Background information and species management guidelines:


Puku

REEDBUCK WATERBUCK LECHWE PUKU

MANAGEMENT

Under Namibia's evolving wildlife legislation, management plans are required for species which are rare or valuable. Reedbuck, waterbuck, lechwe and puku are rare, valuable and in Namibia are found mainly in the floodplains and riparian belts of river systems along international borders. The management guidelines address three objectives: Social, Ecological and Economic.

Social Objective

The social objective is to develop a co-management institution in the Caprivi for the conservation and management of wetland habitats. Typical measures under co-management might be zoning along rivers to preserve portions of the original floodplain, restricted areas for cattle grazing or seasonal use of grazing, fire management and control of illegal hunting.

Ecological Objective

The ecological objective of restoring and recovering wetland habitats will depend on the success of the social objective. Population sizes of all four species are ultimately determined by the rainfall regime. The best strategy for these species is to ensure that a viable nucleus survives dry conditions and is able to rebound when conditions improve.

Economic Objective

The economic objective is to realise the full potential of reedbuck, waterbuck, lechwe and puku as components of wildlife-based land use for the benefit of rural landholders and the State, according to the provisions for sustainable use in Namibia's Constitution. This objective should be progressively achieved as the ecological objective is met. As the numbers of these species in Caprivi and Kavango increase, so will the potential economic benefits from tourism and hunting.

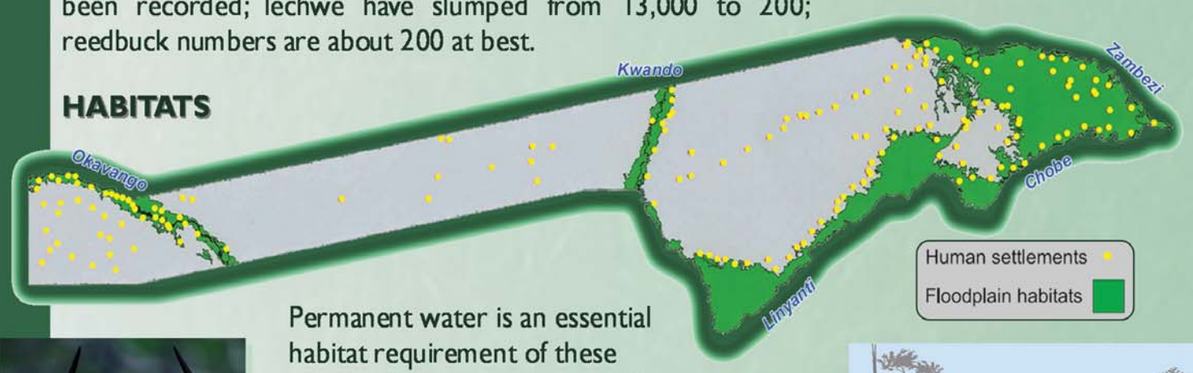
NUMBERS AND DISTRIBUTION

		Reedbuck	Waterbuck	Lechwe	Puku
Caprivi *	Present populations	100	25	200	Not recorded
	Highest estimate	250 (1980)	150 (1994)	13,000 (1980)	Uncertain
Freehold farms		Uncertain	3,500	200	None
2004 TOTAL		200?	3,750	400	Uncertain
Potential population in Parks †		1,000	1,000	10,000	1,000

* likely to be underestimates, due to the difficulties of counting these species
† based on average densities of 2/km² (reedbuck, water and puku) and 20/km² (lechwe)

The species' natural range in Namibia is limited to Caprivi and Kavango, representing the fringe of larger populations in Botswana and Zambia. Within the Caprivi, they are restricted to the floodplains (4,500km²). Their populations in Namibia have fluctuated over the past century from being relatively abundant to being near extinction. The fluctuations appear to be linked to long term rainfall cycles and river flows. Today the population levels of all four species are a matter of concern: puku are almost extinct; in the last decade only about 20 waterbuck have been recorded; lechwe have slumped from 13,000 to 200; reedbuck numbers are about 200 at best.

