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The Endangered Wildlife Trust/IUCN Elephant Survey and Conservation Programme

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Endangered Wildlife Trust of South Africa

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**THE ENDANGERED WILDLIFE TRUST/IUCN
ELEPHANT SURVEY AND CONSERVATION PROGRAMME***

by **Clive Walker**

1. CONSERVATION/RESEARCH

1.1 Tongaland Elephant Survey (Maputoland)

In the northeastern border area of South Africa, known as Tongaland, live the last remaining elephants outside a protected area in South Africa. Negotiations are already under way by the administration of KwaZulu to set aside some of this area as a National Wildlife Conservation area, a move which should be encouraged. This might finally require fencing, as in Addo.

An ecological survey of the elephants and the human/elephant conflict in Tongaland was recommended as a basis for establishing a reserve and in subsequently managing it. The Endangered Wildlife Trust initiated this project in conjunction with the Eugene Marais Chair of Wildlife Management, University of Pretoria.

This project commenced in May 1979, under the direction of Prof. Bothma, assisted by Clive Walker and jointly sponsored by the University of Pretoria and the Trust.

Originally it was believed only bulls inhabited this region, and the subsequent survey has revealed beyond doubt the existence of cows and calves. Interaction with Mocambique across the border fence presents certain problems as the elephants move to and fro regularly.

High Priority

1.2 Elephant Introduction to Pilanesberg National Park - Bophuthatswana

The Trust has been approached with a view to the capture and translocation of elephants from Damaraland, South West Africa. A small group of elephants numbering some 35 inhabit an area where a human/elephant conflict exists, which may necessitate culling in the event of non-removal.

Cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, South West Africa Division of Nature Conservation, the Endangered Wildlife Trust and the University of Pretoria is currently under discussion with a view to carrying out such a project. To date three young elephants from Addo Elephant Park in the Cape Province have been successfully introduced into a special enclosure. These will eventually be released into the main reserve of 60,000 ha.

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1.3 Kaokoland, S.W.A./Namibia

Urgent research on one of Africa's most endangered and unique elephant populations living within a desert environment is under way by the South African Nature Foundation, University of Pretoria and the Endangered Wildlife Trust.

Despite urgent recommendations in the Trust Report, protection in this region is not forthcoming. Research of these elephants is a lost cause unless special attention is urgently given to this unacceptable situation and consideration of the Eloff Report to the South African Government.

1.4 Research and Management of Elephants on Klaserie Park National Reserve

Research and management of the 200 elephants on the above range (total 67,000 hectare) which forms a buffer zone to the Kruger National Park is complete, initiated by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (E.W.T.) -- this is only one of two privately owned reserves with viable elephant populations in South Africa. A degree of danger exists due to movement out of the sanctuaries, where the animals are liable to be shot or culled. Both reserves, an area which includes the Timbavati Reserve of 60,000 ha., must be regarded as safe and under excellent control.

1.5 Tuli Research Programme, Botswana

A two-year study is now complete on the elephant population and habitat. This work was initiated and funded by the Endangered Wildlife Trust and will provide the basis for future management. It was conducted by Bruce Page under the direction of Prof. Brian Walker of the Witwatersrand University.

Recommendations by the Trust to realign the veterinary fence afforded a vital measure for survival. Future aerial surveys to monitor elephant densities and movement will be conducted by the Trust. Disturbance, food and water availability during 1979 resulted in elephant movement into the Tuli circle of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and eastern zone along Shashi River. Reported sightings by Rhodesian (Zimbabwean) wildlife authorities confirm this. No elephants were recorded during an aerial survey conducted in November 1979 by E.W.T. Regular aerial surveys have been conducted since 1976.

There is an urgent necessity for all landowners to undertake land management as current habitat is considerably downgraded and could cause a further decline in elephants, presently down to about 350 from 600.

High Priority

2. REPORT OF ELEPHANT CONSERVATION ACTIVITY BY OTHER AUTHORITIES

2.1 Elephant Introduction to Londolozi/Sabie Sand

Reintroduction of young elephants into the private game ranch of Londolozi within Sabie Sand Park Nature Reserve was initiated two years ago by Londolozi Game Trust from Kruger Park capture programmes. To date a total of 23 young

male and female elephants have been introduced. Six have died as a result of lion predation but the balance are thriving and free ranging. The reserve has now a total of 30 elephants, which includes mature bulls previously resident. This unique, outstanding conservation project is due entirely to the foresight of John and David Varty and is of considerable scientific and conservation value.

2.2 Maputo Elephant Reserve, Mocambique

Paul Dutton reports from Maputo the decline of elephants within the above range. Uncontrolled burning of the floodplain is the main limiting factor. Southward movement into Tongaland has obviously come about, with resulting human disturbance.

The authorities plan to implement a comprehensive management programme soon including adjustments to the existing ecological limits.

2.3 Knysna Forest Elephants

A relict population of 12 to 13 elephants has existed in Knysna Forest since at least 1929. Although difficult to see, these have been inventoried and some work has been done on their feeding habits. A new highway is planned which will cut off a quarter of the forest. It is too early to comment further on this situation due to lack of information, which is presently being sought from the Department of Forestry, under whose control the elephants fall.

2.4 Introduction of Elephants to the Umfolozi Game Reserve, Natal

Negotiations are currently under way by the Natal Parks Board and the National Parks Board of South Africa to introduce elephants into the Umfolozi Game Reserve, which last saw them in the 1860s. It is planned to introduce seven elephants, which are expected to come from Addo Park.

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