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# Chairmen's Report: African Elephant Specialist Group

Holly T Dublin and Bihini won wa Musiti

Like many of us who are fully experiencing the effects of the aging process, the African Elephant Specialist Group needs a facelift. The years of strain and struggle have taken their toll and it is now time to rebuild and restructure the foundations of the Group. This is not a trivial challenge, and we face it with a great deal of thought and an even greater degree of caution. We firmly believe that the AESG continues to have a vital role to play. That seems more obvious now than ever before, but we are keenly aware of the great many difficulties that stand in the way of this role being fulfilled.

We are also aware that to get the most out of our members we must gain and maintain their confidence during the period of our tenure. We are constantly reminded that this confidence has been lost over the years of divisiveness and discord. The task of pulling the AESG back together appears onerous, but we have accepted the challenge, a challenge that was given to the two of us by many of our colleagues and friends. While not an enviable task, it is one that we firmly believe needs doing and therefore demands devotion of our time and energy over the years to come.

The division and disunity brought about by the issue of the ivory trade will not disappear. We must accept that different opinions exist, and move forward. We believe the AESG should direct and concentrate its attention towards consolidating the theory and practice of conservation of the African elephant throughout its range. We do not believe that debating the merits of sovereign range states' differing management policies falls within our mandate. In so structuring the role of the AESG we hope to help unite range states in technical co-operation, rather than divide them even further through continued rhetorical dialogue.

From this perspective, we see many technical *issues* and tonics that can benefit greatly from the diverse membership we have invited. Our new membership

will embody years of solid fieldwork in all aspects of elephant ecology and conservation in a range of habitats across the continent. These include ground and aerial census techniques, population biology, elephant-habitat interactions, behavioral ecology, and the role of the species in community dynamics in the forests, savannahs and grasslands of Africa.

We already have had a good beginning at our meeting in Gaborone in July 1991. With the help of the SSC Secretariat, the meeting accomplished its goals and objectives with the minimum of controversy or contention. Although some of our more highly-spirited members appeared disappointed that the expected pre-CITES 'jousting match' did not take place, we did, in fact, make several major strides at the meeting. Most importantly, new terms of reference were discussed at length, drafted and presented to the AESG membership. The membership voiced its strong support for the idea of the African Elephant Database (a compilation of data on numbers and distributions) belonging to AESG. They therefore committed the AESG membership to being accountable for the data contained therein and its timely updating. The Group also debated and supported the plan for all future updating of the database to remain on the African continent at the UNEP/GEMS facility. Another major outcome of the meeting was a decision that population estimates for nine range states not be included in the database due to poor quality or outdated information. This move alone stimulated at least four states to secure immediate donor funding to conduct or plan country-wide surveys over the next year or two.

We must build on these small successes, and continue to provide all concerned parties with technical expertise and advice to the best of our combined abilities. We hope we can count on everyone to participate actively in this mission. We will neither accept nor think it appropriate to have members who are 'just along for the ride'. There is now too much at stake to allow things

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to follow a course of laissez-faire. The AESG must become much more active over the coming years. Both members and non-members are encouraged to participate actively in meeting the goals set out in our new terms of reference.

As many of you know, we were both 'recruited' to this co-Chairmanship through some powerful

collegiate coercion (perhaps 'dragged in kicking and screaming' would be overstating the case). However, we would like to assure you that despite our own trepidation about the rather awesome task before us we are committed to working with the membership and all our colleagues to make the AESG a more cohesive, more productive and all-round more positive group in the years to come.

## Rapport des Presidents du GSEA

Holly T Dublin et Bihini won wa Musiti

Comme tous ceux qui subissent les effets du vieillissement, le Groupe des Spécialistes de l'Eléphant d'Afrique a besoin d'un lifting. Les années de tension et de lutte finissent par se faire sentir et le moment est venu de restructurer les principaux fondements du Groupe. Il s'agit là d'une tâche considérable et nous nous y employons avec d'intenses efforts de réflexion et encore plus de prudence. Bien que conscients des nombreux obstacles, nous sommes convaincus que le GSEA a toujours un rôle essentiel à jouer et cela apparait plus que jamais de façon évidente.

Nous savons aussi que pour obtenir le maximum de la part de nos membres, nous devons garder leur confiance tout au long de notre mandat. Nous nous rappelons sans cesse que cette confiance a été perdue par des années de division et de discorde. Les efforts qui permettront de rassembler de nouveau le GSEA seront pénibles mais nous avons accepté de relever le défi qui a été lancé à deux d'entre nous par de nombreux collègues et amis. Bien que cela n'ait rien d'une tâche agréable, nous sommes convaincus qu'elle est nécessaire. Il faudra par conséquent y consacrer notre énergie et notre temps dans les années qui viennent.

La division et la désunion entraînées par la question du commerce de l'ivoire ne va pas disparaître. Nous devons accepter que différentes opinions puissent exister et aller de l'avant. A notre avis, le GSEA doit

orienter, voire centrer son attention sur la consolidation de la théorie et de la pratique de la conservation de l'éléphant d'Afrique quel que soit le pays d'origine. Nous ne pensons pas que le débat des mérites des différentes politiques de gestion des pays membres fasse partie de notre mandat. En définissant ainsi le rôle du GSEA, nous espérons contribuer à réunir les pays membres pour mener une coopération technique plutôt que d'entretenir des divisions permanentes sur des questions de forme.

Partant de ce point de vue, nous avons identifié un certain nombre de questions et de sujets techniques pouvant bénéficier aux divers membres que nous sollicitons. Seront ainsi concrétisées des années de travail de terrain dans tous les aspects de l'Écologie et de la conservation de l'éléphant, dans plusieurs types d'habitat du continent. Ces aspects recouvrent notamment différentes techniques de recensement au sol et aérien; la biologie démographique; les interactions entre l'éléphant et son habitat; l'écologie comportementale; et le rôle des espèces dans la dynamique communautaire dans les forêts, les savanes et les herbages en Afrique.

Un bon démarrage a déjà été assuré par notre réunion organisée à Gaborone, en juillet 1991. Gr, ce au Secrétariat de la CSE, la réunion a pu atteindre ses buts et ses objectifs, avec un minimum d'opposition et de contestation. Bien que certains de nos membres, plus