
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: AFRICAN ELEPHANT SPECIALIST GROUP

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Meeting in Kruger

From the 4th to the 11th of February 1996, the African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) held a membership meeting in Kruger National Park, South Africa. The Group was represented by a large turnout of nearly three-quarters of the members. It was a memorable meeting in several ways. On a technical level, members from around the continent presented updates on topics such as elephant translocation, human-elephant conflict, deterrence of crop-raiding elephants, tusklessness, forest and savanna elephant population dynamics, new survey results, elephant impact on habitats and progress with regard to research on elephant contraception. The current status of growing ivory stockpiles across the continent and the threats to safeguarding and securing them were explained to the Group. We listened with concern and frustration to reports from Central Africa about renewed elephant poaching and illegal ivory trading, inadequate legislation and judicial systems, exacerbated by massive corruption, and a desperate lack of government resources to combat these problems. On the encouraging side, we heard of the recent successes of the ELESMAF project which has been conducting a regional, cross-border survey of elephant populations in southern Africa over the past few months.

One day of the meeting was devoted to assisting the National Parks Board of South Africa in reviewing its elephant management policy for Kruger National Park. Extensive public criticism, both local and international, of Kruger's elephant culling policy, has inevitably put pressure on the Parks Board to review its management policy for the Park which harbours over 80% of South Africa's elephants.

Parks Board staff reviewed the history of Kruger and the development of its longstanding management policy. Other invited speakers presented overview papers which provided a strong conceptual backdrop to the subsequent discussions. The speakers also contributed insights into measuring the impact of elephants on biodiversity, defining "preferred management densities" within protected areas and

understanding the individual and synergistic effects of fire, elephants, artificial water and rainfall on vegetation dynamics. Discussions continued throughout the day on the role of research and its interface with management in formulating, adapting and implementing Kruger's policy into the future. We certainly hope that in accordance with its mandate to provide sound technical advice, the AfESG contributed in a meaningful way to the Parks Board's decision-making process which is still underway as we go to press.

Another day was taken up with working groups on five key topics: poaching and the ivory trade; habitat loss; local elephant overpopulation; human-elephant conflict and status of elephant populations. These discussions were held to provide active Group input to the development of a draft document consolidating ideas on priorities for elephant conservation in Africa. Incorporating suggestions for change and improvement during and after the meeting, the document is now moving into a second draft. It is hoped that ultimately, this document will become a working paper of the AfESG and serve as a useful guide for elephant managers and policy makers across the continent.

Among other recommendations, the working group suggested the establishment of a taskforce on human-elephant conflict to collect and organise all available information on the subject and examine the problems and solutions associated with conflict further. The human-elephant conflict taskforce will be voluntarily headed by Richard Hoare, whose extensive, relevant expertise from his ongoing work in Zimbabwe will no doubt help the process along.

A plenary session on the options for elephant management inside and outside protected areas was followed by discussions in two working groups. The talks provided a framework for making decisions on management options of elephants in different environments, under different policies, with differing problems, particularly with reference to forest and savanna habitats.

Further technical discussions were held during the meeting on the new IUCN Red List Categories of Threat. Prior to the meeting, members had not reached a consensus about the categorisation of the African elephant according to the new criteria but after further explanation, debate and discussion, the Group agreed to list the African elephant as Endangered, based on criterion A. 1(b).

On February 9, the Group passed a resolution stating that the "AfESG notes with concern the increases in poaching in Garamba National Park which constitute a grave threat to the remaining rhinos and elephants, and encourage the government of Zaire and international donors to give the necessary support to deal with the situation".

Last, but by no means least, the report *Four Years After the Cites Ban: Illegal Killing of Elephants, Ivory Trade and Stockpiles* was discussed by the AfESG members on two different occasions during the week. The objective of these sessions was to allow the members to air their views on the report in light of widely publicised controversy both within and outside the Group and to come to a mutual understanding on the way forward. In summary, the members at the meeting agreed by consensus that the accidental omission of the standard IUCN disclaimer in the original report should be rectified in all remaining copies. It was further agreed that the AfESG affirmed the professional integrity of the authors and found the personal nature of some of the criticisms both unjust and unacceptable.

The highlights of the meeting, with a selection of full papers, will be published in *Pachyderm* 22.

The African Elephant Database (AED)

The updated *African Elephant Database 1955* (Said, Chunge, Thouless, Craig, Barnes and Dublin, 1995) was completed and distributed prior to the AfESG meeting. In general the response to the updated AED has been positive. The new method of categorising elephant estimates into Definite, Probable, Possible and Speculative groups has been viewed as an objective and comprehensive attempt to display data according to their quality. The AfESG has secured funds for an additional three-year period for the AED. The next phase, which will involve more analysis and predictive modelling, will begin in May 1996 under the co-ordination of a newly-appointed database manager at the facility in Nairobi. The collaboration between the AfESG and the United Nations Environment Programme/Global Resource Information Database has been a real bonus for the project and the close co-operation bodes well for the next phase.

New AfESG Office for West and Central Africa

The new AfESG office in Cameroon became a reality in October 1995 with the appointment of Lamine Sebogo, from Burkina Faso, as the Programme Officer. After a spell in the WWF project office in Douala, Lamine moved to Yaoundé where he has been kindly accommodated in an IUCN project office. Members in West and Central Africa are urged to liaise directly with Lamine and to assist the AfESG to prioritise issues of concern for African elephant conservation in their region.

Projects

In the last few months the AfESG has been able to provide financial support to two new projects: one in Eastern Africa, where funds will allow the continuation of long-term radiotracking of elephants in Laikipia District, Kenya, and one in West Africa, where support is being given to a cross-border survey of elephants in northern Ghana and southern Togo. Technical advice was also given on a number of proposals which were sent to the AfESG office in Nairobi. One of these, a proposal for a collaborative survey of the elephant population in north-western Ethiopia and southwestern Eritrea, has since been offered funding by a donor.

Donors

None of the AfESG activities - the meeting, the AED, the new office, support to individual research initiatives, *Pachyderm* or the successful day-to-day running of the Secretariat in Nairobi - would be possible without the generous support of our donors, namely the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the European Commission, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the UK Department of Environment and the Sir Peter Scott Fund. We look forward to their continued support and to a productive year ahead.

Finally, as we move towards the end of another IUCN triennium, plans are well underway, in Gland and Chicago, for the next SSC meeting and the World Conservation Congress in Montreal, Canada, in October 1996. To allow the Secretariat to address your concerns and continue to move the AfESG forward in fulfilling its mandate, members are invited to send us their suggestions concerning future activities, functioning and direction of the AfESG in the next triennium.