
REVIEW OF AFRICAN ELEPHANT CONSERVATION PRIORITIES*

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* An introduction to this session was given by Simon Stuart, Head, Species Survival Programme, Gland, Switzerland

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION COMPILED FROM RAPPORTEUR NOTES

A series of action plans - about 30 - have been published by IUCN's Species Survival Commission in the last ten years, for use by governments, non-governmental organisations, etc. In 1993, the United Nations Development Programme established the elephant and rhinoceros conservation facility to find funds for conserving of these animals. In 1995 the Asian Rhino, Asian Elephant, African Rhino and African Elephant Specialist Groups were pledged funding by the facility for specific tasks, including the production of updated action plans where necessary. The AfESG's task is to create a document reviewing African elephant conservation priorities, rather than producing another action plan. This document, now in draft format, is being presented to the AfESG members at the meeting for comment and correction.

The draft document differs considerably from previous documents overviewing African elephant conservation (e.g. African Elephant Action Plan [Douglas-Hamilton, 1979]; Africa's Elephants and Rhinos: Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan [Cumming *et al.*, 1990]; African Elephant Conservation Coordinating Group [AECCG] country action plans [early 1990s], etc.). The report is divided into five sections, which deal with: poaching, law enforcement and the ivory trade; habitat loss and human encroachment; local overpopulation (little data exist on the

impact of large elephant populations); human-elephant conflict; and status (how much information do we need to manage elephants?). It is noteworthy that in recent years, attention has been focused more on human-elephant conflict (rather than poaching) and forest elephant populations (rather than savanna populations).

Some of the questions posed to the AfESG members to assist them in consideration of the document during working group discussions were as follows:

Is it worthwhile naming "key" populations? Previously, much emphasis has been given to "key", "baseline" or "priority" populations. But what is a "key" population? All previous action plans had different definitions. How do we determine the biological importance of different populations - by population size, area of range, ecological uniqueness, the "keystone" effect on important ecosystems - or what? Does population size determine stability? What is the intrinsic importance (scientific/cultural/ economic) of a population? What is important for conservation action? Which populations are under threat? What is the chance of effective action?

One day of the meeting was devoted to reviewing the draft chapters in five working groups in a session entitled: African Elephant Conservation Priorities. This document is still in the process of being completed.