work over the years. Ruth Chunge, the AfESG Programme Officer and my right-hand (and left, for that matter), has decided not to renew her contract at the end of December 1996. I could not have had any greater support, any more capable professional or any better colleague than Ruth. Ruth has chosen to go back to the field in which she received her formal training, medical parasitology. We have all benefited from her able contribution to the AfESG and *Pachyderm* which has become a regularly produced and widely distributed journal. I am sure you will join me in bidding Ruth "farewell", "bonne chance" and "thank you" for four years of truly excellent work on behalf of the AfESG. We shall all miss the balanced perspective and good will which are Ruth's trademarks.