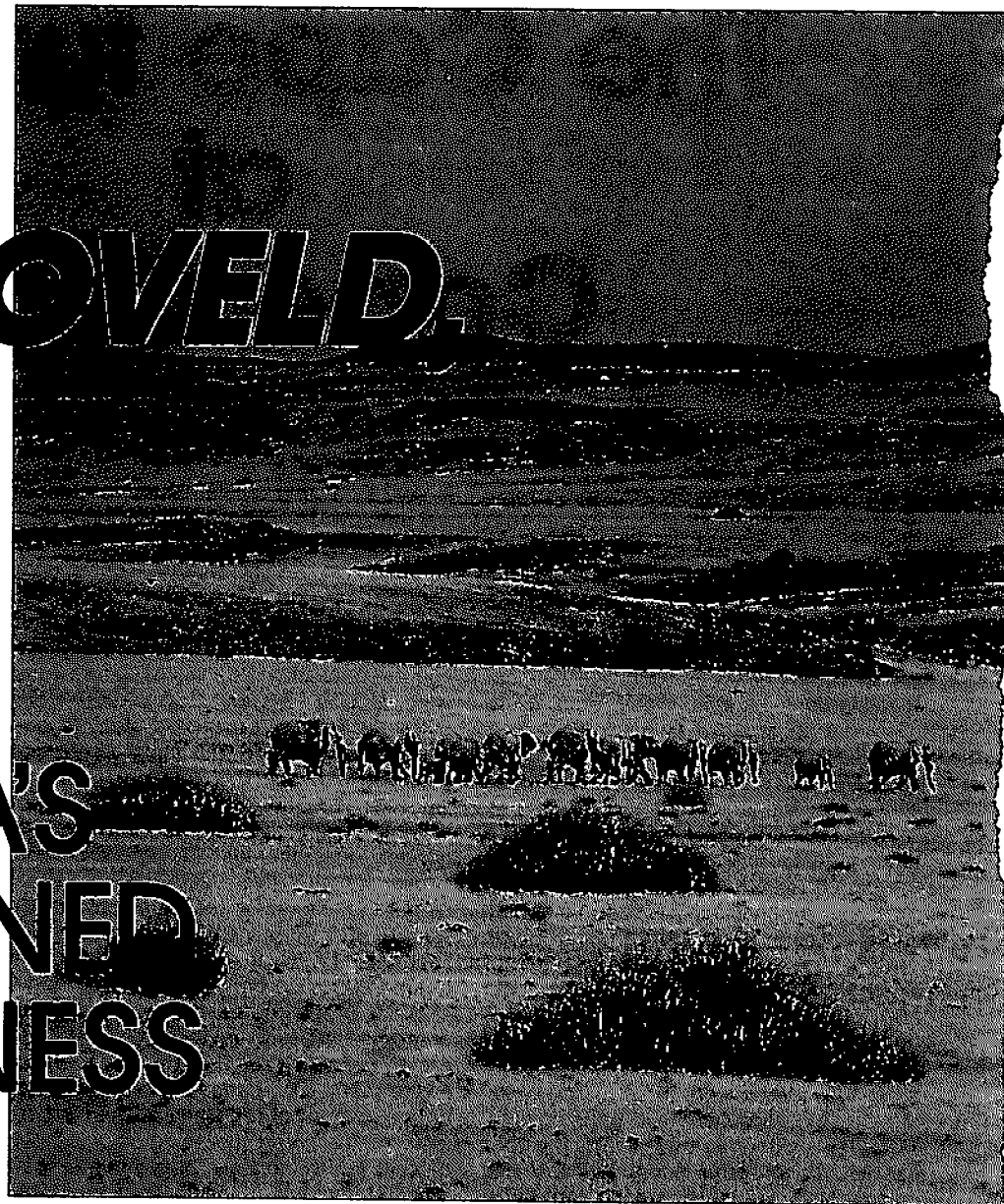


THE KAOKOVELD, SOUTH WEST AFRICA/ NAMIBIA'S THREATENED WILDERNESS

by Garth Owen-Smith

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An unusually large group of elephants on the move in the northern Namib. In 1970, desert-dwelling elephants probably totalled between 300 and 400 animals; by 1982, illegal hunting had reduced their numbers to fewer than 70. / 'n Buitengewone groot groep olifante onderweg in die noordelike Namib.

