FEBRUARY 2008

WILDERNESS SAFARIS WILDLIFE TRUST

WILDERNESS
WILDLIFE TRUST

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE TRUST

The Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust seeks to make a difference in Africa, to its wildlife and its people. These projects address the needs of existing wildlife populations, seek solutions to save threatened species and provide education and training for local people and their communities.

Since its formation, the Trust has supported a wide variety of wildlife management, research and education projects in southern Africa, making use of a number of methods and types of projects to do so.

One kind of project studies and monitors a particular species in its natural environment and in so doing also contributes to its protection. The long-running Maputaland Turtle Project in South Africa, the Namib Brown Hyena Project and the Namibian Desert Elephant and Giraffe Project are cases in point. Moving beyond research into hands-on management is another variation on this theme.

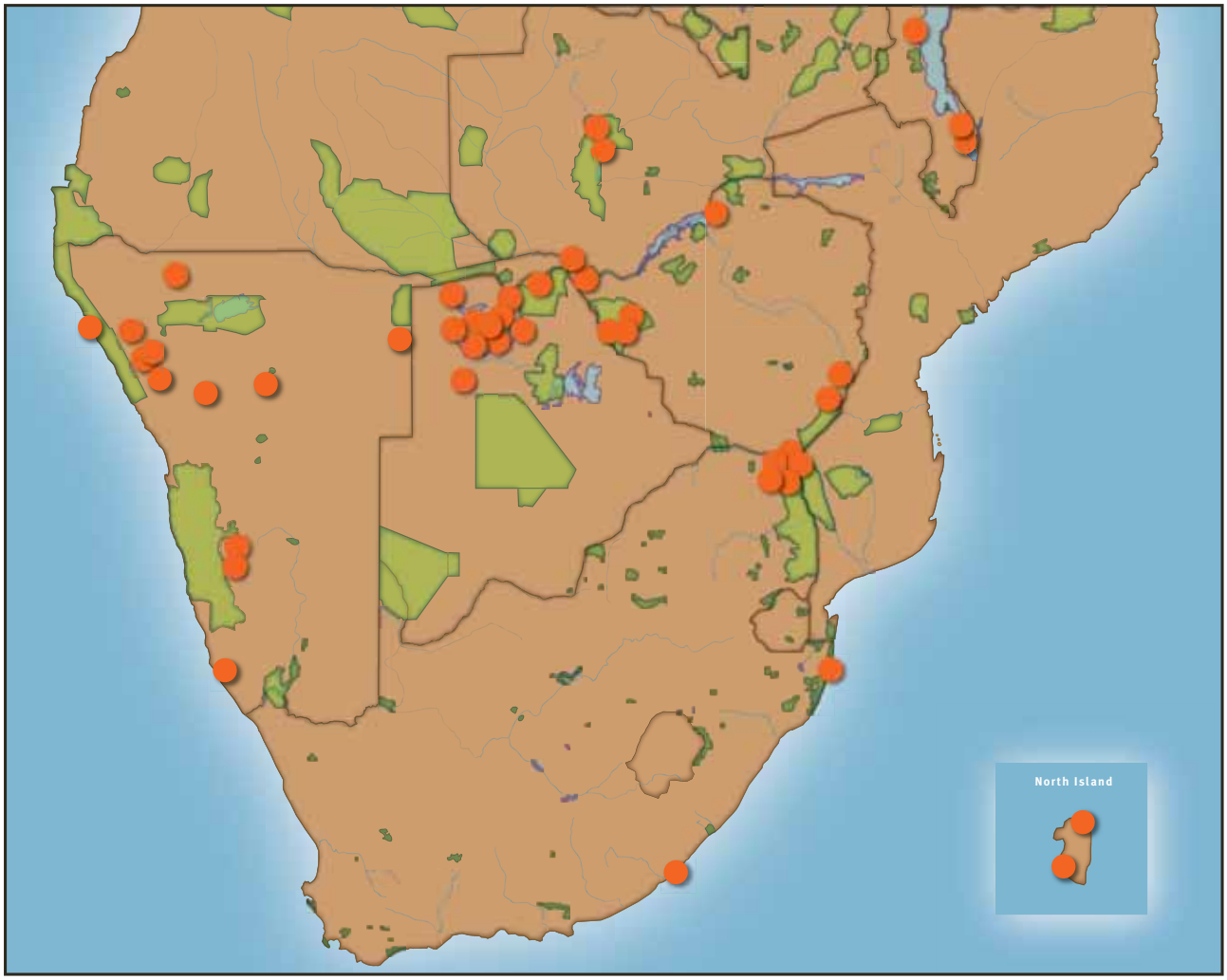
Study of a species sounds like a purely academic pursuit, but within such investigation lie the seeds for its protection and survival. The better we understand a species and its environment, the more efficiently we'll be able to protect it in a world where the struggle for space becomes paramount and human-animal interactions become increasingly conflicted. Most of the Trust's projects have this as an ultimate objective and some amazing headway has been made, for example in the Lake Ngami Bird Monitoring Project, which brought the Lake and this Important Bird Area (IBA) to the attention of the Botswana government, resulting in its being declared a "no-hunting area."

The Trust is involved financially in a number of such projects, supporting research, habitat management, and practical conservation measures such as anti-poaching projects, while Wilderness Safaris contributes logistically in terms of human resources and equipment.

But conservation of flora and fauna is limited as long as the people who live in the vicinity are unconvinced or left out of the process. Financial and educational empowerment of local communities so that they benefit from the wildlife on their doorsteps is therefore vital, and as such, broad-based and comprehensive initiatives are in fact the bedrock of the Trust, providing skills, knowledge and education necessary to communities to value and manage their wildlife populations.

Wilderness Safaris is acknowledged as a leader in the educational process thanks to its innovative formal and informal education projects, supported by the Trust in the form of grants and bursaries. The Children in the Wilderness programme aims to educate the youth of Africa, inspiring and assisting them to preserve their magnificent natural heritage.

Trust projects across Southern Africa 2007



FROM THE TRUSTEES

The Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust enjoyed another effective and rewarding year during the course of 2007, further extending our scope in seven southern African countries and endeavouring to make a difference wherever possible.

Aside from the ongoing projects to which we continued to provide financial support, a number of new and exciting investigations and developments secured grants from the Trust during 2007. This year many of these were located in Botswana and had at their heart an improved understanding and thus protection of the Okavango Delta ecosystem and surrounding area in the northern reaches of the country. Pearl Galebotswe's MSc level study on white and black rhino movements is a good example of this, as is Zenzele Mpofu's MSc focusing on the ecology of hole nesting species. Hattie Bartlam's and Emily Bennitt's PhD investigations into large herbivores and buffalo respectively are other examples.

Additional projects have looked at conservation management issues. The Botswana Rhino Project for example received funding for a second vehicle to aid more comprehensive monitoring and protection for Botswana's growing rhino population, while Anna Songhurst's PhD seeks to address issues around Human-Elephant conflict in northern Botswana – a vitally important issue in the modern scenario of expanding human populations.

In Zambia and Malawi important aerial censuses of large mammal populations were carried out in Kafue and Liwonde National Parks respectively, providing important baseline data for management of these protected areas. In the case of Kafue, it was ascertained that the Busanga Plains area represents one of Africa's most important sites for Wattled Crane conservation.

In South Africa economic development and conservation capacity building were the focus of two grants to the Makuleke Community – funding being provided for the development of tourism-related small businesses on the one hand, and on the other for a bursary for Enos Mngomezulu for further studies into protected area management and conservation.

As has been the case for the past few years, the need for conservation funding in Zimbabwe has been pressing. As a consequence we have continued and expanded our commitment in the country and are confident that the Hwange anti-poaching programme and the wild dog survey in the Zimbabwean part of the extended Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area will yield fruitful results for both conservation and the economies associated with it.

Finally we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the donors that have helped with funding these past twelve months. Without your help we would achieve only a fraction of what we have been able to and we cannot overstate the importance of this contribution.

Thanks too to those engaged in demanding and often thankless tasks in the field: your legacy of conservation is a powerful one.

Lastly thanks to all those who have helped in their various capacities to make the Trust run over the last year: Don Bailey, Margot Bell, Chris Mostert, Ulrike van der Hoven, Ilana Stein and Grant Wolpert. We are also grateful to Colorpress for printing this report, to Horwath, Leveton Boner for preparing the financials, to Bell Dewar Hall for legal advice and to Amos Eno and Laura Mass at the Resources First Foundation for helping make a difference.

The Trustees

Russel Friedman
Andrew Leontsinis
Chris Roche

Special thanks to Chris Roche for all his hard work and time spent as a Trustee in 2006 & 2007. His dedication and commitment to the Trust is appreciated and the Trustees look forward to continuing to work with him as an advisor.

HWANGE WHITE RHINO
REINTRODUCTION

In June 2007, after many months of planning, a supplementary population of white rhino was finally translocated from Matobo National Park to Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. These animals have joined the small existing population and settled down well and it is hoped that more animals will be moved over the course of 2008.

Background

The white rhino population of Hwange National Park was almost wiped out in the early 1990s from poaching. The small surviving population was augmented in 1999 and 2004 by translocations of animals from Matobo. This national park has an over-abundance of white rhino in a relatively small area, which has in turn led to deaths from fighting and rhino moving out of the protected area. As a result it was the perfect source for the additional animals needed in Hwange to ensure the viability of this population and provide an additional reservoir of the species in Zimbabwe.

