

## NOTE

### **Report: Seventh Meeting of the IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group**

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The IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) held its seventh meeting for members from 23–27 November 2009 at the KCB Leadership Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. The meeting was attended by many of AfESG's members, as well as a number of observers and guest speakers who participated in some or all of the sessions. The agenda was tightly packed with technical presentations and working sessions on a variety of issues relating to African elephant conservation and management. The main themes are summarized in this report.

#### **Illegal killing and trade**

A number of technical presentations on illegal killing of elephants and the illegal trade in ivory informed a discussion amongst the participants regarding the scale of the problem, as well as the steps forward which are needed to curtail illegal activities that threaten elephant populations in some important populations across the continent.

Particular concern was raised about the situation in central Africa. A number of presentations focused on illegal killing and the need for more effective law enforcement in that sub-region. Further discussions took place throughout the meeting on the way forward for central Africa. It is clear that the many conservation initiatives already in place in the Congo Basin are having little success in abating the illegal killing of elephants in that sub-region and that in many sites, severe depletions of elephants are taking place. The problem is linked to shortcomings in governance and law enforcement at all levels, and this makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the AfESG

to tackle. Disappointingly, the Central African Elephant Conservation Strategy, the development of which was co-ordinated by the AfESG, has not been implemented at all. Participants discussed the possibility of updating and revising that strategy and attempting to promote its implementation at the highest political level in order to get elephants onto the political agenda. However, as many funded conservation organizations operating on the ground in the region have been unable to influence policy positively at this level, it was agreed that the AfESG is unlikely to be successful. Tom Milliken, who presented the CoP15 ETIS analysis at the meeting, suggested that sub-regional analysis of the ETIS data could serve as a useful tool for highlighting the Central African linkages with illegal trade and trafficking.

A presentation by guest speaker Ed Barrow, from the IUCN Forest Programme, highlighted the linkages between the illegal timber trade flows from Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, and the flow of illegal wildlife products. It was argued that improved forest governance, from the community to the sub-regional level, is necessary to stem the trafficking of illegal timber and other products. A number of members were particularly interested in this presentation and initiated the formation of a working group to investigate the linkages between illegal trade in timber and ivory with forest governance. A self-nominated Chair is outlining the potential scope of work for this group.

Another prominent issue that arose was the strong desire for further investigation of poaching and illegal activities at the site level, but not limited

to MIKE sites. In synergy with MIKE, the AfESG can access, through its network of contacts, information about poaching at non-MIKE sites and help to clarify research questions to gain a deeper understanding of the problem. Several members signalled their interest in joining a working group on this issue, and a self-nominated Chair agreed to prepare a Terms of Reference for this group to allow it to move forward. A deadline was set for the Chair of this and the previous working group to submit Terms of Reference to the AfESG Chair.

## Planning for elephant conservation

A large portion of the meeting was devoted to discussing management needs at various scales, in particular sites or protected areas, in corridors, at the national level and at the sub-regional and continental level. Many elephant management plans have been written, with assistance from the AfESG's staff and members, across the continent, and a number of members shared their experiences with co-ordinating the preparation of plans at the national and sub-regional levels. Technical presentations on specific planning processes and management approaches were complemented by working sessions to consolidate the lessons learned and to identify ways in which the AfESG can contribute to better conservation and management of Africa's elephants. Throughout the session, it was clear that the engagement and partnership of communities and national governments is essential to the successful implementation of any plan.

The lessons learned will be fed back into the IUCN SSC's Species Conservation Planning Taskforce, which has prepared guidelines to assist in preparing species-specific management plans and is now collecting and examining experience with planning processes across the SSC. The issue of landscape connectivity and planning for elephant conservation using corridors was of particular interest to many members. Discussions revealed that corridors are currently being secured throughout elephant ranges using a variety of methods, from payments for ecosystem services to community-managed reserves, with varying degrees of success. There was enthusiasm to review the methods being used to ensure landscape connectivity and prepare a set of guidelines for use in different situations. AfESG members will pursue this if and when volunteer time and funding allow.

## Human-elephant conflict

The meeting examined human-elephant conflict (HEC) at the site and national level in an attempt to understand how the AfESG can move forward following the excellent work on understanding the problem by the HEC Working Group over the years. The session included a number of presentations which ranged from site level mitigation experiments to landscape approaches at the national level, as well as a number of talks about how to move from successful pilots to successful reduction of HEC at a much larger scale. A guest speaker from the Department of Geography at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Dr Alistair Bath, provided a new perspective on the human dimensions of this issue based on his experience of conflict mitigation between predators and human populations in Europe and North America. Dr Bath conducted a two-day seminar called 'Human Dimensions in Wildlife Resources Management' following the AfESG meeting. The seminar was attended by a number of AfESG members as well as wildlife professionals and students from Kenya.