I first visited the Kaokoveld in north-west South West Africa/Namibia in 1967, and from mid-1968 to the end of 1970 I was employed as the territory's Agricultural Superintendent by what was then known as the Department of Bantu Administration and Development. During this period I was able to get to know the region's fascinating people and magnificent wildlife in a way that few other people have done before.

Prior to 1970, the northern Kaokoveld was both a game reserve and a reserved area for Herero and Himba tribesmen. In the south, the Etosha National Park stretched west to the Atlantic Ocean and then down the Skeleton Coast as far as the Uchab (=Ugab) River. Having been protected since 1907 — when the German Colonial Government first proclaimed the area — the Kaokoveld's big game had flourished, their numbers constrained only by the aridity of the environment.

In the good rain years, great congregations of plains (or Burchell's) zebra and Hartmann's mountain zebra, gemsbok and springbok moved off the plateau down into the pre-Namib, to feed on the sweet desert grasses and to revel in the security offered by its vast open plains. But when consecutive seasons failed to bring rain to the west, the herds returned to the highlands where, even in the worst droughts, some rain always fell. For these species, which eat new grass-shoots by preference, following the rain-showers was — and is — the key to survival.

Ek het die Kaokoveld in noordwestelike Suidwes-Afrika/Namibië in 1967 vir die eerste keer besoek, en vanaf die middel van 1968 tot die einde van 1970 is ek aangestel as die gebied se Landboukundige Toesighouer deur wat toe bekend gestaan het as die Departement van Bantoe-administrasie en Ontwikkeling. Gedurende hierdie tydperk het ek die streek se interessante mense en manjifieke natuurliewe leer ken soos min mense voor my.

Voor 1970 was die noordelike Kaokoveld sowel 'n wildreservaat as 'n gebied wat vir Herero- en Himba-stamlede gereserveer is. In die suide het die Nasionale Etosha-wildtuin weswaarts tot by die Atlantiese Oseaan gestrek en dan afwaarts langs die Skedelkus sover as die Uchab(=Ugab)-rivier. Aangesien dit sedert 1907 — toe die Duitse Koloniale Regering die gebied geproklameer het — beskerm is, het die Kaokoveld se grootwild gedy, en hul getalle is slegs deur die dorheid van die omgewing beperk.

In die goeie reënjare het groot getalle bontkwaggas en Hartmann se bergkwaggas, gemsbokke en springbokke van die hoogland afbeweeg na die voor-Namib om die soet woestyngras te vreet en om hul te verlustig in die veiligheid van die groot oop vlaktes. Maar toe opeenvolgende seisoene nie reën na die weste gebring het nie, het die kuddes na die hooglande teruggekeer waar, selfs in die kwaaieste droogtes, dit altyd 'n

The Cape fur-seal at Cape Cross

by Jeremy David

I am grateful for the opportunity to reply to the *Fur Bulletin* article (page 101) because it contains many statements which are factually incorrect and several opinions which cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged. To begin with, the statement that an ecological disaster is occurring along the coast of South West Africa/Namibia contains little, if any, truth. It implies that an array of complex ecological interrelationships has totally broken down and I am not aware of any evidence which shows that this is happening.

The Cape fur-seal population figure quoted (three million) is not correct. The true figure is about 1.1-million, and this, it must be emphasised, is the combined figure for the South African and South West African populations. The figure for South West Africa/Namibia alone is about 660 000 animals. Who are the quoted "experts" who say that the carrying capacity of the area has been exceeded? I agree that if there were three million seals, the carrying capacity would be exceeded. However, evidence from recent censuses carried out at some South West African colonies indicates that carrying capacity is probably only now being approached.