The translocation of white rhino from Matobo to Hwange fell within the rhino management plan for 2006, drawn up between Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (PWMA) of Zimbabwe and the other "rhino stakeholders". The rhino management programme under the PWMA has been running since the onslaught of poaching in Zimbabwe in the mid-1980s. Since 2000, the work has concentrated on management of black and white rhino in Intensive Protection Zones (IPZs) within the Parks and Wildlife Estate i.e. Matobo, Sinamatela and Main Camp (Hwange National Park) and Matusadona, as well as the wildlife conservancies. Activities include ear-notching and micro-chipping for individual identification of rhino, radio horn-implants, de-horning and snare removals.

Project Details

During 2007, five white rhino were moved from Matobo to Hwange; the Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust funded the bomas or pens built to house the white rhino when they arrived.

The release pens were built near Ngweshla Pan, which is close to Wilderness Safaris camp facilities. Together with the PWMA, Wilderness Safaris is involved in the pen management and in long-term monitoring of the white rhino population in the area.

The rhino were immobilised in Matobo by darting from a helicopter. After immobilisation the rhino were ear-notched using standard patterns of the Programme in Zimbabwe. The animals with adequate horn-size had radio-transmitters implanted in the horns. Thereafter the rhino were crated and transported to the pens at Hwange.

The animals were held in pens for a few weeks, during which time they were carefully monitored to ensure that they remained healthy and were eating. After the pen adaptation period they were released.

The rhino are currently being radio-tracked using standard radio-telemetry techniques, either from the air, using a Microlight aircraft already in the area, on foot or by vehicle. This is particularly important during the immediate post-release period, but will continue on a long-term basis.

EDUCATION BURSARY 2008

– ENOS MNGOMEZULU

The Wilderness Trust is acknowledged as a leader in the educational process thanks to innovative programmes that aim to educate the youth of Africa, inspiring and assisting them so that they can continue to preserve their magnificent natural heritage. The Trust funds bursaries for students either at graduate or post graduate level in the wildlife and environmental fields

To many guests of Pafuri Camp in the Kruger National Park, Enos Mngomezulu is known as a quietly spoken, knowledgeable guide. He has received a bursary from the Trust to study Natural Resource and Protected Area Management at the Southern African Wildlife College. Enos' endeavours are part of a long-running programme to build conservation and business skills and capacity in the Makuleke community to ensure the long term sustainable utilisation of the community-owned Makuleke Contractual Park.

The year-long certificate course includes such outcomes as building leadership skills, ability to implement management planning practices, and supervisory functions. The course aims to help the candidate develop values and ethics regarding conservation and environmental issues, implement policies regarding HIV/AIDS in the workplace and finally promote conservation understanding through cooperation with local communities and environmental education.

In his own words…

"I am a member of the Makuleke Community that was forcibly removed from the so-called Pafuri Triangle in 1969, when it was added to the Kruger National Park, and resettled in the area of Nthlaveni some 100km away. Although not yet born at that time, my parents were young adults and were part of the removals. Since 1998 we have succeeded in restoring ownership of the land to the community in the form of the Makuleke Communal Property Association (CPA) and we have implemented several programmes and processes to increase and improve capacity within the community to administer and manage our asset in a responsible and sustainable way, both in the environmental and financial context.

To this end some 20 young members of the community have been through UNISA diplomas and degrees in various environmental and financial fields and are now gaining experience in various fields in the ecotourism industry in particular. Currently the Pafuri Triangle is jointly managed as a contractual park with the Kruger National Park responsible for conservation activities, private concessionaires for ecotourism and commercial opportunities and the Makuleke CPA comprising 50% of the Joint Management Board. Ultimately it is vital for the long term sustainability of the area that we, as a community, are able to manage all functions of the area ourselves.

Accordingly, and as one of the members of the community fortunate enough to be guided through UNISA and other qualifications, I see it as a personal responsibility to obtain the necessary skills and experience in this field and to contribute to the sustainability of our communal heritage and asset. Since completing my UNISA diploma in Nature Conservation I have worked at two private lodges in order to gain experience in the ecotourism field. This has entailed a year-long stretch at Entabeni Lodge and more than two years at Pafuri Camp within the Makuleke Contractual Park. While the skills I have obtained in the employ of the aforementioned lodges are invaluable in the ecotourism business, I have not been involved with hands-on conservation management. I feel I am now sufficiently fluent in an ecological and environmental understanding of the area and its management needs to benefit comprehensively from further studies, including the practical implementation of theoretical conservation skills."

ECOLOGY OF BLACK & WHITE RHINO IN THE OKAVANGO DELTA

MSc. Bursary: Ms Pelotshweu Galebotswe

During the 20th century, both black and white rhino subspecies became extinct in Botswana, due to poaching. In 2001, Botswana's Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), with the help of Wilderness Safaris, the Trust and SANParks successfully reintroduced a number of black and white rhino into the Moremi Game Reserve. Since their release, both species have dispersed far more widely than anticipated, factoring in the carrying capacity of the area.

This project therefore sets out to study the wet and dry season range and feeding preferences of the reintroduced black and white rhino in the area. It identifies key factors influencing the movement of reintroduced black and white rhino out of the habitat into which they were introduced; these will be used to draw recommendations relating to appropriate habitat into which rhino can be released in the future.

The research is being conducted on Chief's Island within the northern part of the Reserve, making use of GPS data recorded by officers of the Anti Poaching Unit during their patrols. In addition, animals are tracked by spoor, identified by means of their ear markings and digital photographs taken of the individuals to assist with identification. Vegetation is sampled to establish food availability and preferences, and the rhinos' response to other animals and humans is also under observation.

The reintroduction of rhino into any unfenced ecosystem is a complex undertaking and though translocation has been a key component of successful rhino conservation in Africa, the management of these new populations poses a challenge to wildlife managers. The results of the project will hopefully lead to a better understanding with regards to reintroductions in a free-ranging system, and provide a better understanding of the ecology of the two species.

BUSANGA PLAINS
AERIAL CENSUS 2007

An aerial census of the very large extended Busanga Plains area (approximately 150 000 hectares) in northern Kafue National Park in Zambia was conducted in September 2007. The census was undertaken to provide accurate baseline data of large mammal and bird populations on the Busanga Plains during the dry season and produce an analysis of numbers and distribution of these key species, as a means of providing baseline data for the future management of this vitally important area of the Kafue National Park.

Previous aerial surveys counted the mammal population of the Busanga Plains as part of an informal impressionist ground count (1972), as a secondary element of a crane and water bird count (2004), and as a low density (9%) coverage included in an early wet season census of the entire park. In mid-September 2007 the census conducted coverage (11%) of only the Plains in the late dry season in an easily repeatable and scientifically robust methodology that gives the most accurate estimate of dry season mammal concentrations on the Plains to date.

Results:

Despite some local logistical challenges the census of the Plains was achieved in 10 hours of flying time in a Cessna 206 in 43 transects ranging in length from 5 to 41km and spaced 1.4km apart in a north-south orientation perpendicular to the main water source, the Lufupa Channel. The survey was designed by acknowledged expert, Dr Petri Viljoen and included experienced observers and counters from Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA), Wings 4 Wildlife and Wilderness Safaris.

A total of 21 large mammal species were recorded in the sampling area. Detailed population estimates and average herd sizes were obtained for the more common large ungulates such as Lichtenstein's hartebeest (227), lechwe (2 098), puku (1 888) and wildebeest (1 119). Also the number of Wattled Cranes estimated (402) suggested that this is area is one the top five most significant wetland sites for this species in Africa.

ECOLOGY OF BUFFALO
IN THE OKAVANGO DELTA

The African buffalo is one of the largest herbivores present in Botswana's Okavango Delta, with bulls weighing up to 700kg and cows up to 500kg. However, the region is under threat, especially from water loss and the encroachment of human activity on its boundaries, including plans to build dams further upriver. These in turn would diminish the amount of water flowing into the Delta system, causing a reduction in the area of floodplains and all the wildlife that they support.

Very little information is available on the behaviour and ecology of the buffalo in this specific region, yet they are as likely to play a key role within the ecosystem as they do in other parts of Africa. Defining this role will help to predict the impact of any potential changes to the Delta, not only on the buffalo themselves, but also on the habitats that they use and on the sympatric herbivores that may benefit from their presence.

The project aims to increase understanding of the ecology of the buffalo in the Delta so that a conservation and management plan for the species can be developed. Using various methods, information on population demographics, home ranges, diet, and habitat modification is being gathered by PhD student Emily Bennitt. The effects of the animals' feeding patterns on the quality and composition of the vegetation species in each habitat type is being investigated, as well as interactions with the buffalo cordon fence and local farmers outside of the protected area.

In December, six adult female buffalo were darted and collared, providing updated information about the animals' movements. Based on this, it is possible to see that there is a marked difference in the movement patterns of the cows collared in different areas. It appears from the GPS data that the cows collared in one area are approaching the veterinary fence, which could be preventing them from following migration routes. Alternatively, the forage available in this area could be of a much higher quality than that in the Moremi area, therefore sustaining the herds for longer.

