

organized poaching in the park appears to come from within the country. One group that was apprehended had over 100 members and its leader was borne around the bush in a sedan chair. Another group was found which was described as consisting of ten teenaged boys each of which carried two Kalashnikov rifles.

The best hope for C.A.R.'s elephants and rhinos lies in the nation's largest national park, Gounda-St. Floris. It covers a sprawling 18,000km<sup>2</sup> and is composed of wooded savanna, open grass savanna and gallery forests. Much of the present area of the park was a hunting and photo-safari domain until 1978 when Bokassa declared the area a national park. Since that time, the newly gazetted park has come under increasing poaching pressure and in 1981 a WWF/IUCN research team was sent to investigate the rhino and elephant situation. Findings show that elephant and rhino poaching has risen to dangerous levels and that the most important refuge for rhinos in the park has been thoroughly poached due to a lack of surveillance. Chadian and Sudanese horsemen are thought to have killed hundreds of elephants mostly by spearing but the use of automatic weapons has also been confirmed.

Viewed in its entirety, the status of the rhino and elephant

populations in the C.A.R. is bleak. Corruption, non-compliance with CITES legislation and years of neglect by the international conservation community have all contributed. Although besieged by poachers, a recent change in the administration of the Gounda-St. Floris Park offers some cause for optimism. Wildlife populations are reduced but still healthy and should benefit from plans to augment the meagre staff of ten park guards and tourist facilities. A private corporation has won a long-term contract with significant governmental support to develop and protect the park. It is an experimental plan where by the complete control of a major African national park has been granted to a private concern. Since the viability of the corporation depends to some degree on profitability, the future of the park's wildlife depends on tenuous economic conditions. If the plans to attract foreign tourists are reasonably successful, the park has a very good chance for survival. But the fate of the rest of C.A.R.'s elephants and rhinos is precarious at best and is at the mercy of the economics dictated by the world trade in ivory and rhino horn. Compliance with the Convention of Washington would be of great help to stem the tide of destruction of Central Africa's troubled elephants.

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## Protecting The Black Rhino in Damaraland, Namibia

### Introduction

A viable but endangered population of black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis* L.) survives in the very arid country of western Damaraland, bordering the Skeleton Coast Park. The park is unfenced, allowing free movement of game in and out.

The eastern boundary of the Skeleton Coast Park was designed by ruler and pen without consideration for the ecology nor for the effective conservation or protection of game species. Important permanent waterholes were left outside the protection of the park, some of them as little as three kilometers from the boundary.

Elephant and rhino feeding routes are found deep into the true desert in sand-dune country, and elephants have been seen on the beaches of the cold Atlantic coast.



Black rhinos in Damaraland with food plant in foreground, *Euphorbia damarana* [B.D. Loutit]

### Poaching

When poaching of rhinos and elephants in Damaraland reached a peak in 1981-2, the Namibia Wildlife Trust was formed and field staff were employed in a successful operation to patrol and report to the officials of the Division of Nature Conservation. The NWT was sponsored by the People's Trust for Endangered Species, the Endangered Wildlife Trust, the Foundation to Save Africa's Endangered Wildlife, the Wildlife Society of SWA/Namibia, and local business houses. In April 1984 the control of the project was taken over by the Endangered Wildlife Trust. Present field staff comprise a senior field officer, his assistant and six auxiliary game scouts appointed by Herero headmen, under the supervision of Garth Owen-Smith who is based at the Damaraland headquarters. The camp and radio equipment was donated by Consolidated Diamond Mines (Pty) Ltd.

Rhino numbers are carefully monitored by means of an identikit system compiled by Garth Owen-Smith, Karl Peter Erb, and the staff of the Skeleton Coast Park, assisted by Elias Hambo and Bernard Roman. To date 40 rhinos have been identified, most of which have been photographed. A possible 50-60 still survive in the area. Hind foot spoor size, ear notches, horn shapes, sex and age classes are recorded. The records of track (spoor) sizes have proved valuable in checking if a spoor is missing from a habitual drinking place or home range. The area is immediately searched on foot in case poaching may have taken place.

### Geographical Distribution

The larger portion of the rhino population is resident north of the veterinary control fence which bisects western Damaraland from east to west.

This has unfortunately left a number of individuals isolated in the immediate vicinity of the fence. One of these is a breeding cow with a calf. A young lone cow was recently 'herded' by Land-Rover from south of the fence to join the northern population inside the Skeleton Coast Park.

If funds were available it would be advisable to move the remaining live individuals living close to the fence to join the larger population in the north-west.

An isolated population survives much further south near the Ugab river. This part of Damaraland is scenically spectacular. Vast plains dotted with granite boulder islands and dominated by towering mountain fortresses are the home of the southernmost population in Namibia. In dry times the black rhinos traverse extremely rugged terrain to waterholes far from their feeding grounds.