"The population of fish and shellfish is being decimated . . .", is an unsubstantiated statement and is probably not true. Seals could not have been increasing steadily for the past 40 years if food supplies had been limiting. Furthermore, except for pups in their first year, seals eat very little by way of shellfish (less than two per cent of their diet).

"In the coming months, hundreds of thousands of seals are expected to die of hunger and disease." This is another unsubstantiated statement which can be dismissed as conjecture.

The following statement, "Enormous natural resources are going to waste . . . millions of people suffer from want", is exaggeration and contains a non-sequitur. In fact, the total population of South West Africa/Namibia is only 1 150 000 and, while some of them may suffer from want, preventing the natural (seal) resources from "going to waste" and reviving the sealing industry cannot materially alleviate this situation — firstly because humans do not find seal-meat palatable, and secondly because the gross value of the sealing industry in South West Africa

is very small and only a handful of people are employed.

Some of the comments erroneously attributed to Senior Nature Conservator Tommy Hall are inaccurate; I know Mr. Hall well, and I am satisfied that he did not make any of these statements. Five years ago the population of seals at Cape Cross was around 80 000 to 90 000 (not 100 000) and the population today is nowhere near 170 000; our most recent estimate in January 1986 gives a figure of just over 108 000.

With regard to the culling figures quoted, the average harvest at Cape Cross for the five years before 1983 (when the market for seal skins collapsed) was 10 000 pups per year. In the three years since 1983 the average harvest has been 4 800 pups per year.

As far as the degree of crowding is concerned — labelled in the article as "almost indescribable" — one should be aware that a high degree of crowding is a normal feature of the Cape fur-seal's biology. All the known breeding colonies (24 of them) are densely populated, especially during the breeding season. Cape Cross is no more crowded than any other colony. The seals exhibit a high degree of what is known as "thigmotactic behaviour", which means that they tolerate almost unlimited touching and in fact lie around in dense clumps sprawled all over each other. If it wishes to go somewhere, a seal will invariably crawl over any animal in its path rather than go around it. It is also absolutely normal for the young black pups to congregate together in extraordinarily dense "pods" while their mothers are away at sea. Yet a female can find her pup unerringly when she returns, using a combination of individual call and scent recognition. It is quite possible that ten per cent of pups do die during their first year owing to a variety of causes, but this is not abnormally high and should be regarded as natural wastage in a colonial breeding animal that tolerates high densities.

With regard to the culling, the article is correct in saying that it is mainly one-year-old seals that are harvested, but on the other hand it is wrong to say they "are killed by a blow on the head or shooting". Pups are only clubbed — never shot. There has also been a big increase in the number of bulls harvested for their genitalia

since the collapse of the skin market, and bulls are always killed by shooting.

The article goes on to say that "fishermen keep on complaining that their catches are shrinking . . .", that the Cape Cross seals eat about 3 500 tons of fish a month and that "There is simply not enough left for human beings." Even if the quoted consumption figures are correct (and, based on research done at the S.F.R.I., I would accept a consumption figure considerably higher than this), one can see from looking at the quantities of fish caught by the local industry that this last statement is wide of the mark. The local industry alone (*i.e.* South African and South West African trawlers) has caught an average of 13 000 tons of pilchard, anchovy, maasbanker and hake combined in South West African waters each month during 1986. If one adds in the considerable quotas of maasbanker and hake allocated to foreign trawlers, then the global total catch is about 80 000 tons per month! Compared with figures such as these, one can see that the quantities of fish consumed by seals are less significant than may appear at first sight. It appears too that the author of the article believes that if the seals were reduced, the fishing industry would necessarily catch the fish not now being taken by seals. This, of course, is a highly debatable point and probably not true, since there are many marine predators competing with seals for the same prey. For example, predatory fish such as snoek are thought to consume considerably more anchovy each year than do seals.