A major part of the project is an attempt to identify the ways in which buffalo modify the habitats they use and subsequent effects on other herbivores. The buffalo's ability to consume low-quality vegetation, together with the trampling effect that would ensue from a large herd of buffalo passing through a habitat, could provide a basis for the facilitation of other species of herbivore. The feeding habits of the buffalo may remove the taller grasses, as well as those of lower nutritional value, thus 'opening' the habitat for smaller herbivores by increasing access to shorter, higher quality forage.

GREATER LIMPOPO TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA WILD DOG PROJECT

Researchers Peter Lindsey and Stephanie Romañach, following completion of the bush-meat project, have focused their attention once more on conservation research involving wild dogs in the Savé Valley Conservancy, Zimbabwe. These efforts are particularly relevant currently in light of upcoming Transfrontier Park conservation efforts and planned South African surveys on wild dogs in that country. The study expands on their research of 2006, examining the conservation status and threats affecting the conservation of wild dogs in the context of the Zimbabwean portion of the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area.

The Greater-Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTCA) and its surrounds are home to an African wild dog population of global significance and include the approximately 120 wild dogs in South Africa's Kruger National Park and a considerably larger Zimbabwean population which is of major conservation significance. Aside from the Savé Conservancy, populations of wild dog are also known to occur in several other wildlife areas in the South East Lowveld of Zimbabwe. However, the extent of the distribution of wild dogs in the area, or the status of these populations is poorly understood and the changes in Zimbabwe's conservation areas have had major and poorly documented implications for wildlife conservation.

Prior to the land reform programme in 2000, Zimbabwe had a large and well developed game ranching industry and as a result, several significant wild dog populations developed in ranching areas and on conservancies in the South East Lowveld. Since then, due to the high human population densities in this area, conditions for predator conservation have changed significantly. These have resulted in several threats to wild dog populations: major increases in snaring for bush-meat and depletion of populations of wild ungulates; habitat fragmentation due to bush clearing for agriculture, and elevated levels of contact between wild carnivores and domestic stock with corresponding increases in the risk of disease transmission.

The Wild Dog Project is to be expanded in scope to include the Zimbabwean portion of the southern transfrontier conservation areas: the Greater-Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area and the Shashe-Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (SLTCA). The objectives of the new study are to assess the conservation status of wild dogs in the GLTCA and SLTCA areas, with particular emphasis on Gonarezhou National Park. The 5 000km^2 Gonarezhou NP will form part of the core of the GLTFCA and despite its size, very little is known about the status of wild dogs or other large predators in the area.

To achieve this, the study comprises a regional component, addressing the distribution and status of wild dogs in the South East Lowveld and a focal study area component, using the Savé Valley Conservancy (SVC) to assess the impact of various key threats on the conservation status of wild dogs in the area. Wild dogs have been studied in SVC since 1996 and so the area represents an important long-term study site ideal for assessing the impact of changing land tenure conditions on the ecology and conservation of the species. By assessing the impact of these factors on the SVC population, it is hoped to develop tools and recommendations with which to promote wild dog conservation on a broad scale.

HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT
IN NORTHERN BOTSWANA

Botswana faces a different challenge in elephant conservation and management to most other African countries. Thanks to successful conservation efforts and a minimal amount of poaching it now has the largest savannah population of African elephant in sub-Saharan Africa. With its current population growth of approximately 6% per annum and a consequent expansion back into their former range, the elephant is unfortunately now being perceived to be a problem animal in some areas where it comes into contact with rural people. Many local communities complain of crop loss, property damage, fear of walking to work/school, and even elephant-caused fatalities.

A relatively recent expansion in the range of elephants throughout northern Botswana has contributed to a large influx into the Okavango Delta and, as a result, an increase in the number of Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) reports from many of the local communities living on the fringes of this area. Human-Wildlife Conflict, and that involving elephants in particular, poses one of the most serious challenges to wildlife management throughout the Okavango Delta and, as such, has been chosen as an important management intervention in the implementation of the Okavango Delta Management Plan (ODMP).

This project by PhD student Anna Songhurst aims to contribute information on the ecology and movements of elephants in HEC 'hotspot' areas of the Okavango's Panhandle. The overall goal is to assist wildlife managers and rural subsistence farmers in developing practical and effective alternative land-use planning strategies to try and reduce such conflict in the area. Data is being collated on elephant population numbers and structure, their movements and migration routes, and habitat utilisation of elephants utilising the 'Panhandle.'

The project also aims to provide valuable information on where elephants are coming from in order to position and concentrate mitigation measures (i.e., chilli fields and electric fences) where they will be most successful. Investigating the ecology of elephants utilising conflict "hotspots" will provide an understanding of why, when and where conflict occurs and which elephants are the main perpetrators. This will aid in developing effective land use planning strategies and successful positioning of mitigation measures, as well as creating a model to predict future incidents and hence enable the avoidance of potential conflict.

LIWONDE NATIONAL PARK
ANNUAL CENSUS – 2007

The second aerial census of Liwonde National Park funded by the Trust took place in October 2007, adding to the solid, scientific data that is much needed for long-term management of the Park. Aerial counts of population sizes of different wildlife species in protected areas can serve as a useful tool to assist management decisions. The Liwonde National Park (LNP) currently faces a number of management questions that can be resolved with a better understanding of the animal numbers in the Park and their population trends. These include supplying animals for the restocking of other protected areas in Malawi, assessing the current biomass and stocking rate for various species, and evaluating suggestions for the introduction of large predators to enhance the tourism potential of the Park.

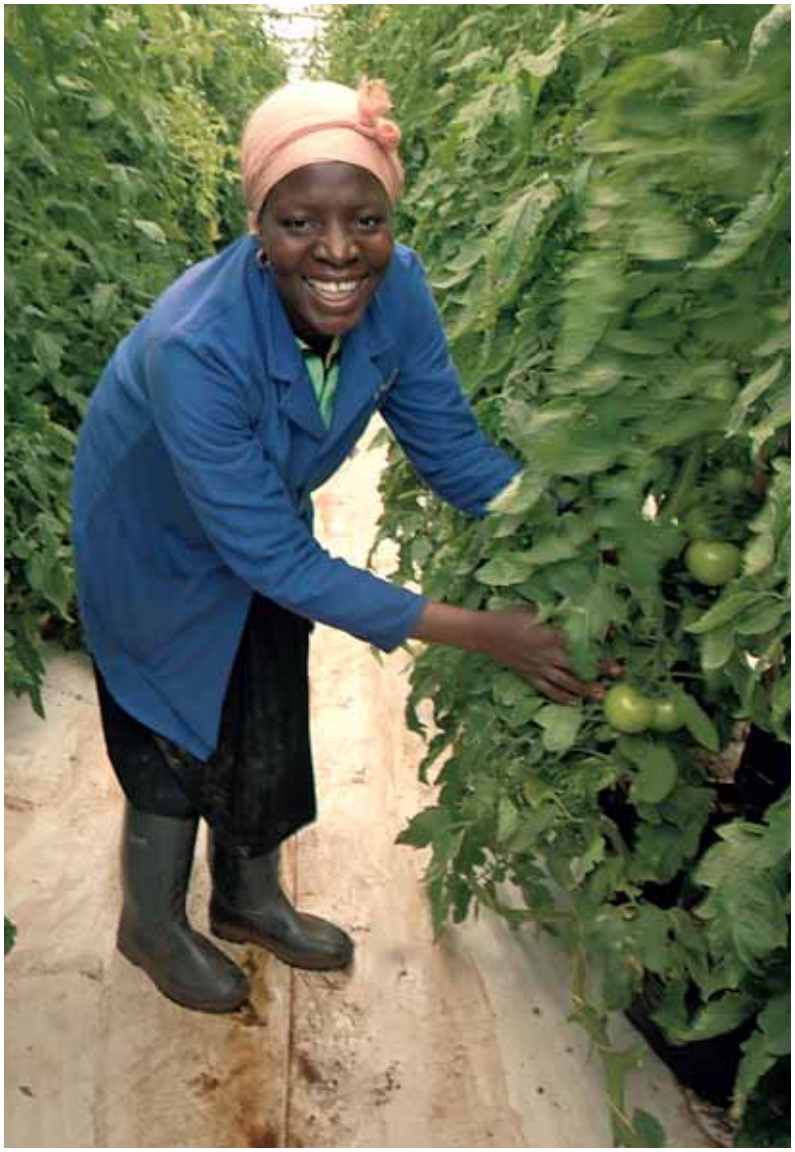
The census took place at the height of the dry season, when most vegetation cover is reduced (making large mammals more visible from the air) and when limited water resources make clustered animal concentrations easier to locate and count.

Using a Hughes 500MD, the census took four hours of flying time, first sweeping north from the airstrip near Mvuu Wilderness Lodge to Lake Malombe and then covering the southern part of the Park. In the north strips were flown along the Shire River and flanking floodplains before surveying the mopane woodland away from the River. In the south a similar approach was followed, with strips concentrating on the Shire and wide open floodplains, before surveying the woodland areas. The survey was begun at 09h00 and ended after midday. Specific focus was once again given to the fenced 'sanctuary' area in the central part of the Park in order to compare game concentrations and ratios here with the remainder of the Park.