The working sessions identified a number of questions to be taken on by the HEC Working Group in the future. While the AfESG has previously highlighted the pitfalls of compensation, it seems to be creeping back into national policies as a way to mitigate HEC. It was proposed, therefore, that the HEC Working Group prepare a policy brief on compensation that can be used to inform practitioners of its limitations as an effective mitigation measure. Further work also needs to be done to implement and test the Group's vertical integration model, and to promote the lessons learned by the HEC Working Group over the last 13 years.

## Securing and managing population data

The new African and Asian Elephant Database (AAED) project was discussed during the meeting. This replacement for the African Elephant Database will house and analyse population and range data for the African and Asian elephant. The online interface, which enables users to interact with data from the African Elephant Status Reports and to submit new survey reports, was of particular interest to the meeting participants.

Additional technical presentations covered a new method of monitoring using acoustic recordings, which Dr Andrea Turkalo has been piloting in Dzanga Sangha in the Central African Republic. Dr Michelle Gadd, from the USFWS, updated members on the workshops undertaken to build capacity to monitor elephants in forest clearings and Dr Colin Craig gave a talk on re-examining the calculations of precision in aerial surveys. The AfESG Secretariat also took the opportunity to collect survey reports and learn of upcoming surveys from the members for inclusion in the AAED.

## Climate change and payments for ecosystem services

Climate change has the potential to impact elephant conservation negatively and positively, and at this meeting, we attempted to unravel what is a very confusing and jargon-laden subject, but one which it is essential to understand in the rapidly-evolving world of conservation politics and financing. The Group hosted two guest speakers. Jeannette Van de Steeg, from ILRI, demonstrated the high level of uncertainty for changes in rainfall in sub-Saharan Africa—which likely influences elephants—will range and potentially increase competition with human populations for water and habitats. Dr Nicolas Kosoy, from UNEP, outlined the theory and different mechanisms for payments for ecosystem services, while AfESG member, John Mason, demonstrated the potential for using carbon markets through the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) mechanism to quite dramatically increase the scale of financing for elephant habitat conservation, especially in forested areas.

While some members were intrigued by this topic and others struggled to link it to their day to day work, it is clear that the elephant conservation community will have to stay informed about the consequences of climate change and the newly emerging opportunities and mechanisms that the climate change and payments for ecosystem services paradigm presents.

## Multiple species of the African elephant

The AfESG, at their 2003 meeting in Etosha, Namibia (see *Pachyderm* issue 36, January–June 2004,

pp.136-139) discussed the latest findings on the taxonomic status of Africa's elephants. At that time, the AfESG updated its Statement on the Taxonomy of extant *Loxodonta* ([http://african-elephant.org/tools/pdfs/pos\\_genet\\_en.pdf](http://african-elephant.org/tools/pdfs/pos_genet_en.pdf)). At this meeting, the AfESG again considered subsequent research into this issue, and after discussion amongst the members, it was agreed that these findings were still inconclusive. Therefore, it was agreed that the Group's statement of December 2003 regarding multiple species should remain unchanged.

## Additional sessions

The meeting consisted of a number of additional sessions, including a session on recent behavioural research undertaken by members in Kenya, and a session that looked at funding streams available for elephant research and conservation. A side meeting was held between the members of the African elephant Red List Authority and a number of members of the AfESG who were authors on a recent critique of the 2008 Red List Assessment of the African elephant. At this meeting, which also included the lead author of the critique, a number of issues raised in the critique were discussed.

A summary of the Red List discussion was presented to the Group during the closed members' business meeting, which was held on the final day of the meeting. In addition to the Red List, the AfESG members spent time discussing the membership of the AfESG, effective communication methods and ways in which AfESG members can more effectively build capacity and mentor elephant scientists and managers across sub-Saharan Africa. A number of the suggestions have practical implications for the AfESG Secretariat, who will be working to implement these, subject to the ongoing availability of core and project funding.

The AfESG Secretariat expressed its gratitude to SWAN International, WWF-International and the USFWS African Elephant Conservation Fund for their support in allowing this meeting to happen. The event was executed very efficiently, free of logistical glitches and resulted in a very productive meeting for all. As the timing and venue of the next meeting will depend on the availability of funds, the AfESG will increasingly rely on electronic means to communicate amongst the members.