Finally, I should like to deal with the claim attributed to Tommy Hall, that at least 36 000 seals per year should be culled at Cape Cross. The Sea Fisheries Research Institute has developed a yield curve which is used in the calculation of seal-harvest quotas for each harvested colony; this curve is designed to achieve "maximum sustainable yield" for the long-term benefit of the industry. The yield curve predicts that, at the current population level at Cape Cross, the pup-harvest should be 8 600 pups.

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DIE OVELD, SUIDWES- AFRIKA/ NAMIBIË SE BEDREIGDE WILDERNIS

deur Garth Owen-Smith

In 1970 was daar waarskynlik tussen 300 en 400 woestynbewonende olifante; teen 1982, het onwet-
tige jag hul getalle tot minder as 70 uitgedun.

photo/foto: Garth Owen-Smith

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The browsers also moved with the seasons, but much more locally. Their food source had longer roots with which to reach deeper, less ephemeral water supplies, and was thus more reliable. In very bad droughts, however, when even the trees put out few new leaves, the browsers too would have to leave their normal home ranges or die of starvation.

Oddly enough, the animals best able to withstand the region's periodic droughts were the largest: the elephant, the black rhinoceros and the giraffe. This was because these species feed to a large extent off the larger desert trees and shrubs that grow along river-beds and drainage lines — the plants that are least dependent on localised rainfall for putting out new foliage. When things became really bad, elephant and rhino could also grind up the dry twigs. This was frugal fare, with a low protein content and, as a result, calving would have decreased and some of the old and very young animals would have died. The majority, however, would have survived until conditions improved again.

A further factor to the advantage of the large mammal species, was their slow breeding rate. This ensured that their numbers did not rise too quickly during cycles of high rainfall. With a smaller population at the start of the next drought, the available food would have been more likely to carry them through the lean years. In contrast, antelope such as springbok and

bietjie reën. Vir hierdie spesies, wat verkies om nuwe gras-spruite te vreet, was — en is — die volging van reënbuie die sleutel tot oorlewing.

Die blaarvreters het ook met die seisoene rondbeweeg, maar meer plaaslik. Hul voedselbron het langer wortels waarmee dit dieper, langer blywende waterbronne bereik, en is dus meer betroubaar. In baie ernstige droogtes wanneer selfs die bome min nuwe blare dra, moes die blaarvreters egter ook hul normale tuisgebied verlaat of van honger omkom.

Snaaks genoeg was die diere wat die streek se periodieke droogtes die beste weerstaan het, die grootste: die olifant, die swartrenoster en die kameelperd. Dit is omdat hierdie spesies grootliks voed op die groter woestynbome en -struik wat langs rivierbeddings en dreineringslyne groei — die plante wat die minste van gelokaliseerde reënval afhanklik is om nuwe lower voort te bring. Wanneer toestande baie swak was, kon olifante en renosters ook die droë takke opmaal. Dit was 'n karige voedsel met 'n lae proteïeninhoud, met die gevolg dat voortplanting sou verminder het en party van die ou en baie jong diere sou gesterf het. Die meerderheid sou egter oorleef tot toestande weer verbeter het.

'n Verdere faktor in die guns van die groot soogdierspesies was hul stadige teeltempo. Dit het verseker dat hul getalle nie tydens siklusse van hoë reënval te vinnig gestyg het nie. Met 'n



In south-west Kaokoland, giraffe and desert mountains make a picturesque combination. Like the desert-dwelling elephant and rhinoceros, the survival of the Kaokoland giraffe is hanging in the balance. / In suidwestelike Kaokoland is kameelperde en woestynberge 'n aanskoulike gesig. Soos die woestynbewonende olifant en renoster, is die oorlewing van die Kaokoland-kameelperd in die weegskaal.

photo/foto: Garth Owen-Smith

gemsbok increased rapidly in the good rainfall years, but were susceptible to population crashes in severe droughts. In recent times, the fact that elephant, rhino and giraffe do not compete directly with domestic livestock for food has also been a crucial factor in their favour when the rains have failed.