Of specific interest was Liwonde's elephant population and of course the small black rhino population harboured in the sanctuary. Amongst the interim results, elephant showed an increase on numbers recorded in 2006, as did several other species such as waterbuck, sable, impala and warthog.

MAKULEKE

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT PROJECT



The Makuleke Small Business Support Company (SBSC) has been established as a joint venture between the Makuleke Community Property Association (CPA) and Wilderness Safaris to encourage, support and diversify tourism related enterprise. The CPA is the landholder both in and outside of the Kruger, whilst Wilderness Safaris is a concessionaire in the Makuleke Contract Park that attaches to the Kruger National Park.

From the support of partner agencies such as GTZ, substantial infrastructure, equipment and facilities have been introduced to start tourism-related enterprise at Makuleke Village near the Kruger Park. The Makuleke Small Business Support Company, which has been given the responsibility to manage the assets in a productive manner, needs to plan, train and support community-based enterprise to develop their product and services for the tourism market in a manner where they become profitable and are diversified and expanded in the best interests of the company and community partners.

The objective of the project is to develop a multi-function community centre in the vicinity of the Makuleke Concession on adjoining communal land where the Makuleke landowners are situated. In this manner, tourism-related products and services can be procured by tourism establishments inside and outside of the Kruger National Park.

OKAVANGO DELTA

LARGE HERBIVORE ECOLOGY PROJECT

The Large Herbivore Ecology Project, run by PhD student Harriet Bartlam, focuses on gaining detailed information of present seasonal population densities, demographics and distribution of the key large-bodied herbivores – Cape buffalo, African elephant, blue wildebeest, giraffe, greater kudu, impala, Burchell's zebra, red lechwe and tsessebe – across the southern Okavango Delta. This is being complimented by gathering detailed season-, habitat- and area-specific data on the available resource characteristics, local flooding regime and fire incidence. It is hoped that these data will increase our understanding of the current state of the Okavango Delta's herbivore population, their limiting factors and how they utilise the Okavango system.

Despite the policies that aim to protect the Okavango Delta from detrimental human interference, the ecosystem remains under threat, internationally from increased water extraction in Angola and Namibia, as well as locally through increased human pressure from communities and tourists. These threats are compounded by a lack of knowledge about the community ecology of many of the ecosystem's large-bodied mammals, especially herbivores.

The project's primary goal is thus to provide scientific and holistic ecological data that can be used by ecosystem managers in long-term active management strategies and to produce an interpretive assessment of the potential environmental impacts of the Delta's principal conservation issues. The information provided by the project on the present population demographics, assembly patterns, preferred resources and habitats, movement patterns and spatial distribution patterns of medium-sized herbivores within the southern Okavango Delta will dramatically increase our understanding of what factors are of primary importance in regulating the system's herbivore population.

During 2007, GPS collars were deployed on zebra across the Moremi Game Reserve to investigate how animals utilise the system with preliminary data already providing interesting and helpful insights into local movement patterns and ecology.

OKAVANGO NEST BOX PROJECT

MSc. Bursary: Ms Zenzele Mpofu

The Okavango Nest Box Project, part of the larger Meyer's Parrot Project, aims to investigate the ecology of hole-nesting bird species and competitors for these natural tree cavities in the Okavango Delta. An overall analysis of the availability and preference of nest cavities as a keystone for ecological processes of the Meyer's Parrot and other species will produce data that will be used to develop a strategy that will protect the species and the community in which it lives in the future.

Another aim of this project is to look at whether nest boxes can be successfully used to substitute the removal of old-growth timber and woodland habitat. This is especially important during the modern era where cavity nesters are threatened by increasing deforestation due to logging and burning. To this end, the project will assess both nest box preferences and breeding biology of bird species that make use of cavities in which to nest.

Other threats such as ectoparasites and predation are being investigated to determine to what extent these might be limiting factors. The use of nest boxes and natural cavities by different species will be compared to see if a conservation plan for cavity nesting bird species can be developed.

The study is taking place on Vundumtiki Island in the Kwedi Concession in the Okavango Delta where a large population of Meyer's Parrot and other cavity-nesting bird species exist. To date 25 active Meyer's Parrot nest sites have been identified in the area and estimates of natural cavities are being obtained. In addition 30 wooden nest boxes, 105 PVC nest boxes and 45 palm trunk sections have been put up in dead or damaged Knobthorn or Leadwood trees in various ecotones and habitats, including riverine forest. Climate, temperature, humidity and other data are recorded at each site daily and nest boxes inspected. During nesting season eggs will be measured, ectoparasites collected, and behaviour observed for later analysis.

BOTSWANA RHINO
RELOCATION AND REINTRODUCTION PROJECT

This project, also known as the Mombo Rhino Project, began in 2001 when some 30 white rhino were successfully reintroduced into the Mombo area of the Moremi Game Reserve (in a joint effort by Wilderness Safaris, Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust, Botswana's Department of Wildlife and South Africa National Parks), after having been poached out in the 1990s. Since then, the project has concentrated on monitoring and observing the animals, their social and territorial behaviour and their response to the annual Okavango floodwaters, rainfall and other animals in the area. 2007 saw a need for the increased presence of and protection by a monitoring team particularly in the cases of rhino having settled outside the formally protected areas.

Some rhino remain on Chiefs Island where they were all initially released, many of the remainder having moved significant distances away. Currently, seven rhino carry active transmitters, most of which reside on Chiefs Island where the Mombo Rhino Patrol vehicle is able to access them and monitor them. This monitoring is carried out by the Rhino Monitoring Officer, the Environmental Manager and the Conservation Ecologist in collaboration with the Anti-Poaching Unit.

However, the Mombo Rhino Patrol vehicle only operated on Chief's Island, meaning the rest of the population had not been monitored to the same degree. Added to this was the concern over increasing levels of poaching in the areas surrounding National Parks. The Rhino Reintroduction Project thus urgently needed to expand its presence into these outlying areas.

The purchase of a second Rhino Patrol vehicle and camping supplies has enabled the Rhino Monitoring Officer, Environmental Manager and the Conservation Ecologist to conduct patrols to areas where the rhino have moved, in order to monitor and keep track of them.

With this additional support, the project has been able to maintain and expand the detailed monitoring programme currently being carried out by Wilderness Safaris Botswana in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Anti Poaching Unit. This programme involves locating the rhino by means of telemetry or tracking and recording their GPS localities, condition and behaviour patterns – all of which is added to the Rhino Monitoring Database.

Results that are expected to be produced by the project include an increased presence of the Rhino Reintroduction Project in and around community areas where some of the released rhino have dispersed. Increased monitoring of these populations will also add to their protection and safety as well as increase the degree of environmental and conservation education shared with local communities living in close proximity of these rhino.

NAMIB BROWN HYENA PROJECT

The Brown Hyena Research Project studies the brown hyena population in its natural habitat in south-western Namibia to ensure the long-term conservation and survival of this species and its ecosystem. The main study area lies in the Sperrgebiet. Its habitats are diverse, resulting in differing behavioural ecology of the various brown hyena clans. Coastal brown hyenas are ecologically unique, as they prey on seal pups in the seal colonies. Inland hyenas lack such a localised food source and use larger home ranges in which to forage. Conflict with humans exists mainly along the coast in areas where mining takes place, around towns and along the Sperrgebiet boundary.

To date, project leader Dr Ingrid Wiesel has fitted 14 brown hyenas with VHF collars and 13 brown hyenas and one spotted hyena with GPS collars. GPS technology is used to determine home range size, habitat use and activity patterns. By using remote data download technology, data can be delivered in due time and the Project is therefore able to give conservation recommendations on a regular basis.

The data has indicated that home range sizes for brown hyenas vary and can be between 200km^2 and 3000km^2. Coastal brown hyenas have smaller home ranges than those inland, which tend to move greater distances in search for food each night. The first spotted hyena home range estimate for the north-eastern part of the Sperrgebiet is 3900km^2.

Data from GPS collars provided the possibility to detect changes in hyena behaviour in areas with land development. Some newly disturbed areas were avoided, whereas other areas seem to have become an attraction to hyenas (such as access to water near sewerage systems). In the case of the spotted hyenas, retrieved data from the GPS collars made it possible to exclude hyenas as problem animals with regard to recently killed livestock on farms bordering national parks.

CHILDREN IN THE WILDERNESS

Now going into its seventh year of operation, Children in the Wilderness continues to run highly successful programmes in Wilderness Safaris camps in Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, South Africa and the Seychelles. Zambia ran its first Children in the Wilderness Camp in 2007 and it is hoped that the programme will extend to include Zimbabwe in 2008.

Fundraising as always is an ongoing and a vital element to the success of the programme. In July 2007 the third Tour de Kruger and Great Limpopo cycle event took place, and many individuals pushed their personal boundaries to raise money for the children of Africa.

2007/ 2008 CAMPS

Overall, this season CITW hosted a further 428 children and 1940 "children-in-camp nights" – since inception of the programme a total of 2 263 children and 10 643 children-in-camp nights have been hosted.

