
AFRICAN ELEPHANTS IN COASTAL REFUGES: POSTSCRIPT*

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*Postscript to Dudley's article in *Pachyderm* 21

Two years ago, while the manuscript by Dudley (1996) was in preparation, four Knysna elephants roamed the Gouna/Diepwallé forests and a translocation of additional elephants from Kruger National Park was pending. There appeared to be some hope still for the future survival of elephants in the Knysna forest.

As of February 1996, however, only three elephants have remained in the Knysna forests. All are female, and two are juveniles of exogenous origin. The translocated juveniles have failed to establish social bonds with the remaining resident elephants (M. Garai, pers. comm.), and the probability for the long-term survival of any elephants in the Knysna forest now appears minimal. The Knysna elephant population may now be considered functionally extinct.

The final extirpation of the Knysna elephants may be linked to a complex of cultural and ecological factors, each perhaps dominant only within certain periods but all contributing significantly to the final outcome. In view of its long, patently marginal status and now certain demise, why should the tiny Knysna elephant population merit such attention while there are still numerous African elephant populations numbering in the thousands and even tens of thousands roaming across large areas of the continent?

The significance of the Knysna elephant debacle is that this scenario may soon be replicated time and time again among isolated elephant populations in the Guinea rainforest region and elsewhere within the African continent. The precarious status of the Knysna elephants during the period 1950-1990 is typical of that experienced by Asian elephant populations within much of their current range (Santiapillai & Jackson, 1990).

African elephant populations will become increasingly fragmented and limited by the rapidly growing resource requirements of human populations, which are projected to at least double within the next 25 years throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa. Elephant conservation in the 21st century will require intimate experience with the management of small and isolated elephant populations, and the Knysna experience may provide valuable lessons for the conservation of elephants elsewhere.

REFERENCES

- Dudley, J.P. (1996) African elephants in coastal refuges. *Pachyderm* 21, 78-83.
- Santiapillai, C. & Jackson, P. (1990) *The Asian Elephant. An Action Plan for its Conservation*. IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland. 80 pp.