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# CO-CHAIR REPORT: AFRICAN ELEPHANT SPECIALIST GROUP

Holly T. Dublin

WWF Regional Office, PO Box 62440, Nairobi, Kenya

From 27th May through the 1st of June 1994, members of the African Elephant Specialist Group met, greeted one another, watered, fed and relaxed together in Mombasa, Kenya. It was a traditional “meeting of the clan”. Following the recent rains, the habitat was lush, green and fertile as new, familiar, young and old faces joined for a week of intense and close interaction characterized by a free flow of information-sharing. For the first time ever, this sharing of information was expedited and enhanced significantly through simultaneous translation in French and English.

All members present, and others by proxy, reported the status of elephant conservation and management initiatives in 20 range states across the continent. Formal sessions covered a wide range of relevant topics, from the genetics of free-ranging forest and savanna elephants, to the translocation of live elephants, to the development of national elephant conservation plans and management policies, to the impact of elephants on habitats under increasing confinement, to the diagnosis and prevention of disease and notably to the continuing quest for a general theory of elephants, forests and dung.

This year’s plenary sessions and working groups focused on two main areas:

1. the interactions between people and elephants
2. the continued killing of elephants and illegal trafficking and trade in ivory.

A number of exceptional presentations (we hope to print many of these in future issues of *Pachyderm*) provided information from a broad geographical range and set the stage for lively and productive discussions in the working groups.

More than anything, the working groups confirmed the closely shared problems of African countries in each region of the elephants’ range on the continent. In particular, the realization and acknowledgement of the ever-growing and widespread conflict between people

and elephants provided impetus for members to work together to develop new and innovative solutions. To this end, the members delved into the design and use of barriers, the development of chemical deterrents, the involvement of local communities in the conservation and management of elephants inside and outside formally protected areas, strategies for dealing with problem animals and methods of evaluating and assessing elephant damage to life and property. A concerted effort was made to identify areas where these conflicts currently exist, to review ongoing attempts to ameliorate the conflict and to develop means to predict where similar conflict may arise in the future. Finally, recommendations from each group were drafted and presented back to the plenary for discussion and debate.

Following this, the members re-arranged themselves and Settled into working groups targetted at:

1. developing simple techniques for law enforcement personnel in the field for systematically monitoring the illegal killing of elephants
2. examining the problems of monitoring and managing national and international trade in elephant products and the registration and marking of ivory stockpiles in African range states.

Using their combined experience, the meeting participants developed basic guidelines for collecting field-based information on illegal activities. Many members benefitted from the knowledge of others on the obligations of parties under CITES regarding international trade in ivory and the current regulations of the European Union and the United States of America on the import of elephant hunting trophies. There were also extensive discussions on national legislation controlling the sale of ivory in many range states. Concern was expressed by a number of members regarding the growth of government ivory stockpiles and their future security under widespread declines in law enforcement budgets across the continent.

During formal plenary sessions and working groups,



members met individually with the Manager of the African Elephant Database to update the status and distribution of elephants in their respective countries. Albeit exhausting and time-consuming for all those involved, this devotion of special time to the task was well worth the effort. Ways of making the AED work “for” the membership in the future were also discussed throughout the meeting with many good ideas brought to the floor.

Special attention was also devoted to defining the desired role of the AESG in helping to improve information gathering and its dissemination. These technical topics of broad interest among the membership included collecting and synthesizing data on illegal

killing, trade and trafficking; compiling guidelines for dealing with human—elephant conflict; and promoting, through networking, the sharing of expertise and information across the range states.

Like every meeting, this one had its high and low points. A low point was watching our comrades fall to elephantine intestinal ailments. The high points were infinite and just kept on coming. The AESG is growing in membership, in scope and in cohesion. I am intensely gratified to be surrounded by so many willing, able and knowledgeable colleagues. Looking back over the past three years and embarking on a new three-year term with AESG, I could not have hoped for a better vote of confidence.