- Botswana – In November and December another 96 children were hosted over six camp sessions at Jacana and Kaparota camps.
- Namibia – May/June saw a camp for street children at Kulala Wilderness Camp as well as a second follow-up camp there. Two camps took place in December 2007 at Desert Rhino Camp – hosting almost 100 children this year.
- Malawi – Six camps were run in December/January in Mvuu Camp and Chintheche Inn with 24 children per camp.
- South Africa – Pafuri Camp operated its third camp, hosting 44 children in December.
- Seychelles – North Island completed its second camp and hosted 30 children in September.
- Zambia – Its first camp took place in October with 18 children.

Botswana

In February, Children in the Wilderness Botswana hosted the first workshop for its new Environmental Outreach Programme, teaming up with the Association of Environmental Clubs of Botswana to develop programme materials for Environmental Clubs in schools.

The outreach programme in 2007 hosted a series of five workshops involving the Environmental Club Coordinator from each school to develop projects for the Environmental Clubs. The outcome will be a year's activity plan with teacher's guidelines that will then be implemented in 2008.

I have always wanted to do something charitable and joining Wilderness Safaris was one of my dreams come true, I learnt about Children in the Wilderness and its aims.

I was honoured when my volunteer application was approved and I was a mentor to the children. I was happy to see sad faces wearing smiles when we welcomed them to the camp and gave them the love…. Being a mentor to these children taught me how to deal with them and how children appreciate little things that we as their elders/parents offer them, just the priceless love we showed the kids was more than buying them the most expensive toy.

Most of the children were thankful that they had the opportunity to see the beauty of nature and that the camp taught them responsibility, environmental conservation, respect, love (which they got from us) caring for others etc.

I personally enjoyed being part of CITW and being with the children, sharing my knowledge and love. I definitely will participate each year to do this tremendous job CITW is doing.

***Abraham Kula** CITW mentor (2007)*

Namibia

This year, Children in the Wilderness Namibia was sad to see the departure of Sunday Nelenge, who had been the "front and centre" person for most of the Namibian camps. However, on a positive note we were joined by Franco Morao – the youngest member of the team who started as one of the first child-orphan participants on a Children in the Wilderness camp – who has become a skilled and very talented Assistant Camp Coordinator.

One of the highlights this year was the successful implementation of a follow-up camp at Desert Rhino Camp, with 30 children selected from all over the country who had participated in Children in the Wilderness Camps since 2002. An older group of children was purposely chosen, as the camp specifically focused on job opportunities and preparation for some of the challenges they may face when leaving school. A wider and new range of topics was brought to this camp, including income-generating craft projects, vocational counselling and more in-depth conservation projects.

For many of the children going on the nature drive was also their first experience of looking through a pair of binoculars. One girl called Mukamaandera was very puzzled by the binos and to start with was very cautious and didn't want to hold them. … She tentatively put her eyes towards the lens. She jumped backwards, shocked that the kudu were now so close and the other children erupted in laughter. Looking for a second time she shrieked with the joy of seeing the animals up close, telling the others all that she could see. For the rest of the drive her eyes were glued to the binos as she examined every rocky outcrop for signs of life.

Malawi

In addition to the six annual camps, Children in the Wilderness Malawi conducted one-day follow-up camps for 95 children, at Mvuu and Chintheche respectively. The aim was to build on the learning experience of the initial camp session, to provide mentoring and support through regular contact as well as allow the evaluation of the impact of the programme. This theme of the follow-up was "The power of staying focused on your future" and had topics such as planning one's future, HIV/AIDS, values and decision making, the benefits of staying in school and environmental education. In order to enhance proper coordination and collaboration of this follow-up, we also invited two teachers from each school that the children attend.

Some of the children from Children in the Wilderness Malawi also participated in the Lake of Stars Festival by performing with American singer Yewande Adebayo. Yewande is a hugely talented musician who performs music with a message and whose work has catapulted an inspirational movement of social change. Yewande spent many hours rehearsing with the children prior to the event. At last the big day arrived and 26 children participated in the festival, outshining everyone. Not only was the performance a big hit, the children learnt many life skills in the process.

"We don't have time to play in the village; we're too busy with chores. I like it at camp because we can play."

North Island, Seychelles

North Island closed its doors to guests in September to host 30 children, selected by the Seychelles' National Council for Children, for its second Children in the Wilderness programme. Both children and staff made new friends, and all learnt new lessons about their environment through games and creative projects whilst having an enormous amount of fun in the process. They also learned about fitness as they took part in the "North Island Marathon" led by Tracy Bamber of Wilderness Safaris and Helen Clark, two marathon runners who had assisted in raising funds to make the programme possible.

Cate Procter, CITW North Island Project Coordinator said, "As staff we were given as much as we gave. On the last night, we were privy to incredible theatre display from all the children where we not only discovered 30 budding Hollywood stars but were shown an appreciation that moved us all tremendously! We also witnessed just how much had been absorbed and learnt about the environment – our main theme – how their confidence had grown and their new-found happiness had flourished."

South Africa

For the third year in a row, Pafuri Camp welcomed in 44 underprivileged children on the programme designed to change their lives. Aged between 11 and 15, the participants were selected from the local Makuleke people to whom the Pafuri area belongs. This is particularly significant, considering that this gives the children a chance to see the very land from which their grandparents were evicted so many years ago. They are able to appreciate its wealth of beauty and diversity and to learn from and be inspired by those members of their villages who have become knowledgeable guides and staff at Pafuri Camp. Children in the Wilderness' ideals of creating role models and a sense of hope in the future are thus fulfilled.

This year's Children in the Wilderness programme concentrated on learning about wildlife and about the history of the Makuleke. More focus was placed on game drives and conservation than in the past, where each game drive had a different theme, such as Mammal Identification (the first time many children had seen an animal in the wild!), Bird Identification, a Natural Treasure Hunt, Tracks and Signs and Survival Skills.

A number of the children's teachers attended as well, to ensure that the programme's benefits continue after they return home. This year's programme was sponsored by Tauck World Discovery.

Pafuri Camp a miracle that you have done to me, I will never forget my whole life forever.

I like to say don't stop what you are doing. Go on please. Take care of the children that are coming next year and show them all what you show us this five days and teach them what you teached [sic] us. God bless you the Pafuri members and the CITW.

Helper Manganyi

Zambia

In October 2007 Wilderness Safaris closed the doors of Lufupa Camp to guests to host a group of 18 children from Jifumpa School, a primary school located in the North Western Province, just outside Kafue National Park. The school has limited resources; classes average 65 students with only four teachers employed to teach them all. Over the four days an incredible transformation was seen in each child; the smiles, laughter and enthusiasm grew day by day and hour by hour. The game drives were very interactive activities, with the children partaking in a scavenger hunt, collecting a variety of different seeds, flowers and natural medicines. On a morning game drive, the children were lucky enough to come across two very large male lions, a highlight for all, including the Headmaster, as none of them had seen a real lion before!

Workshops focused on respect and responsibility, conservation, friendship and love and caring, particularly with regard to HIV/AIDS. The programme clearly benefited not only the children. The teacher and headmaster pledged to take what they had learnt back to the school and to continue the good work with all their students.

There were some comical moments – Mason told us that the best thing about camp was seeing a "Muzungu" (white person) for the first time!

On the last night the children told us what had meant the most to them. Constance loved the food and having enough food to eat and not feeling hungry. Ireddy loved sleeping in her own bed and wished she could sleep like that at home instead of sleeping on the mat with all the other children. She loved playing outdoors and feeling free.

Zimbabwe

Given the political and economic state of the country, young Zimbabweans need hope and encouragement more than ever – hence the decision to begin implementing the Children in the Wilderness programme within the next year. Planning is in progress to implement the programme focusing primarily on staff training. The first camp will host 25 children to be selected from the AIDS orphanage in Dete. This is on the boundary of Hwange National Park where the majority of Wilderness Safaris' camps are situated.

KUNENE COMMUNITY
PERCEPTIONS PROJECT

MSc. Bursary: Kenneth Heinrich ≠Kibagu /Uiseb

Thanks to the intensive efforts of conservationists, black rhino are increasing in many areas of Namibia, with rhino reintroductions taking place within the species' historical range. For example, in 2006, two black rhino were reintroduced in the ≠Khoadi //Khoas Communal Conservancy in the area that borders on Torra and //Huab Communal Conservancies.

However, since black rhino became locally extinct in these conservancies in the 1980s, for many years people have not come into contact with this species. The Kunene Community Perceptions Project therefore assessed local communities' attitudes and perceptions towards, and experiences with, the reintroduced black rhino in the ≠Khoadi //Khoas Conservancy and the bordering conservancies (Torra and //Huab Conservancy). The research findings will be compared with that of a similar attitudes and perception survey that was conducted in May/June 2004 by Save the Rhino Trust (SRT). By confronting this issue now, approaches towards perceived threats and opportunities with local communities can be identified. It is hoped that the long-term survival of this rare and endangered animal will be thus ensured.

The study was conducted in September 2007 in the ≠Khoadi //Hôas Conservancy. Methods used included questionnaires, with selected households interviewed, as well as focus group discussions and interviews with key people in the area, such as traditional leaders and conservation workers.

Preliminary findings from the survey show that people generally have positive attitudes and perceptions toward the reintroduced black rhino. The only negative perception was that of the black rhino being a dangerous and aggressive creature, which is possibly connected to the human-elephant conflict in the conservancy over limited water and grazing, resulting in negative attitudes towards wildlife in general.

