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Clive Walker

Endangered Wildlife Trust of South Africa

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**REPORT TO THE SURVIVAL SERVICE COMMISSION, IUCN
AND THE ENDANGERED WILDLIFE TRUST:
KAOKOLAND, SOUTH WEST AFRICA / NAMIBIA***

by **Clive Walker**

It is with the utmost urgency that I draw your attention to my recent visit to Kaokoland with Professor F.C. Eloff's expedition during September 1978, with the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Kaokoland is in the northwestern part of South West Africa/Namibia and covers an area of some 5½ million hectares (22,000 square miles) and at present is under the control of the South African Government and falls under the Minister of Plural Relations, Dr. C. Mulder.

The most striking topographic feature of the region is the many mountains, from the dolomite hills in the south to the stark ridges and isolated eminences rising from the highland plains and to the towering peaks of the Northern Baynes and Otjihipa ranges. A rugged escarpment runs parallel to the coast (an average of eighty kilometers inland), dividing the interior plateau from the lower lying semi-desert steppe, which gradually merges into the gravel flats and shifting dunes of the Namib. In the east, the sandy plains of Ovamboland overlap the Kaokoveld for about 40 kilometers. (G. Owen-Smith).

The Kaokoveld Highlands are well bushed, below the escarpment; the plains are treeless or lightly wooded whilst good tree coverage lines the large river courses.

The semi-desert region is well grassed whilst the Namib coast is devoid of vegetation.

Apart from numerous endemic species of plant and lesser animal life, some unique to the western Kaokoveld, the broad plains of the sub-desert support large numbers of springbok, gemsbok, and zebra, and the river courses that traverse the region are the stronghold of the elephant, rhinoceros, giraffe, lion and cheetah. (G. Owen-Smith).

The Kaokoveld and adjoining Namib Desert are also of extreme international importance in the conservation of natural systems, as this is probably the last place in Africa where big game (e.g. elephant, black rhino, giraffe and lion) occur on a desert coast by following the seasonal river courses which traverse the desert. Elephant and rhino also walk across the bare desert between river courses, a distance of 45 kilometers or more.

The Kaokoveld and adjoining Skeleton Coast are the last places where research can be done into the manner in which wild ungulates adapt themselves to the desert environment. This would give an insight into the real potential of the deserts under natural conditions with the whole spectrum of life. (K. Tinley, 1971).

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Nowhere on the sub-continent is there anything to match the outstanding natural features of this region or the various species that have adapted to this desert and semi-desert environ. Sharing this region are an estimated 16 - 18,000 people, mainly confined to northeastern Kaokoland.

The following reports detail the full spectrum of the total region:

The Kaokoveld - An Ecological Base for Future Development Planning,
by Garth Owen-Smith, 1968-1970.

Etosha and the Kaokoveld by Ken Tinley, 1971.

Master Plan for the Conservation, Management and Utilization of Nature
Reserves in Damaraland and Kaokoland by Prof. F.C. Eloff, University
of Pretoria, August 1977.

It is a lamentable fact that very few, if any, of the recommendations put forward have been implemented nor will they be in the foreseeable future.

Until the end of 1977 members of the public could not enter this region without a permit. The area was closed to all except officials and the Defense Forces. Persistent rumors of destruction of wildlife led to the press becoming involved during 1977. These reports painted a picture for concern and led to the Endangered Wildlife Trust taking an interest in the situation (see photostats).

The question of the elephant and rhino is of considerable concern as the fear is that the political ferment in pre-independent South West Africa is leaving a void in areas that are out of the control of the Department of Nature Conservation which presently has no say whatsoever in either Kaokoland or Damaraland.

The Kaokoland elephant, the true desert population, may now number less than 80. That this population is probably unique in the world, I have no doubt. So little is known of this race as to place them on the list of the MOST endangered elephant population in Africa. In spite of reports to the contrary, there is enough evidence to strongly refute large migration from Etosha.

The black rhino is in a far worse situation with possibly fewer than 12 to 15 animals in the whole of Kaokoland. The fact that we found the remains of three rhinos and four elephants highlights the position as one for grave concern. In the case of the elephants, the tusks had been chopped out in three of the four animals examined; the other skull was missing.

In 1974, the then Department of Bantu Administration in Pretoria approached Prof. F.C. Eloff of the Department of Zoology, University of Pretoria, to carry out a major study in Damaraland and Kaokoland. This resulted in a 2½-year full-time investigation, and an extensive report was submitted during August 1977 to the South African government.

With the opening of Kaokoland to the public during 1978, inroads into the region have commenced in the inevitable fashion of irresponsible domination of the wilderness.

CONCLUSION:

Those responsible for Kaokoland must be approached, bearing political considerations in mind, to ensure the preservation of this unique area.

1. Total ban on elephant, rhino and giraffe hunting regardless of who does it.
2. Restriction on the number of vehicles entering the area and a halt to the increase of pollution.
3. Implementation of the Eloff report and the recommendation of an urgent elephant and rhino study to be undertaken by the University of Pretoria, requesting possible funding by the South African Nature Foundation and the Endangered Wildlife Trust.
4. Establishment of a multi-national coordinating board to implement recommendations and control of the region up to the time of responsible governmental hand-over.
5. The control of Kaokoland and Damaraland conservation should ultimately fall within the present Department of Nature Conservation for South West Africa/Namibia.

No conservation officer has worked in Kaokoland, an area of 22,000 square miles, for the past 2 1/2 years; furthermore, the area appears to have NO conservation status whatsoever!

Author's address: Endangered Wildlife Trust of South Africa, P.O. Box 645,
Bedfordview 2008, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa.