

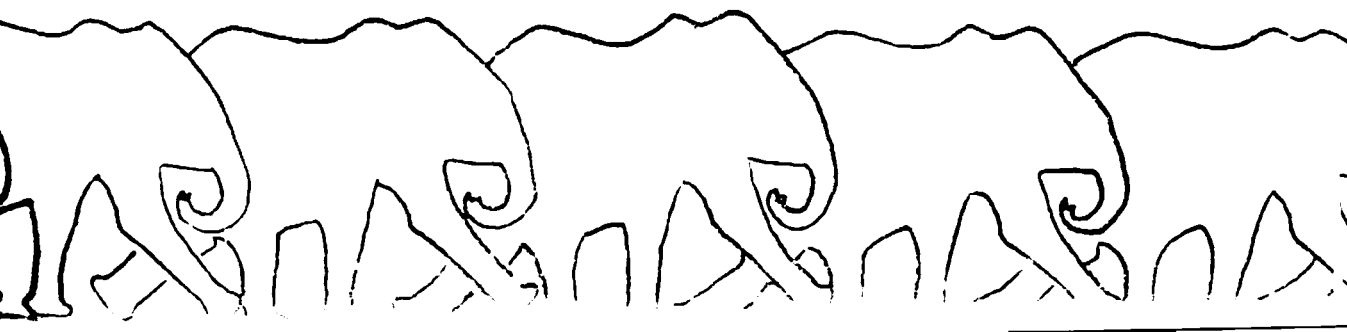
The future of elephant and rhino in Damaraland and Kaokoland

EDITOR - Barry Clements

THE NAMIBIA WILDLIFE TRUST was formed in 1982 by a group of concerned conservationists who were alarmed by the wilful slaughter of game species in Namibia/South West Africa. A programme of protection was worked out for the large mammals of the arid desert areas - in particular the elephant black rhino giraffe and Hartman zebra all of which occur outside proclaimed game reserves or parks in an area commonly known as Kaokoland and Damaraland. Once the Trust had been officially registered in April 1982 we then looked for support wherever we could find it.

It is time we acknowledged the aid and support given by the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (United Kingdom) the Endangered Wildlife Trust (RSA) and the Wildlife Society of South West Africa which enabled our project to get underway. The Trust is also indebted to the Department of Nature Conservation for invaluable assistance in the translocation of game. Without the backing that the abovementioned organisations have given - there would not have been a Namibia Wildlife Trust.

The top priority of the Trust however is the immediate protection of the elephant and rhino which inhabit the desert areas east of the Skeleton Coast Park. It is an area of incredible scenic beauty not of any mining or agricultural potential and almost uninhabited by humans. It is thus ideal for conservation purposes and was in fact part of the original Etosha Game Reserve.



The groups of ivory and rhino poachers who have been operating in the area can only be thwarted by continual patrolling and acute vigilance. We have put men in the field in four wheel drive vehicles as anti-poaching units to cooperate with the Department of Nature Conservation in their patrols and fieldwork. At present there are three staff members doing this work but the area to be covered is vast and it is hoped that further contributions will be forthcoming so as to enable the Trust to employ a full team of fieldworkers and thus help ensure a future for the precious wildlife of these areas. At the same time the Trust has combined educational work into the programme which is being run by Garth Ower-Smith who is well acquainted with the area and the people.

The costs of running this project are high because of the vast area that needs to be covered and the fact that operations are most successful when backed up by small spotter aircraft. The Trust would like to place on record its gratitude to Mr Martin Bertens and Mr Hans Kriess, businessmen from Swakopmund (fuel has been provided by Trust funds) who provide and fly the aircraft.

Time is of essence and one cannot allow the project to be held up by lack of funds if the protection of the last remnants of the elephants and rhino surviving within this unique habitat to which they have adapted are to be saved. Should the elephant and rhino become exterminated from the desert, it would be extremely unlikely that they could be replaced with animals from more vegetated areas as the inherent knowledge of the location of hidden waterholes, sometimes as much as 70 kilometres apart, is passed on from generation to generation.

The Namibia Wildlife Trust has become a vital organisation which may well determine the future of the Northern Desert wildlife. At stake is the extinction or survival of the 'desert' elephant and black rhinoceros. In a more sentimental vein the Trust would like to ensure that our children have the privilege of seeing an elephant crossing the sand dunes of the Namib as they have been doing since time immemorial. In reality the Trust is doing all that is possible to safeguard an irreplaceable part of a unique ecosystem.