It is hoped that the resulting research report on the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of local communities towards reintroduced rhino will lead to a better understanding of the relationship between the two, ultimately ensuring the success of the reintroduction programme.

About the researcher:

The researcher of this project, Kenneth Heinrich ≠Kibagu /Uiseb, grew up in the rural Kunene region, the stronghold of the free-roaming black rhino, and over time developed strong interest in the conservation of the flagship species of the arid Kunene region.

During the dry season in Hwange National Park, water sources become scarce. Some 57 boreholes therefore are used to pump out the precious liquid from deep underground in order to sustain the wildlife in the area.

The 2006 and 2007 wet season was in general very dry and Hwange as a whole did not get much rain — approximately 230mm. The dry winter months arrived and pans were pumped 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to keep up with demand from herds of animals. 13 waterholes were being pumped at this stage in the concessions with engines supplied through the Wilderness Trust. These pumps are essential for wildlife in this area as there are no major rivers or sources of permanent water and most natural waterholes dry up completely during the winter and hot dry months. On a yearly basis all equipment is uplifted from the waterholes to ensure a proper service plan is carried out in order to maintain these boreholes.

Windmills are now being looked at as an alternative to the Lister engines; it is hoped that new windmills will be used on certain areas of the concession, beginning with the more remote areas such as Mbiza Pan and Airstrip Two Pan. These are efficient and very low maintenance machines that will without doubt relieve a lot of pressure from other more central pans in the area. Although they do not pump as much water as a Lister engine, windmills are more environmentally friendly, simpler to maintain and more cost-effective. These will be set up in such a way that in the dry months, when pressure mounts from thirsty wildlife, a Lister engine can be installed and more water can be pumped.

A windmill funded by the Wilderness Trust arrived early in 2008 and will hopefully be up and running before the beginning of the next dry season.

HWANGE ANTI-POACHING
PROJECT

Hwange National Park is Zimbabwe's largest game reserve, where poaching is a continual concern. The combined efforts and participation of Wilderness Safaris' staff and National Parks and Wildlife Authorities support and maintain an anti-poaching camp. Here they assist with anti-poaching raids, rake concessions to remove and collect wire snares, and subsequently de-snare and treat animals inflicted and wounded by snares; all this has helped protect the wildlife of Hwange National Park.

Recently, the efforts have been extended outside the concessions, focusing on the south-eastern boundary of Hwange. Both the communal farming zone south of the boundary and the railway line from Victoria Falls to Bulawayo that runs through the area have contributed to an upsurge in commercial bush-meat poaching that is then transported to Bulawayo. Traps and wire snares are being set close to and around natural waterholes in seldom frequented areas of this boundary and it became vital that the National Parks and Wildlife Authority, supported by Wilderness Safaris and the Trust, were able to access these areas regularly and timeously.

Not having a dedicated vehicle meant that there was no full-time presence to patrol the areas or keep poaching activities fully under control. Occasionally a Wilderness Safaris vehicle could be used if it was available. The Trust funded the rebuilding of a Land Rover to transport scouts, patrol and gather information, apprehend poachers and deliver them to the police for sentencing.

With a dedicated vehicle the anti-poaching team has been transformed into a mobile and active anti-poaching presence on the ground in order to hamper and prevent any further poaching activities. Radio communication between the scouts, the vehicle and camp is now possible, resulting in rapid reaction times to incidents. With regular patrols, the circle of influence will be expanded to the neighbouring communities, where conservation awareness programmes will hopefully empower local people to protect their natural heritage.

Anti-poaching patrols now take place on a daily basis in the south-east, eventually expanding into other areas within Hwange. The unit can continue in its efforts to ensure both wildlife and natural heritage for future generations of Zimbabwe.

KUNENE LION PROJECT

Namibia supports a unique population of desert-adapted lions that survive in the harsh Namib Desert. This "desert lion" is highly valued in Namibia, ecologically, aesthetically and financially, as a prominent feature of the growing tourism industry. However, regardless of the potential value of wildlife there is regular conflict between local people and animals such as black rhino, elephant, and lion. The last is traditionally one of the most popular species among tourists but local communities suffer financial losses when lion prey on their livestock, often retaliating (illegally) by killing them. In addition, there appears to be a discrepancy in the proportion of the benefits from tourism that reach the local people living close to lion (i.e. individual farmers) who suffer more losses than those further away.

During 2007, the Project and its leader Dr Flip Stander focused on improving the tourism potential of desert-adapted lions, and developing a system where benefits from lions would reach the appropriate local people. Essential to this process is a sound grasp of lion ecology and behaviour which, due to their nocturnal habits, is often poorly understood. Lions were observed intensively for 2 208 hours in a study area between the Hoaruseb and Hunkap Rivers. It was found that there are three prides of lions living around three ephemeral river systems and associated conservancies. Although there was overlap between the home ranges of the three groups, they rarely interacted with each other. By January 2008 there were 35 individually-known lions occupying a combined area of 6 171 km^2.

Hunting was observed regularly with lions taking 51 animals from a range of 12 species. Gemsbok was the most important prey species and, along with zebra, ostrich and springbok, formed 75% of kills. Livestock (donkeys) represented only 5% of these.

In the Hoaruseb River, lion spent 85% of their time in the riverbed and the remainder in rocky outcrops close to the river (5–10km). The likelihood of finding and seeing lions, during a sample of 82 attempts, was high (69 %). Despite this high probability, only 18% of 412 tourists that drove past the lions actually saw them; peak tourism traffic was generally during the hours when lions were inactive.

By providing more information to tourism operators, the success rate of finding and approaching desert lions during game drives should increase, thereby improving their tourism value. Conservancies are currently implementing a "Lion Fund" where income derived from lion-related tourism is managed. To limit and manage depredation by lions, each conservancy is implementing a livestock management structure. The "Lion Fund" can then be used to protect livestock from predation by lions, and preferentially compensate the correct conservancy members when livestock losses occur.

MAPUTALAND SEA TURTLE
PROJECT

From as early as 1961 there has been awareness of dwindling sea turtle populations on the Maputaland coast, but a 1963 initiative set up by the Natal Parks Board (now Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife) and Dr George Hughes set out to protect and monitor the 56km stretch of beach now known as the Maputaland Marine Reserve. After financial difficulties threatened to disable the project, donations made from the World Wildlife Fund, Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust, and Rocktail Bay Lodge were able to save the ongoing monitoring process along the beaches. The project is now in its 45th year, making it one of the longest and most successful running turtle research projects in the world. Since the 2006 season, it was joined by MSc. researcher Chris Boyes from the University of Stellenbosch.

The first two months of the 2007/8 nesting season saw a rather slow start with very few turtles coming up to lay eggs in October and fewer actually laying – only five loggerheads and six leatherbacks got eggs into nests. By November this had increased dramatically however, and by February, loggerhead nests far outnumbered those of the same period in the previous year, with 360 as opposed to 219 nests. Leatherback turtles have had a better season than last year as well, with 105 nests to date, compared with 91 nests at the last season's end.

In March 2007, the topography of the beach was drastically altered by a massive equinox tide and rough seas. It was feared that this would negatively affect the turtles' nesting success as a large portion of the beachfront dune complex was eroded away, leaving very little suitable nesting sites. Many turtles resorted to laying their eggs low down on the beach where the threat of the eggs being washed away during a big spring tide was thought to be much higher. However, the tide did not reach as high up the beach as expected, and few major erosive events occurred this season, possibly attributed to the extra width of the beach due to the great amount of sand added by the erosion of the stable coastal dune system. Thus, the numbers of hatchlings emerging from nests were very positive, with 52 nests emerging to date, of which 13 were leatherback and 39 loggerhead nests.

Another challenge for the turtles has been the patrolling of the beach by honey badgers around Manzengwenya, digging up quite a few of the leatherback nests. Amazingly these mammals have been targeting leatherback nests over those of the loggerheads, even though the former are much deeper and seemingly much harder to locate. The pay-off of a nest full of larger leatherback eggs is obviously worth the effort. Experienced Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife officers had never seen honey badger predation on the nests before this; it is possible that an isolated few honey badgers have learnt to forage for this source of food.

This season the temperature of the beach was measured at various depths and points along the study area in order to estimate the temperature at which the nests could be incubating. Some I-button data loggers were put into nests with eggs to log the temperature every 24 minutes through the incubation period, complementing the temperature profile data logged on the beach.

Many Rocktail Bay Lodge guests have generously adopted turtles this season, with 31 loggerheads and 13 leatherbacks having found "new parents." Two companies have been especially generous – PT Trust celebrated the Rugby World Cup by adopting four turtles, and Vox Telecom's CEO, Tony van Marken, recently adopted 10 turtles to be shared by his company.

NAMIBIAN
ELEPHANT AND GIRAFFE PROJECT

The Namibian Elephant and Giraffe Trust (NEGT) Project investigates the seasonal movements, seasonal distribution, behaviour, genetics and social interactions of the elephants in the Kunene and Omusati Regions of Namibia. Over the past year, its researchers focused on the social behaviour, movement and diurnal activities of the elephants in the research area, completing 11 field trips, including one collaring exercise (eight elephants were GPS-collared).

