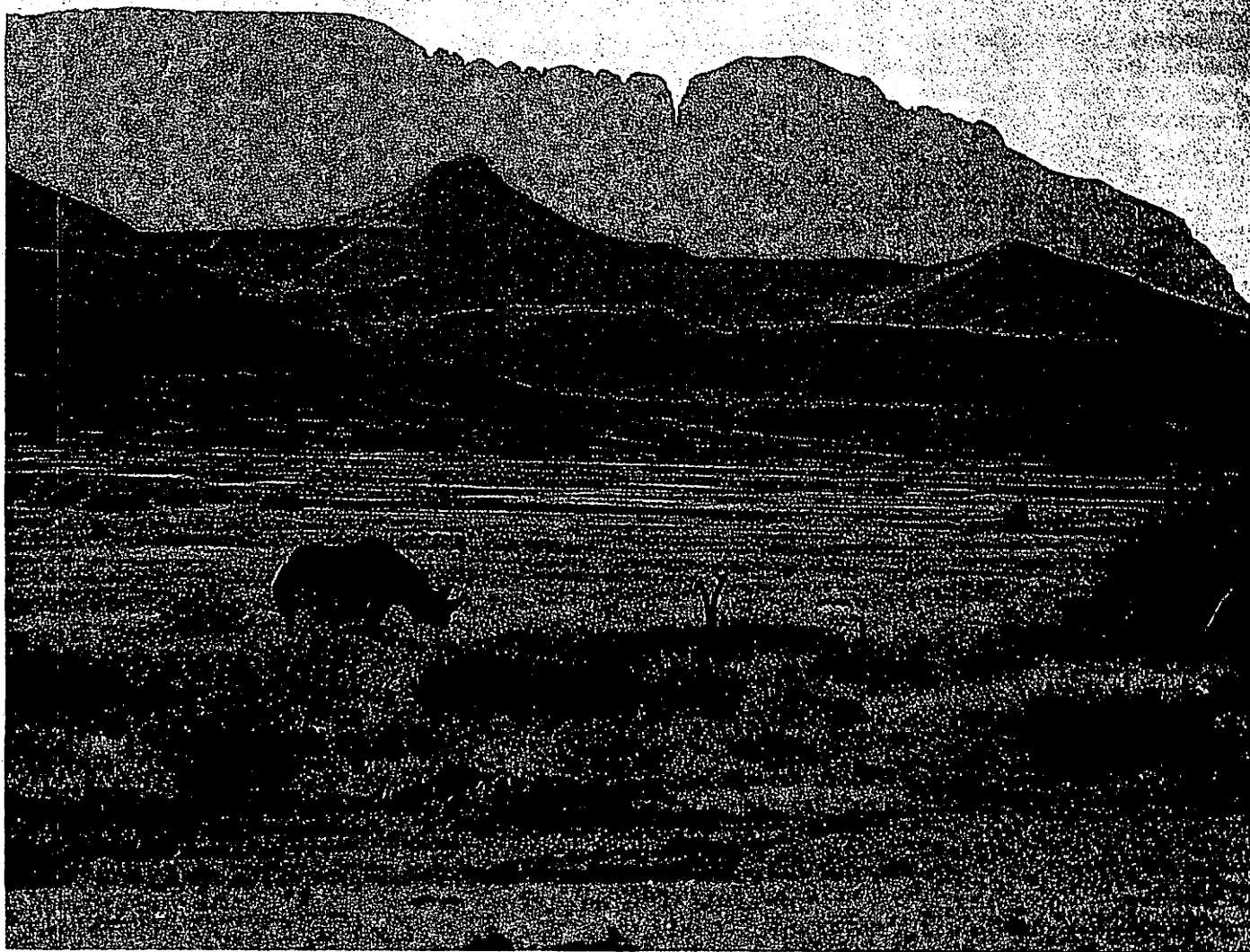




THE RHINOS OF DAMARALAND — HOW ARE THEY FARING?



by Blythe Loutit
Elephant and Rhino Monitoring Project.

In 1980 the estimated number of Black Rhinoceros in Damaraland was 30 animals, with only 10 in Kaokoland. The terrible population crash during the later 1970's and early 1980's was mainly due to poaching and the population dropped from an estimated 100 in Damaraland and 150 in Kaokoland (Gart Owen-Smith, pers comm).

The poaching massacre was curtailed by intervention from concerned conservationists both from the Government Department of Agriculture and Nature Conservation and from the private sector, when a number of non-government organisations combined their funds to help protect the rhino and elephant of Damaraland. One of these "NGO's" was the Endangered Wildlife Trust which sponsored vehicles, fuel, salaries and expenses amounting to over R150 000 during a period of active re-

search, extension work and education.

Since 1984 the Department of Agriculture and Nature Conservation has increased its staff in the region and poaching of rhino and other game is better controlled. However, three rhino were poached during the past two years, and it is imperative therefore that the monitoring and surveillance of the rhino population continue. Extension work amongst the local human population must also be maintained if we are to keep the prospective poachers at bay. Aerial surveillance is an essential factor to reach inaccessible places. Ground monitoring of rhino movements with records of each individual rhino has been meticulously conducted and identification files have been compiled.

The Black Rhino population is be-

ginning to increase in Damaraland. The rest of Africa is experiencing a crash in the rhino population — the Central African Republic, for example, expects its rhino to become extinct this year, due to poaching (Spinage 1986). In Damaraland the numbers are now up to 60 plus and new calves are frequently recorded. This is an extremely critical stage and we should double our efforts to protect this population. The illegal traders in rhino horn are poised on the fringes, waiting for the first 'chink in the armour'. The ever-present threat of the greedy trader is always at hand and until these middle-men are defeated, poaching will not vanish completely from the rhino and elephant scene.

Reference

C.A. Spinage. *Pachyderm* Number 6. February 1986.