Although some subsistence hunting had undoubtedly always taken place around villages, the human population of the Kaokoveld was low and the tribesmen — most of whom possessed considerable herds and flocks — were generally content to live on sour milk and goats' meat, supplemented by veld fruits and, when the elements were kind and permitted a harvest, a little maize meal. In the late 1960s, most of the wealthy Herero and Himba stock-owners actually looked down on hunting for meat as a socially inferior way of life. Only predators, which of course threatened their livelihood, were destroyed whenever the opportunity presented itself. At that time, man and big game, including elephant and rhino, coexisted in relative harmony, amicably sharing the food and water resources of the region.

In 1970, on the recommendation of the Odendaal Commission*, the Kaokoveld and the western parts of the Etosha

kleiner bevolking by die aanvang van die volgende droogte, sou die waarskynlikheid groter wees dat die beskikbare voedsel hulle deur die maer jare sou dra. In teenstelling het bokke soos springbokke en gemsbokke vinnig in die goeie reënvaljare vermeerder, maar skerp dalings in bevolking tydens ernstige droogtes ondergaan. In die laaste jare was die feit dat olifante, renosters en kameelperde nie direk met vee vir voedsel kompeteer nie, ook 'n deurslaggewende faktor in hul guns toe die reëns weggebly het.

Alhoewel daar ongetwyfeld nog altyd rondom woonplekke vir die pot gejag is, was die menslike bevolking in die Kaokoveld laag en die stamlede — waarvan meeste aansienlike kuddes besit het — gewoonlik tevrede om op suurmilk en bokvleis te leef, aangevul deur veldvrugte en, wanneer die elemente goed was en 'n oes toegelaat het, 'n klein bietjie mieliemeel. In die laat-sestigerjare het die meeste welgestelde Herero- en Himba-veeboere inderwaarheid jag vir vleis as 'n sosiaal-minderwaardige lewenswyse geag en daarop neergesien. Net roofdiere, wat natuurlik hul bestaan bedreig het, is gedood wanneer die geleentheid homself voorgedoen het. In daardie tyd het mens en grootwild, insluitend olifante en renosters, in relatiewe harmonie saamgeleef, en die kos- en waterbronne van die streek vriendskaplik gedeel.

In 1970 is die Kaokoveld en westelike dele van die Nasionale Etosha-wildtuin gedepronkameer om die stamtuislande

* (A commission set up in 1962 by the then Prime Minister of South Africa, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, to enquire into the welfare and future development of South West Africa and its peoples. — Editor.)



The gory head of a poached black rhinoceros; the horns were hacked off and the carcass was left to rot. / Die bloederige kop van 'n swartnoster wat onwettig gejag is; die horings is afgekap en die karkas is agtergelaat om te verrot.

photo/foto: Garth Owen-Smith



The gruesome carcass of an elephant bull illegally shot from a South African Defence Force helicopter on the banks of the Kunene River in 1974. No charges were laid against the killer. Die grusame karkas van 'n olifant wat in 1974 op die oewer van die Kunenerivier onwettig uit 'n Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag-helikopter geskiet is. Geen klag is teen die jagter gelê nie.

photo/foto: Garth Owen-Smith

National Park were deproclaimed in order to create the ethnic homelands of Kaokoland and Damaraland. This action was deplored by conservationists in southern Africa who feared that, with political and economic development, the destruction of the region's wildlife would be inevitable unless adequate controls on hunting were introduced and enforced. Various recommendations were therefore submitted, but all were turned down by the Government (See Tinley's report in the special supplement to *African Wild Life* Vol. 25 No. 1). In response to the outcry, the Department of Information issued a press release in early 1971 which included the following statement: "... The Minister of Bantu Administration and Development will, on behalf of the Government, at a time convenient to both parties, negotiate with the Natives concerned in regard to the establishment of a game park in their homeland. In the meantime conservation of fauna and flora will be carried out according to the existing S.W.A. legislation and, if necessary, special steps will also be taken."