Elephants are becoming increasingly important income generators for local conservancies and information is required to guide decision-making, particularly relating to consumptive use. The revenue generated from consumptive and non-consumptive tourism has the potential to contribute in the long term to rural livelihoods. The current project focused on the collection of elephant identification, movement and monitoring data, with the aim of contributing to the long-term conservation of elephants in north and north-west Namibia. Further, the project aims to disseminate scientifically-gathered data on elephants to all stakeholders to ensure appropriate management plans for the elephants.

In September 2002, September 2004, October 2005, February 2006 and October 2007, eight, four, five, one and eight (respectively) GPS collars were fitted to elephants in the northern section of the Kunene and the Omusati Regions. In July 2007, one of the long-term study elephants (EKM-06) was shot in the commercial farming areas to the south of Hobatere Game Reserve (HGR).

Between 24 and 30 October 2007 a new collaring exercise was undertaken. Elephants identified as WKM-10 and WKM-20 were GPS-collared in the western section of the Hoanib River, EKM-07, EKM-08, EKM-09 and EKM-10 were collared in Hobatere Game Reserve, and WOM-05 and WOM-06 were collared in the Omusati Region. Only WKM-10 from the previous collaring exercises was re-collared; all other elephants were "new."

The activity observed over the wet season of 2007 reflects the fact that it was a relatively dry year, with activity that has differed significantly from previous years. During the 2006-7 wet season, only 15mm of rain was recorded at Sesfontein (average being 87.9mm per annum) and no rain at all was recorded in Purros (no annual average available). This was reflected in the amount of available grazing and browsing, which was less than in previous years. Significantly, social activities were observed to be either much less (adults) or much greater than expected (sub-adults and juveniles). These are just preliminary results and when the complete yearly data sets are added, the results may be slight different.

A new project currently being developed on human-elephant conflicts aims to provide relevant data to decision makers at local, national and international levels. This study will contribute significantly to the conservation of elephants in Namibia.

NORTH ISLAND
REHABILITATION PROJECT

In 1990, a biodiversity study undertaken to evaluate the Seychelles islands for their rehabilitation potential identified North Island as a prospective sanctuary where natural habitats could be transformed and Seychelles animal and plant species reintroduced. However, before endemic species could be introduced, pest eradication and vegetation rehabilitation (removal of invader plants, remnants of its time as a coconut plantation, and subsequent planting of endemic species) had to take place. North Island's "Noah's Ark Project" therefore began these processes with the aim of becoming a "host island", that is, a place where species indigenous to the Seychelles, particularly those that are endangered, can be reintroduced and increase in numbers in a safe environment.

The North Island Rehabilitation Project provides necessary assistance in accelerating the vegetation rehabilitation of the island by adding casual labour to the resident Landscape Team. In 2007 the Project supported the introduction and subsequent monitoring of Seychelles White-Eyes (a critically endangered endemic bird species) in support of the Government's management programme to safeguard the survival of this species. Additional areas are being rehabilitated by removing alien invader plants and trees and replacing these with endemic broadleaved and fruiting trees. Whilst the fruiting trees will be supplying berries and fruits, the broadleaved trees form a suitable habitat for insects, both insects and fruit being the main food components in the diet of the Seychelles White-Eye. In July 2007, after nearly ten years of intensive rehabilitation, 25 Seychelles White-Eyes, around 8% of the world's population, were released on North Island.

The Seychelles White-Eye is a small, nondescript bird, but no less important in that the global population is estimated at only 350-400 individuals and is entirely restricted to the granitic islands of the Seychelles. Due to habitat loss and the highly localised nature of the population this species is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red Data List. Central to the recovery strategy for the species has been expanding its range and as a result it was decided to allow new populations to be created on other islands, one of which was North Island.

The 25 birds were captured on Conception Island adjacent to Mahé and were moved by helicopter in five separate translocations by Helicopter Seychelles and Zil Air. On North Island each group of birds was held overnight in captivity for observation and for analysis of blood samples for parasites before being released the following day onto the island.

The whole operation was very much a team effort. North Island's rehabilitation programme provided a sustainable habitat for the White-Eyes, while NGO Island Conservation Society and the Seychelles Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources enabled the capture, transfer and post-release monitoring of the birds.

The Seychelles White-Eye Introduction was made possible through the funding of the Annenberg Foundation. The Annenberg Foundation exists to advance the public wellbeing through improved communication. As the principal means of achieving its goal, the Foundation encourages the development of more effective ways to share ideas and knowledge. The Annenberg Foundation has offices in Radnor, PA and Los Angeles, CA. (www.annenbergfoundation.org)

SHADOW HUNTER
BLACK MONGOOSE PROJECT

The black mongoose is considered the largest endemic carnivore in Namibia and possibly a separate species to the slender mongoose. This project aims to verify its taxonomic and conservation status by ascertaining the genetic relationship between the black, slender and small grey mongoose, investigating its distribution and dispersal in the Erongo Mountains and training Namibian students in conservation ecology.

A major element of this project was completed in 2007, with preliminary DNA analysis confirming that the black mongoose is indeed most likely a species separate from both the slender and the Cape grey mongooses. In addition, a total of 37 black mongooses were trapped over the year at six different locations across north-western Namibia.

Some genetic samples from other mongoose species (either trapped in the field or sampled from museum specimens) were provided and researcher Sara Tromp is currently searching for more so as to gain a suitable sample size for each of the suggested species.

Preliminary data analysis suggests that there is some pronounced genetic differentiation between black mongoose populations. This information is important as it suggests that some populations are possibly acting as evolutionarily significant units, a factor which needs to be considered carefully when making management recommendations for this species and its unique habitat. Many more samples are needed to further this study and four potential trapping sites have been identified for 2008 in addition to the original six.

As well as continuing the trapping and distribution survey, 20 individuals will be radio-collared at the main field site in 2008. This will allow researchers to track these individuals daily, describing their social system, breeding and other general observations, thus increasing knowledge of the mongooses in this study population. Finally, in January, a Masters student from the University of Namibia joined the project to conduct a study on the diet and habitat preferences of the black mongoose.

SIMONGA VILLAGE
PROJECTS

Since 2000, The River Club has carried out a range of projects in the nearby Simonga Village, funded by donations of guests in conjunction with the Trust. This year the Simonga Village Project has largely continued with the existing smaller projects and used funding to keep these on track while negotiating bureaucracy to achieve ever larger social benefits.

Simonga Basic School remained the main focal point of activities and visits by guests. A couple of formal volunteer visits were even organised and we are grateful for the acts of generosity by these people and institutions to help the people of Simonga. Funds from UNUM, UK, went towards repainting the school buildings following a football match – in which the schoolboys won 1-0 against their English opponents! Three young volunteers from UNUM were already at the school assisting with administration and in addition painted the school buildings and the roof of the police station and built a goat shed in the school grounds. They completed their tasks successfully before flying back to the UK to begin university.

The Robert Sloan Scholarship has continued to put children through high schools in Livingstone as well as two teachers through university courses. One of the schoolchildren has entered a tertiary institution. Other funds have paid for all the exam fees at Simonga Basic School.

The sporting events attended by the schoolchildren were all sponsored by donations from River Club guests. The money covered food, drinks and transportation, whilst the children proudly wore new sporting uniforms provided by guests largely from the USA.

The Simonga Health Post continues to attract fundraising efforts from all over the world (generally after a visit to the village during their stay at The River Club) and construction work has continued, albeit at a frustrating pace. A joint initiative between the Department of Health of the Government of Zambia and The River Club, sufficient funds have now been secured for the completion of the building, projected for 1 June 2008. The Belron Group of Companies raised money for clinic equipment, currently in safe storage until the clinic opens. The clinic has even attracted high-profile attention with the US Ambassador to Zambia, Carmen Martinez, looking in on the project during a trip to the Southern Province during the year.

The Water Programme has continued to provide 50 000 litres of water to the inhabitants and funds have been used to supply diesel for the generator and servicing of the equipment. The Simonga Police Post will also be expanded to include accommodation for police officers, ensuring that the station is manned 24 hours a day. Funds for this project have largely now been raised.

In 2008, we will continue to raise funds for the village school and its facilities, the clinic and its equipment supply, the completion of the Police Post accommodation, generator fuel for the water project and the electrification of all these buildings in conjunction with Zambia's Rural Electrification Initiative.

VICTORIA FALLS
ANTI-POACHING UNIT

The Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit (VFAPU) is a privately managed anti-poaching unit established by Charles Brightman in 1999, patrolling a 50 km² area surrounding the Victoria Falls, deterring poachers and removing snares from this area. VFAPU has worked in close cooperation with the National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and the Zimbabwe Republic Police, to achieve many successes.

The unit has grown in strength, with twelve full-time scouts actively patrolling the area, seven days a week, day and/or night, as they endeavour to combat poaching in all its various forms. All operations are in accordance with the Senior Warden, National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Zambezi Camp.

Whilst the anti-poaching unit activity is largely directed at the removal of snares and the apprehension of mammal poachers, a great deal of time is spent educating and reinforcing the benefits of conserving our natural resources. The conservation message is being brought to local communities through drama groups, who portray this vital message through song, dance and myths.

VFAPU continues to work with the Forestry Commission in finding alternative means for convicted wood carvers to earn a living other than destroying indigenous tree species such as African Ebony (*Diospyros mespiliformis*), and the Mukwa (*Pterocarpus angolensis*), the latter species under particular threat locally.

Since the unit's establishment, over 17 500 wire snares have been removed from the operational area and more than 280 poachers have been arrested.

PAST PROJECTS

Small Carnivore Project

This project, beginning in 2000, studied the habitat, ecology, breeding and feeding habits of small carnivores on the Kulala Wilderness Reserve, including the bat-eared fox. It also focused on the education of farmers and communities about the differences between an aardwolf (an insectivorous small carnivore) and a hyaena. Farmers often kill aardwolves, mistakenly regarding them as threats to their livestock. It is our hope that education will be a way forward in the conservation of this rare small carnivore.

Cape Griffon Vulture Project

The Cape Griffon Vulture Project, run by the Rare & Endangered Species Trust (REST), monitors Namibia's most endangered resident bird species. REST is the first organisation in Africa to fit satellite telemetry to vultures. The resulting assessment is that poisons have the largest single fatal impact on raptors and scavengers and it is vital that land-use managers are informed of the negative impact of their use in both the short and long term. Overall, the Cape Griffon Vulture population in Namibia is stabilising, with concurrent success with major awareness campaigns by REST.

Chitabe Fire Ecology Research

This project studied the impacts of fire on small mammal populations in the Delta. The study team monitored the populations of small mammals of six grassland species, both before and after a fire. Results showed that the immediate effect of a fire is drastic with complete emigration from the area; none of the study individuals that were present before were ever recaptured afterwards. However, within a few months new individuals of some of the species began to arrive, with some species recovering quicker than others.

Communal Conservancy Black Rhino Relocation

Namibia holds almost a third of all the black rhino remaining in Africa, and 95 percent of the south-western subspecies. While numbers have increased, the annual growth rates of the Kunene black rhino have declined. Therefore, a number of translocation and tagging operations were carried out in 2006 and 2007 to expand black rhino range into specific identified areas within communal conservancies. The operation was successful; it is hoped the colonisation of new suitable black rhino habitat will allow increased population growth rates and the continued survival of this endangered subspecies.

Education Bursary 2006 – Gayle Pederson

2006 Education Bursary recipient Gayle Pederson studied the habitat preference and behaviour of the six white rhino that were reintroduced into the Makuleke region of the northern Kruger National Park. Particular attention was paid to habitat use, diet selection and establishment of territory. The fieldwork component was followed by laboratory work, which included map compilation and faecal analysis. Statistical analysis of the data is now underway.

Linyanti Elephant Impact Study

The study confirmed that loss rates of large tree species in the Linyanti vary considerably from year to year – regardless of whether this is as a result of local climatic variation or factors such as elephant browsing – but importantly also emphasised that these loss rates have high variability over longer time periods as well. Additional and longer-term studies in the region are needed to understand exactly what impact the elephants have on the system.

Liwonde National Park Aerial Census — 2006

In August 2006, a helicopter aerial game census of Liwonde National Park (LNP), Malawi took place. An additional reconnaissance survey was also undertaken over the adjoining Mangochi Forest Reserve (MFR) to establish the status of elephants in the area. The results and conclusions clarified the movements of elephants out of the Park, the extent of illegal activities in both LNP and MFR, and the population increase of various species. Most importantly, the census provided crucial baseline data for the management of Liwonde National Park.

Makuleke Large Mammal Reintroduction Project

In 2005, six white rhino were moved from the central district of the Kruger National Park to the Makuleke Concession in the far north. This was followed with daily tracking and monitoring of the animals to gain an understanding of the local ecology of the white rhino in an area from which it has been absent for more than 120 years, and in so doing to provide this information to the broader conservation community. This increased level of understanding can only improve the likelihood of establishing a viewable breeding nucleus with the potential to range further into the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

PAST PROJECTS

Mana Pools Tree Conservation Project

The project looked at the decline of the tall albida trees (*Faidherbia albida*, known also as the ana tree) that line the banks of the Zambezi River in the Mana Pools National Park. Possible causes of the decline include elephant feeding, part of a natural cycle or change in the Zambezi's flood patterns.

Mkambati School Programmes

A combination of donations from the Trust and private sponsors saw significant improvements in two schools in the Pondoland area in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. Additional funds from private individuals through the Trust have allowed these schools to be completed with regard to buildings and equipment. The schools included Mkambati Junior Secondary School, sponsored by family and friends of Bruna Zacks, and Zimisele School, sponsored by the Ultimate Travel Company UK. These donations have improved the quality of education in this poverty-stricken area.

Monitoring of Bird Populations at Lake Ngami

Bird counts were done twice a week between April and May 2004, after which the Lake began to fill with water. The Project took note of both numbers and species and costs were shared between the Trust and Wetlands International. The end result of the study was the ban by the Botswana government of hunting in the area.

Namibian Black Rhino Habitat Assessment

Carried out by MSc. student, Basilia Shivute, this study explored the use of habitat by the black rhino within its range, taking into account plant density, diversity, tree and shrub species composition, and investigated the influence of terrain on both the vegetation and on the black rhino. This study was carried out in the 144 255km^2 Kunene Region where tourism has been identified as a key development sector for the region. This study also formed a foundation to guide creation of multiple black rhino habitat suitability models across their historical range to prioritise optimal sites for translocation.

Nyae Nyae Human-Elephant Conflict Research

Conflicts between elephants and people are occurring with increasing frequency in Africa, particularly in rural areas on the border of protected regions and specifically at waterholes. The Project was developed to help develop effective strategies to reduce human-elephant conflicts in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, where the Ju/'hoansi people live. The aim of the project was to identify the behavioural, environmental and anthropogenic factors influencing such conflicts in this part of Namibia as a basis for sustainable development and conservation of elephants. One of the key findings of the research was that drinking points for elephants being located further from villages than they are at present may reduce the conflict.

Savé Conservancy Bush-Meat Survey

This project focused on the extent and impact of the bush-meat trade in Savé Valley Conservancy (SVC). Its goals were to develop tools to reduce the impact of snaring, by addressing the underlying causes for the bush-meat trade and enhancing the ability of the conservancy to protect its wildlife. Preliminary data showed that in parts of the conservancy, illegal off-takes are unsustainable. In a year, 9 239 snares resulting in the death of 869 animals were removed from SVC by anti-poaching scouts. However, the data also highlighted that incidences of illegal hunting tend to occur in predictable patterns, both in time and space. By predicting these patterns, anti-poaching scout patrols can be deployed more effectively.

Skeleton Coast Lichen Project

A ground survey of all lichen communities in a 3 000-km^2 concession of the Skeleton Coast Park in the northern Namib Desert assessed the long-term impacts of human activity on lichens and the Namib Desert ecosystem as a whole. The project contributed greatly to the management plan of the Skeleton Coast Park as well as an increased awareness of the role played by lichen in stabilising fragile desert soil and the threat that human activities present to this delicate environment.

TFCA Elephant Populations in the Okavango

Working in collaboration with the Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks and other partners, this study provided vital information on the abundance, distribution, population structure, habitat needs, and movements of elephants in northern Botswana, and particularly the transboundary movements of elephants within the Okavango-Upper Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area. This data, along with a digital land-cover map and a spatial elephant population model has hopefully provided wildlife managers with tools for developing an elephant management programme for Botswana as well as for the larger Transfrontier Conservation Area.


JACANA

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HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO AFRICA

Africa's conservation needs are enormous and in urgent need of financial and logistical support. We are justly proud of the successes we have achieved that have resulted in the conservation of animals and plant species and the assistance of neighbouring communities. We would like to thank all our generous donors who have helped us make a difference in Africa.

To continue this work, we need your help. We are grateful for your donations. These fall into two categories: 1) those given for specific projects or 2) those given to the Trust in general. The money in this latter category is essential for common costs incurred by many of the projects that we support and are often put towards equipment such as radio transmitters and receivers, satellite collars, vehicles, fuel and other essential elements. They are also vital to allow us to devote resources to new, deserving projects at short notice to ensure timely conservation action.

If you would like to assist us in these efforts, please make use of one of the options below:

For your convenience we have a USD bank account in Botswana:

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For American taxpayers, donations to the Trust can be tax-deductible through a 501c facility. This facility levies a 5% administration fee. Please email Laura Mass of the Resources First Foundation at lmass@resourcesfirstfoundation.org or call her on 207-221-2753 for details.

For more details about the Trust or donations, please call Trust Secretary Mari dos Santos on +27 11 807 1800.

About Resources First Foundation:

The Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust is supported by the Resources First Foundation (RFF), a non-profit organisation formed to promote and design conservation and education tools and solutions to promote conservation and restoration activities for fish, wildlife and other natural resources primarily on privately owned lands across the United States and in southern Africa. Many community-based and private landowner conservation techniques and policies were first initiated and developed in a number of countries in southern Africa. Because the foundation's financial resources are relatively small, grants will be made only upon the invitation of the foundation's officers and board. An area of grant-making focus includes training and education programmes for wildlife professions and innovative wildlife restoration projects (from the tagging of marine turtles to the reintroduction of white rhinoceros). Donations via RFF are tax-deductible.

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Apologies

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