
Chairman 's Report

African Elephant Specialist Group

Holly T. Dublin

On behalf of the AESG Co-Chairs

Our November 1992 meeting in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, marked an important cornerstone in the history of the African Elephant Specialist Group (AESG). This was our first meeting since separating from our sister group, the African Rhino Specialist Group (ARSG), in July of 1992. About 35 (approximately half) of our members were in attendance at a very lively gathering which included many new faces. In addition to members, we had the benefit of expertise from several invited participants including Dr. R. Sukumar, our able colleague from the Asian Elephant Specialist Group, who was rapidly assimilated into the African elephant clique by very competently chairing one of our topical working groups.

In rebuilding the AESG, we have made a concerted effort to bring both the membership and the meetings onto a more technical level. Our success in this endeavor is exemplified by the hard work and individual efforts portrayed in the papers, working group summaries and abstracts comprising this issue of *Pachyderm*.

It was an AESG decision that this issue be dedicated to the proceedings of the Victoria Falls meeting. We hope that the text gives those of you who were unable to attend a general sense of our progress and those of you who were present good memories. The fact that African elephants continue to provide a unique and dynamic conservation challenge was underscored by the definite change since the last meeting in the focus of our deliberations.

The first day of the meeting was devoted to general presentations on new initiatives in the conservation and management of the African elephant. On the second day we heard country reports from all those range states represented. While day three was spent in regional working groups, our fourth and fifth days were distinctive in that members broke up into working groups on three special topics - aerial surveys, ground surveys and elephant-habitat interactions (the latter to be overviewed in the next

issue of *Pachyderm*). The mixing and blending of personalities, skills and experience made for lively and productive sessions throughout the meeting.

While many important points emerged during the week, a few deserve special note. Unlike the focus of many previous meetings regarding the African elephant over the past decade, the impact of poaching pressure on elephant survival did not feature significantly in this gathering. This year, more than ever before, country after country reported an increase in the incidence of human/elephant conflict outside protected areas. Although few scientific studies have been undertaken, the general consensus was that the increase in conflict has been commensurate with a decrease in poaching activity. While elephant lives are clearly being saved, we are now faced with increasing loss of both human lives and property. The irony of the situation is inescapable but the problem is no less serious because of it. The need for dedication towards developing management strategies for elephants outside parks and reserves is taking on a definite sense of urgency.

All the regional working groups expressed strong interest in the monitoring and trafficking of the ivory trade, both within Africa and between Africa and the end-user markets in Asia. While members from central, west and eastern Africa expressed their belief that the trade was much diminished in their regions, a general concern was voiced that ivory trafficking in portions of the southern African region continues to be a problem. The AESG hopes to work closely with TRAFFIC to move forward on this initiative in the coming year.

In addition to the practical issues of conservation, the AESG membership voiced their strong support for the continuation of a continental database on elephant numbers and distribution. While formulating the necessary actions to achieve this goal was not possible in an abroad forum, such as an annual

meeting; I felt that there was an urgent need for an overall review of all the data needs of the AESG with regard to its terms-of-reference. To this end, I appointed a task force to assist the AESG in defining and detailing the technical data needs of the Group. Among other issues, the task force is mandated to establish more quantitative guidelines for the assessment of data quality across populations, to develop more distinct definitions of elephant range, to set criteria for the “usable” life of population estimates and to more closely define the future role and character of the African Elephant Database. It is also our hope that this task force will provide general guidance on priority data needs in other topical areas of concern to the AESG.

And last, but by no means least, the AESG again strongly endorsed and emphasised the continued need to obtain realistic estimates of elephant numbers and

distribution in the largely unexplored Central African region. This daunting task is made ever more difficult by the gruelling field conditions and the constant struggle to secure sufficient funds.

To our traditional concerns for the African elephant are added new and more challenging dilemmas all the time. It is gratifying to know that so many of you are committed to working together to gain new insights to old problems and to formulate innovative approaches to new problems. There can be no doubt that our challenges are cut out for us! I believe the meeting in Victoria Falls clearly demonstrated to those of us present that the AESG has embarked on a period of reconciliation and technical growth. I hope you share my optimism and will each continue to contribute constructively, through your individual strengths and expertise, to the conservation and management of the African elephant.

Rapport des Présidents du GSEA

Holly T. Dublin

Au nom des Co-Présidents du GSEA

Notre réunion de novembre 1992 qui s’est tenue aux Chutes Victoria, au Zimbabwe, a marqué un tournant important dans l’histoire du Groupe des Spécialistes de l’Eléphant Africain (GSEA). C’était notre première réunion depuis notre séparation d’avec le groupe frère, le Groupe des Spécialistes des Rhinocéros Africains (GSRA), en juillet 1992. Près de 35 (à peu près la moitié) de nos membres ont participé à une réunion très vivante, qui a présenté de nombreux nouveaux visages. En plus des membres, nous avons eu la chance de profiter de l’expérience de plusieurs invités, comme le Dr.R.Sukumar, notre compétent collègue du Groupe de Spécialistes de l’Eléphant d’Asie, qui fut rapidement intégré dans la coterie de l’Eléphant africain en dirigeant de façon très efficace un de nos groupes de travail.

En reconstruisant le GSEA, nous avons voulu solliciter de ses membres comme de ses réunions, un niveau plus technique. Nous voulons pour preuve de notre réussite en ce sens le travail intense et les efforts

individuels rapportés dans les articles, les résumés des groupes de travail et les extraits repris dans ce numéro de *Pachyderm*. C’est le GSEA qui a décidé que ce numéro serait consacré aux débats de la réunion des Chutes Victoria. Nous espérons que le texte donnera à ceux d’entre vous qui n’ont pas pu y assister une bonne idée de nos progrès et rappellera de bons souvenirs à ceux qui étaient présents. Le fait que les éléphants africains continuent à être un défi unique et dynamique pour la conservation fut souligné par le changement manifeste survenu depuis la dernière réunion quant au centre de nos discussions.

Le premier jour de la réunion fut consacré à la présentation générale de nouvelles initiatives touchant la conservation et la gestion de l’éléphant africain. Le deuxième jour, nous avons entendu les rapports de tous les pays abritant des éléphants qui étaient représentés. On a passé le troisième jour, répartis en groupes de travail régionaux, mais le quatrième et le cinquième furent différents en ceci que les membres