

Unexpected Wildlife Abundance in Southern Sudan

By Gerhard R Damm

The Dr Mike Fay of the Wildlife Conservation Society, together with the autonomous government of South Sudan, announced that a study had revealed an abundance of antelope, particularly of white-eared kob. Flying over an area of about 590,000 sq km sandwiched between the Sahara and a belt of tropical forests, scientists witnessed a column of animals in their seasonal migration through grasslands and swamps that was 80kms long and 48kms across. They estimated the population of the white-eared kob at about 800,000, Mongalla gazelle at about 250,000, about 160,000 topi (tiang) and 13,000 reedbuck.

Maj. Gen. Alfred Akwoch, undersecretary of the Ministry of the Environment, Wildlife Conservation & Tourism for the Southern Sudan, said "although we were telling people that wildlife was still present in southern Sudan, nobody believed us." Readers of African Indaba will remember that in 2003, the late Peter Pichler, hunting safari outfitter from Uganda, had already traveled to Southern Sudan and discussed wildlife issues with Maj. Gen. Alfred Akwoch. He also presented the Southern Sudan Wildlife Force at that time with several boxes of my book "The Conservation Game". Pichler personally told me at that time about the rich game populations in some areas he visited.



The late Peter Pichler presenting Major General Akwoch of the SA Wildlife Force with boxes of "The Conservation Game" in 2003

The researchers around Dr Fay said that they also found at least 8,000 elephants in the upper Nile river valley, the largest freshwater wetland in Africa as well as fresh clues that an even greater number of elephants had passed through Boma park and the Jonglei region. Other species found in southern Sudan were 8,900 buffalo, 2,800 ostriches, as well as lion, leopard, giraffe, crocodile and hippo. Biologists have even seen Oryx, which were thought to be extinct there. The research team plans to go back and conduct further surveys which should show that this survey actually underestimated many animal populations.

The kob migration they observed is close to the size of migrating herds of wildebeest on the Serengeti, long considered the biggest migration of mammals. But Dr. Fay and his colleagues suspect that because they were replicating pre civil war survey methods, their estimates to be low. New survey methods, such as digital photography, would likely raise it above the Serengeti. "My personal feeling is that it's the biggest migration on earth," Dr. Fay said, "we just haven't proved it yet."

Geography may explain much of the surprising survey results. Poachers on horseback could ride into the western part of Southern Sudan, but the Nile River and the notorious Sudd swamp may have acted as an impenetrable shield protecting the eastern region of Southern Sudan.

The WCS review was not universally positive. In the south-west of the region up to 90% of species had been lost. There were no buffalo where in 1981 there were estimated to have been 60,000 and only one group of elephants was sighted, where some 10,000 had been estimated to roam in the past," said Paul Elkan, head of the WCS's program in southern Sudan.

In other parts, zebra populations appear to have been wiped out. Zebra used to number up to 20,000 in the Boma National Park, in the south-east corner of the autonomous region, but were not visible to the survey planes.

The animals in the region remain at risk, because poachers have automatic weapons to decimate herds, thousands of refugees are returning to the region, and oil exploration is taking place within migration corridors of the kob.

Northern White Rhino Hope

By Gerhard R Damm

Whether the remnant population of Northern White Rhino is still viable, or whether there are indeed any survivors is unknown at present. By 2000 the species had been reduced to 30 animals in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Garamba National Park. By last year there were only four left.

There are ten animals in zoos, however: seven in Dvur Králové in the Czech Republic and three in San Diego. Only two of them are fertile females and both – a mother and her offspring are in Dvur.

Robert Hermes, a zoologist at Berlin's Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, and his colleagues Frank Goritz and Thomas Hildebrandt, work in cooperation with several other groups in European zoos in order to prevent that the Northern White Rhino join the blue buck and quagga into extinction. Hermes and his colleagues are testing instruments and methods for artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization and sex-selection of embryos and are hopeful to launch the program still this year. It is critical that the two reproductive cows in the Czech Republic are used in a captive breeding program, in order to stave off the danger of extinction in a seemingly hopeless population bottleneck situation.