HABITATS

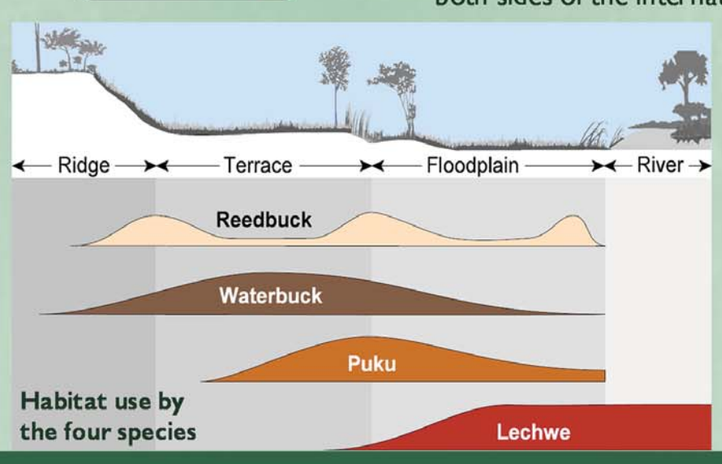


Permanent water is an essential habitat requirement of these species; they are rarely more than 2 km from water. They also have very specific vegetation requirements.


Waterbuck


Reedbuck


Lechwe



CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE

The IUCN Red Data book classifies all four species as at 'Lower Risk (Conservation Dependent)'; indicating that they are not threatened at the global, continental or regional levels. All four species are of conservation concern at the national level in Namibia because their natural range is limited to Caprivi and Kavango, their numbers are low and appear to be declining, and some of the subpopulations are isolated from one another. However, since reedbuck, waterbuck, lechwe and puku in the Caprivi are spatially linked to larger populations in Botswana, with careful management their populations should slowly recover. This recovery would be significantly enhanced by reintroducing animals. These species are specifically adapted to floodplain habitats and when present in substantial numbers they establish the unique character of the area. Their disappearance from Namibia's wetland habitats would be a significant cultural, ecological and economic loss. Their persistence in healthy numbers is a key indicator of ecosystem health and good local management.


Lechwe


Reedbuck

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE

Once populations of these species have recovered, substantial economic benefits could be derived through tourism, live capture and sale, and trophy hunting. Safari hunting is capable of producing competitive returns from land with little adverse ecological impact, low capital investment and rapid returns to land custodians. The benefits of achieving the highest valued land use through hunting and tourism would be considerable - providing income to increase the standard of living of landholders and creating incentives for more land to be put under wildlife management.

TRANS-BOUNDARY CO-OPERATION

Transboundary cooperation, particularly between Namibia and Botswana, could make a substantial difference to the conservation of these species. Namibia's primary conservation objective is to increase their numbers and avoid fragmentation of the populations. Maintaining spatial linkages with Botswana will be vital.

Other possible areas of co-operation are:

- Ensuring compatible forms of land use on both sides of the international boundary;
- Expanding the available range for reedbuck, waterbuck, lechwe and puku;
- Co-operating on law enforcement directed at illegal hunting;
- Managing the interaction between these four species and others, particularly elephants;
- Controlling fire;
- Collaborating on air surveys to improve population estimates;
- Collaborating in setting hunting quotas and monitoring sustainability of hunting; and
- Maintaining liaison between wildlife departments and communities managing wildlife on both sides of the international border.


Lechwe


Puku

Poster designed by Annie Symonds and Alice Jarvis.

Photos: S. Linder, K. Landen, M. Jarvis, treknature.com

Information in this poster is based on a background study and management plan by Rowan Martin for the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, facilitated by the Namibia Nature Foundation.

May 2008

Namibia Nature Foundation Committed to conservation

WWF

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE