

REPORT BACK

POACHING ESCALATES IN GARAMBA NATIONAL PARK

FLOPPY TRUNK SYNDROME



Africa - Environment & Wildlife featured the Garamba National Park in Vol. 2, no. 5. Entitled 'Riding High in Garamba', it was a story full of hope for the future of the elephants in one of Africa's oldest proclaimed conservation areas.

We were disheartened - but not unduly surprised - to read the following account. The 12-year civil war in Sudan, Africa's largest country, has destroyed much of Sudan's wildlife and now threatens to have a similar impact on neighbouring Zaïre.

The threat of poaching in Garamba National Park - a 4 864 square-kilometre UNESCO World Heritage Site that is home to the last known northern white rhinoceros in the wild, as well as some 11 000 elephants and the only Zaïrean population of giraffes - increased significantly following the capture of Maridi by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in 1991, and the subsequent influx of refugees to Zaïre.

The local field office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 60 000 refugees are in the area to the west of the park, with a further 20 000 to the east. Of these, 43 000 are in camps, while the rest are scattered in the three reserves surrounding the park. Both the refugees and the local Zaïreans have access to arms and are able to live off the land

and exploit it commercially. Bushmeat from the reserves and park is available for sale in the local markets.

The greatest threat, however, comes from across the border where rebel armies need food - armed with automatic weapons and hand grenades, they poach animals from the park. Refugee registration, Sudanese identity documents and Sudanese money attest to the poachers' origins. Buffalo are the main prey - their numbers have declined from around 53 000 in 1976 to 25 000 in 1995. Forty-five elephants were found dead in 1995 and in January 1996 ivory from 20 elephants was recovered from Zaïrean and Sudanese poachers.

The threat to the northern white rhino is increasing as poaching moves south. An adult male rhino named 'Bawesi' was killed by poachers in February, and a pregnant 10-year-old female named 'Juliet' was found dead at the end of March. Poachers hacked off the horns of both animals. Rhino horn is sold for up to US\$1 200 per kilogram in Yemen, where it is used to make dagger handles. WWF Director General Claude Martin, has written to Zaïrean President Mobutu Sese Seko, asking him to intervene directly in the case.

While the guards of the *Institut Zairois pour la Conservation de la Nature* are doing a valiant job to combat poaching - often at great risk to their own lives - conservation aid is limited. The threat of poaching escalates with Zaïre's ongoing national economic crises and with the continuing war in Sudan.

Paradoxically, wildlife and the environment offer the greatest hope for revival and new development in this region. Dr Jean-Pierre d'Huart, regional representative of the WWF East African Regional Programme Office says, 'It is time for the international community to look closely at the impact of the civil war in Sudan on this unique ecosystem. If not, by the time the refugees return to their homeland, Zaïre will have lost one of the jewels of its natural heritage'.

FROM REF NEWS,
 NO. 14, APRIL 1996

In our July/August 1993 (Vol. 1, no. 2) issue, *Africa - Environment & Wildlife* carried a News & Notes item on elephants afflicted by the so-called 'floppy trunk syndrome'. A number of readers have expressed interest in the story and the plight of the elephants, so we asked the experts to give us an update.

Cases of 'floppy' or flaccid trunk paralysis in elephants continue to be diagnosed in the Fothergill area of Zimbabwe's Matusadona National Park (currently fewer than 20 cases). Several elephants have died, many of them old bulls with big ivory, several have been killed and a thorough post-mortem carried out. The majority of cases are in mature bulls.

Past research has eliminated heavy metals (including lead) and other toxic causes such as organochlorines. Analyses of soil, vegetation and water by a team from the British Geological Survey, greatly assisted Zimbabwean researchers in ruling out the above.

The post-mortem examinations have revealed some interesting lesions. The disease appears to originate from the brain, with degeneration of the facial nerves occurring as it spreads down the trunk, resulting in muscle atrophy. In one post-mortem carried out by Dr Nancy Kock of the University of Zimbabwe, significant lesions were found around the facial nucleus in the brain (where the facial nerves originate).

With the ruling out of infectious disease, trauma and any genetic component, the cause highest on our list is a toxic plant. The bull elephants at Fothergill spend the majority of their time feeding on the foreshore rather than browsing in treeline (which would be more normal). The foreshore has been colonized by several non-indigenous plants, for example, *Boerhavia erecta* (Family: *Nyctaginaceae*), originally from South America and first recorded in South Africa in 1934, is a favourite food during the rains.

The emphasis for further research ▶

GAME AUCTION NETS NEARLY R9-MILLION

A game auction conducted at the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park, KwaZulu-Natal, on behalf of South Africa's Natal Parks Board, realized a turnover of nearly R9-million. There was widespread interest from overseas buyers, especially from Israel and Malaysia, and all 1 552 animals on offer were sold.

The highlight of the auction was six black rhino which were sold for R150 000 each, a total of R900 000. A total of 133 white rhino fetched exceptional prices, achieving a highest price of R86 000 and an average of R43 000.

A nyala bull was sold for a new South African record price of R6 300. Good prices were also fetched for the following game: impala R400 each; reedbuck R2 000; giraffe from R6 000 to R7 000 each; and waterbuck R2 900.

5937