Continued on Page 12

Continued from Page 11
Northern White Rhino Hope

Hermes' team is using up-to-date medical methods, including ultrasound scanners and instruments and some success has already been achieved by the birth of a southern white rhino calf in the Budapest zoo earlier this year. The experience gained there could be applied to its northern cousin. It is planned to artificially inseminate one of the cows at Dvur later this year. There might be another way to overcome the situation of having only two reproductive females available. Researchers are learning now to remove eggs from ageing rhinos, allowing them to build up stocks of northern white eggs, which could then be fertilized. The resulting embryos could be implanted in southern whites, which would act as surrogate mothers for the species. The scientists are also planning to use separation techniques to split female-producing sperm from the male-producing version in order to "produce" only female northern rhino calves for further breeding programs.

There still might be hope for the northern white rhino.

Deadly Encounters

Central African Republic

In May 2 persons were killed and 3 injured on the road crossing concession #21 (N'Goumbiri Safaris) in the north of the country after their safari vehicle was shot at by 6 Sudanese poachers. Daniel Breyton, a Frenchman working as camp manager for Hunting-Vision-Safaris was killed instantly by a shot to his head; the wife of a tracker was seriously wounded and died later. Aoumar Aboussair, a CAR PH was seriously wounded by 4 gun shots from AK47s; another woman and a man were wounded in the attack. The victims were traveling with other staff from the safari company. The survivors fled into the bush and walked to 6 km the camp of Goumbiri Safaris.

Congo DR

A conservationist was killed and 2 park guards wounded on May 19th when Mai Mai militia attacked their gorilla observation post in DR Congo. A third guard was believed abducted. The Nature Conservation Institute suspects locals living illegally in the Virunga National Park of ordering militias to attack the post to frighten off conservationists and persuade DRC authorities into a compromise with locals illegally farming park areas. At least 10,000 people are still living in the park, whose preservation was declared a priority by the DRC environment ministry.

Kenya

3 rangers and 4 poachers were killed and another ranger seriously wounded on May 18th in a firefight in Tana River District, a remote area notorious for poaching activities.

Namibia

2 game guards were trampled to death by an elephant in the Mahango Game Park/Kavango Region. Environment Minister Willem Konjore said in a statement that the elephant had been killed and an investigation had been ordered.

South Africa

Professional Hunter Nick Kilbride, son-in-law of Outfitter

Angus Brown, and the pilot died in a helicopter accident at the Mpofo Game Lodge near Lephalale. A CAA senior manager for accident investigations said the final cause had not been established, but it was believed the Robinson R22 hit a fence.

Uganda

A total of 13 people have been killed by crocodiles in Mayuge district since the year began. The crocodiles mainly attack fishermen, women and children from communities that border Lake Victoria.

Zimbabwe

A game scout, who allegedly tried to poach an elephant in Gonarezhou NP was gored to death. A large bull with 70lb tusks was found dead nearby. In two more cases, a Chirundu man was trampled to death by an elephant on the Zambezi and an elephant trampled a man to death while he and his son tried to scare the pachyderms from their fields in the Zambezi Valley. A couple working their cotton field in Mushumbi were killed by a buffalo which went on to kill a 25-year-old man.

In other attacks, 2 British tourists, a mother and her 10-year-old daughter, were trampled to death by an elephant in Hwange in March and in Mwenzi district, a crocodile killed and ate a young boy in April. A young Australian diplomat on her first overseas posting was badly mauled by lions at Harare's Lion and Cheetah Park in April.

PH Christo Kaiser Killed

By Tharia Unwin, Johan Galitz Safaris

The hunting fraternity was shocked to learn about the tragic death of Christo Andre Kaiser (40), owner of Unico Hunting Safaris from Limpopo in South Africa. Christo accompanied 2 Spanish hunters and their families and friends on an elephant safari. The party arrived 10th of May 2007 in hunting concession NG42 in northern Botswana.

On 11th May on their way to camp, Christo and a tracker spotted some elephant at a pan. They left the vehicle to observe the herd. Christo was unarmed. Unseen and without warning or provocation, a young elephant cow charged them from the side. Christo and the tracker ran to the vehicle for cover. Unfortunately Christo did not reach the vehicle and was savagely attacked by the cow. The tracker frantically blew the vehicle's horn and drove towards the enraged animal, which stopped her attack and ran away, leaving a critically injured Christo behind.

The tracker called professional hunters Henk Vorster and Dave Lincoln to the scene by radio. They immediately put a medical evacuation plan in action and started applying first aid. However, Christo had suffered fatal internal injuries and died before the MRI helicopter could get him to Maun.