Conservationists were mollified by this declaration and even more so when in 1975 Dr. Anton Rupert (President of the S.A. Nature Foundation) announced that he had been given a personal pledge by the then Prime Minister of South Africa, Mr. John Vorster, that a giant new game reserve — the largest national park complex in the world — would soon be created by the South African Government in Kaokoland and Damaraland.

van Kaokoland en Damaraland te vorm, op aanbeveling van die Odendaal-kommissie.* Hierdie daad is deur bewaringsbewustes in Suider-Afrika betreur, aangesien hulle gevrees het dat, met politieke en ekonomiese ontwikkeling, die vernietiging van die streek se natuurlewe noodwendig sal volg indien daar nie toereikende beheer oor jag ingestel en afgedwing word nie. Verskeie aanbevelings is dus voorgelê, maar almal is deur die Regering afgekeur (sien Tinley se verslag in die spesiale bylae tot *African Wild Life* Vol. 25 Nr. 1). In antwoord op die ontevredenheid het die Departement van Inligting vroeg in 1971 'n persverklaring vrygestel, wat die volgende stelling bevat het: "... Die Minister van Bantoe-administrasie en Ontwikkeling sal, namens die Regering, op 'n tyd wat beide partye pas, met die betrokke inboorlinge onderhandel met betrekking tot die daarstelling van 'n wildtuin in hul tuisland. Intussen sal bewaring van fauna en flora volgens die bestaande S.W.A.-wetgewing uitgevoer word en, indien nodig, sal spesiale stappe ook geneem word."

Bewaringsbewustes is deur hierdie verklaring gerusgestel en selfs meer so toe dr. Anton Rupert (President van die S.A.

**('n Kommissie wat in 1962 deur die toenmalige Eerste Minister van Suid-Afrika, dr. H.F. Verwoerd, saamgestel is om die welstand en toekomsontwikkeling van Suidwes-Afrika en sy mense te ondersoek.*

— Redakteur.)



A desert-dwelling black rhinoceros bull in western Damaraland. / 'n Woestynbewonende swartrenosterbul in westelike Damaraland.

photo/foto: Garth Owen-Smith

However, because access to both homelands was tightly restricted, the general public had no knowledge of what was actually happening in the region.

By 1977, unfortunately, it was clear that this pledge was not to be fulfilled and no new game reserve had been proclaimed in northern South West Africa/Namibia; on the other hand, rumours of excessive hunting of big game by high-ranking civil servants and S.A. Defence Force personnel had become rife. Reports by geologists and others working in the area implicated top Government officials, even cabinet ministers, in the slaughter. The local and South African press tried to expose the situation, but most of their efforts were quashed, although Mr. Jannie de Wet, then Commissioner-General for the Indigenous Peoples of South West Africa, admitted that he had used South African Defence Force helicopters to hunt both elephant and the threatened black-faced impala in Kaokoland. That this was just the tip of the iceberg was confirmed in 1977, when Clive Walker of the Endangered Wildlife Trust accompanied Professor Fritz Eloff of Pretoria University to Kaokoland; he reported that possibly fewer than 50 elephants and 15 rhino still survived in the west of the homeland (Walker, 1978). Needless to say, no "special steps" to protect the wildlife of the region had ever been taken. Nor were the promises of soon-to-be proclaimed game reserves to come to anything.

In the late 1970s, and early 1980s, the region was struck two further blows: the worst drought on record devastated both wildlife and livestock, and S.W.A.P.O. insurgents opposed to South African political domination of the territory opened a western front in Kaokoland. So that they might "protect themselves against S.W.A.P.O. terrorists", the now virtually cattleless tribesmen were issued with between two and three thousand .303 rifles along with over 200 000 rounds of ammunition. Perhaps inevitably, these guns were turned against the surviving herds of game. To make matters worse, by now the demand for rhino horn and ivory had increased dramatically in the Middle and Far East, and their black market value had sky-rocketed. In the larger centres of both South and South West Africa there was no shortage of unscrupulous buyers for these commodities, and some black residents of Kaokoland and Damaraland turned to the hunting of elephants and rhino as a way of obtaining cash with which to buy livestock or the newly desired luxury goods produced by White society. Despite the fact that all this was taking place fairly openly, no nature conservator had yet been stationed in Kaokoland! By the end of 1981, rhino and elephants had, to all intents and purposes, been wiped out in central and western Kaokoland and well-armed gangs of poachers had started moving south into northern Damaraland. Because of the greed of a few, and the ignorance or apathy of the rest of the population, a priceless national asset seemed doomed to extinction.