A study of their means of survival and nutritional needs under these stressful conditions has been initiated through a grant to cover fuel costs from the People's Trust for Endangered Species. At present our private Land-Rover is being used and funds are needed to purchase a vehicle to continue the study and patrol the area, which is vulnerable to poaching. Although no rhinos have been found poached in the past four years, recently a number of mountain zebras (*Equus hartmannae*), kudus (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*) and ostriches (*Struthio camelus*) have been snared with disc snares. Game numbers have increased favourably since the study and monitoring has taken place. The population of rhinos is small but healthy, consisting of:

2 ♂ adults	2 ♀ adults	2 of unknown sex
1 ♀ sub-adult	1 ♂ calf	2 or more others
[6 individuals photographed]		[4+ in extreme desert]

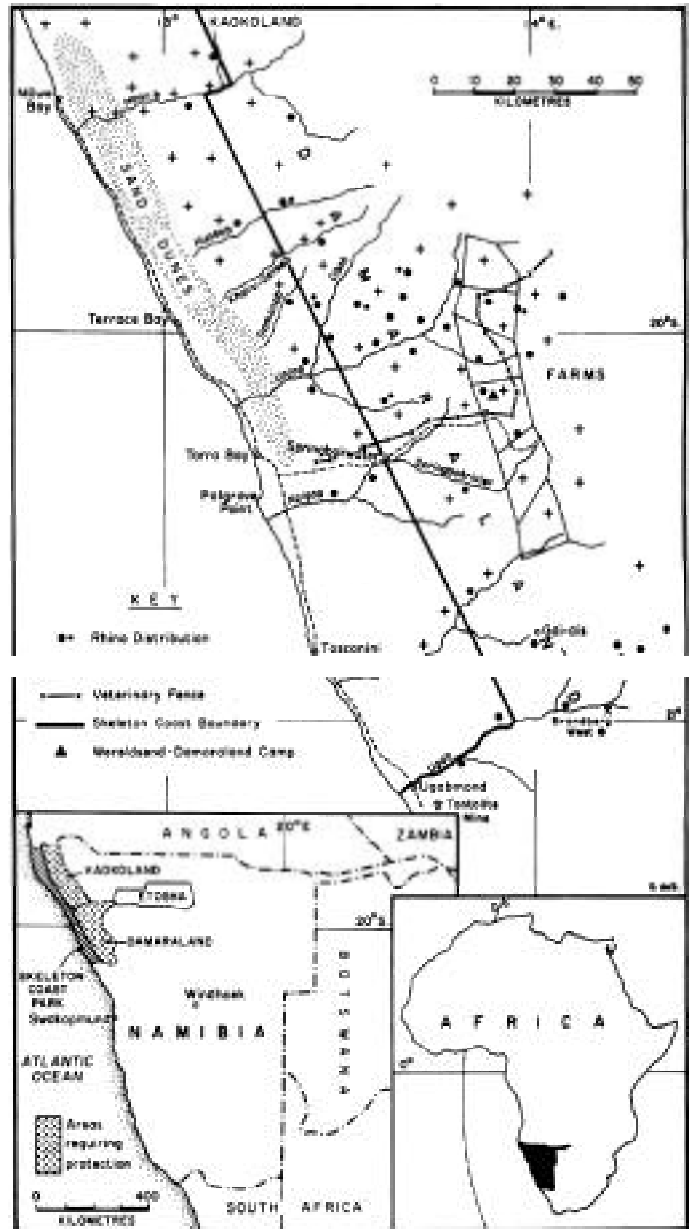


Black rhino cow running over rocky terrain in Damaraland [B.D. Loutit]

The aridity of the terrain suggests that the black rhinos here would occupy much larger home ranges than in other parts of Africa. The condition of the rhinos appears to be consistently good and recruitment rates are good. This applies to rhinos in general in Damaraland and those last few surviving in Kaokoand.



Black rhino calf feeding on *Welwitschia mirabilis* seed cones in Damaraland [B.D. Loutit]



Damaraland, Namibia

### Conclusion

The vital point which must be recognized is that the rhinos should be conserved and protected within this habitat. The habitat is secure, it is not threatened by agriculture, mining nor human overpopulation, the climate is harsh and the terrain is rugged. Development would be minimal and should be carefully planned. There is no sound reason to allow any further destruction of game to take place.

Both the black rhino and the African elephant of Damaraland and Kaokoand should be conserved within these unique conditions. To achieve success in this, additional patrol vehicles and another member of staff are critical. The final objective is to achieve a fully acceptable status of proclamation for the people and wildlife in the area. Until this is achieved the onus remains with the NGOs to continue their vigilance and monitoring of game movements.

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