Hunting operators in Botswana said that they are devastated by Christo's tragic death. "We have lost a great friend, a gentleman and a true professional whose integrity served as example to us all. Christo was a unique and special person. His memory will live forever in the hearts of those who had the honor and privilege to know him." Christo leaves behind his wife Tania, daughters Talya (9), Lane (6) and Christi (2) as well as his mother, brother, two sisters and a grandmother.

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Editorial

The CITES Conference of Parties 14 has come and gone and what a meeting it was. Read the report of CIC's Director General Kai Wollscheid on Page two of this issue. Just some short remarks from my side – Kenya's divisive approach did not bear fruit; neither in the black rhino issue nor in the leopard quotas. But it certainly made for some long nights for those who wanted solutions for the African elephant.

Some heartening news came from Southern Sudan with the upbeat report about the wildlife populations in this country. Seems that there is far more wildlife left than the greatest optimists ever dreamt of. The late Peter Pichler said this in African Indaba already four years ago.

Congratulations must go to the Namibian Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs and the Kyaramacan Association for receiving the coveted 2007 CIC Edmond Blanc Award for their sterling work to open two new hunting concessions in the Bwabwata National Park in Namibia's Caprivi Strip. The awards ceremony in the Serbian Parliament in Belgrade and the long-lasting applause bear testimony to a job well done!

I hope that the Minister will take this as encouragement to involve more local communities and open more new hunting concessions. Namibia's track record of a sensible triple-bottom-line approach to nature conservation is an example for other African nations to follow.

We are grateful to the editor of "African Outfitter" to give African Indaba permission to reprint two articles about leopard hunting in Southern Africa. The issue of hunting leopard with hounds has created quite some debate and you can now read the views of a houndsman and an old professional hunter.

In the last minute, before closing this issue, I received a very disturbing report from Philippe Chardonnet, director of the International Foundation for the Conservation of Wildlife (IGF) about Sudanese elephant poachers in Sudan. With this report included, the July issue of African Indaba has again exceeded the planned page limit, but it is so important that I did not want to wait for the September issue also in connection with the report about the violent death of Daniel Breyton at the hands of Sudanese poachers (see "Deadly Encounters").

I have not included a full report about the 54th CIC General Assembly in Belgrade. But you can read details about this on the CIC website www.cic-wildlife.org. Let it be said, however, that the co-operation between the international hunting associations and the representatives of IUCN, CITES and FAO was more than satisfying. This must be said especially about the

workshop "Trophy Hunting, Hunting Trophies and Trophy Recording". African Indaba was proud to have the CIC logo in the title line of two special issues dealing with this topic. The pre-workshop issue was sent already in May, but you can download it also at www.africanindaba.co.za/Archive07/AfricanIndabaVol5-3SpecIssue2.pdf.

African Indaba published the key note presentations of the workshop as well as reviews, comments and articles in hunting media in a follow-up special edition; use this link www.africanindaba.co.za/HuntingTrophies/AfricanIndabaVol5-3SpecIssue2.pdf to download.

The topics of the Belgrade workshop will be re-visited during the July conference of the Society of Conservation Biologists in port Elizabeth/South Africa. Make sure that you get the next African Indaba with reports from there.

Last not least I would like to thank the many readers via this editorial for their encouragement and thumps-up! African Indaba is a non-commercial one-man show, yet, the preparation involves a lot of people who volunteer their contributions and work free-of-charge. I take the opportunity to thank them too!

Sincerely
Gerhard R Damm
Editor & Publisher

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

	Page
Editorial	1
"Only one Elephant in this Room ..."	
Report From CITES CoP 14 in The Hague	2
CITES & CIC Work Together	4
One Shot Hunt Club in South Africa	5
News From Africa	6
Bowhunting Course at SAWC	9
CIC Edmond Blanc Award 2007 Goes to Namibia	10
Northern White Rhino Hope	11
Unexpected Wildlife Abundance in Southern Sudan	11
Deadly Encounters	12
PH Christo Kaiser Killed By Elephant	12
Southern African Leopard Hunting Perspectives	13
Global Tourism: A Multi-Million Dollar Venture	18
Belgrade CIC Trophy Hunting Workshop Report	18
Central African Republic: Elephants in Turmoil	19
Migratory Species: Working towards a Vision for 2020	21
Why Tanzania was well advised to withdraw its proposal to CITES to sell 100 tons of ivory	22

For hunter-conservationists and all people who are interested in the conservation, management and the sustainable use of Africa's wild natural resources.

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