The Directorate of Nature Conservation stationed its first na-

Natuurstigting) in 1975 aangekondig het dat hy 'n persoonlike belofte van die destydse Eerste Minister van Suid-Afrika, mnr. John Vorster, ontvang het dat 'n reuse nuwe wildtuin — die grootste nasionale parkkompleks in die wêreld — binnekort deur die Suid-Afrikaanse Regering in Kaokoland en Damaraland geskep sou word. Omdat toegang tot beide tuislande egter streng beperk was, het die algemene publiek geen kennis gedra van wat eintlik in die streek aangegaan het nie.

Teen 1977 was dit ongelukkig duidelik dat hierdie belofte nie vervul sou word nie en dat geen nuwe wildtuin in noordelike Suidwes-Afrika/Namibië geproklameer is nie; aan die ander kant was daar vele gerugte van die uitermatige jag van groot-wild deur hoë staatsamptenare en S.A. Weermag-personeel. Berigte deur geoloë en andere wat in die gebied gewerk het, het top-regeringsamptenare, selfs kabinetsministers, betrek by die slagting. Die plaaslike en Suid-Afrikaanse pers het probeer om die situasie oop te vlek, maar meeste van hul pogings is die nek ingeslaan, alhoewel mnr. Jannie de Wet, toe Kommissaris-generaal vir die Inheemse Volkere van Suidwes-Afrika, erken het dat hy Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag-helikopters gebruik het om beide olifante en die bedreigde swartneusröoibok in Kaokoland te jag. Dat dit net die punt van die ysberg was, is in 1977 bevestig toe Clive Walker van die Trust vir Bedreigde Natuurlewe professor Fritz Eloff van die Universiteit van Pretoria na Kaokoland vergesel het; hy het gerapporteer dat daar moontlik minder as 50 olifante en 15 renosters nog in die weste van die tuisland oorleef (Walker, 1978). Onnodig om te sê was geen "spesiale stappe" ooit geneem om die natuurlewe van die streek te beskerm nie. En van beloftes oor vinnig-geproklameerde wildtuine het ook niks gekom nie.

In die laat-sewentigerjare en vroeë tagtigerjare het twee verdere ongelukke die streek getref: die ergste droogte op rekord het sowel natuurlewe as vee afgemaai, en S.W.A.P.O.-insurgente wat Suid-Afrikaanse politiese heerskappy van die gebied teenstaan, het 'n westelike front in Kaokoland geopen. Om hulself "teen S.W.A.P.O.-terroriste te beskerm", het die stamlede, teen dié tyd amper sonder vee, tussen twee- en drieduisend .303-gewere ontvang, tesame met oor die 200 000 patrone. Miskien is dit onvermydelik dat hierdie gewere op die oorblywende wildkuddes gerig is. Om sake te vererger, het die aanvraag na renosterhorings en ivoor dramaties in die Midde- en Verre-Ooste gestyg, en hul swartmark-waarde het hemelhoog geskiet. In die groter sentra van sowel Suid- as Suidwes-Afrika was daar geen tekort aan gewetenlose kopers vir hierdie handelsware nie, en sommige swart inwoners van Kaokoland en Damaraland het hul na die jag van olifante en renosters gewend as 'n manier om geld te bekom waarmee hul vee kon koop, of die luuksegoedere van die Wit gemeenskap wat skielik begeerlik geword het. Ondanks die feit dat dit alles betreklik openlik gebeur het, is geen natuurbe-waarder ooit in Kaokoland aangestel nie! Teen die einde van

05



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