

# *The establishment and operation of* **CONSERVANCIES IN NAMIBIA**

A SIGNIFICANT development in wildlife management and use in Namibia is the concept of conservancies. Individual farmers have realised that it would be advantageous to pool natural and financial resources to form a larger unit of land on which to carry out integrated management practices.

To date three conservancies have been established. They are the Ngarangombe Conservancy south of Rietfontein, comprising 100 000 hectares, the Khomas Hochland Conservancy close to Windhoek, comprising 90 000 hectares, and the Waterberg Conservancy covering the southern boundary and serving as a buffer zone for the Waterberg Plateau Park, comprising 150 000 hectares. This concept of wildlife conservation had its origin in the province of Natal, South Africa. Here over 1 000 km<sup>2</sup> are administered as conservancies.

A conservancy consists of a group of farms or areas of communal land on which neighbouring landowners or members have pooled natural resources for the purpose of conserving and using wildlife sustainably. Members practise normal farming activities and operations in combination with wildlife use on a sustainable basis. The main objective is the conservation of wildlife on combined land. Conservancies are operated and managed by members through a committee.

The reasons for the establishment of conservancies in Namibia greatly differ from those for conservancies and other community-based natural resource management projects in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Botswana, in that they are based on a combined wildlife management and use strategy.

About 75 percent of Namibia's wildlife is found outside formally protected areas. This includes elephant and endangered black rhinoceros, which roam communal land. On commercial farmland, especially in the northern regions, farmers are experiencing problems with migrating game populations. Migratory species like oryx, springbok, warthog, hartebeest, eland and kudu are not restricted by ordinary stockproof fencing. This results in over- and under-utilisation, causing friction between farmers about the ownership, use and financial benefits from game. These problems can often be overcome

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with a combined wildlife management and utilisation strategy.

Since 1967, commercial farmers have enjoyed the right to use and benefit from wildlife on their farms. This was based on the landowner meeting certain conditions imposed by the State. These included the type of fencing. Extending these rights to commercial farmers has improved conservation of wildlife on commercial farms because landowners realised that they could benefit from the game. Most evident was the development of a multi-million dollar game farming, tourist and hunting industry. While contributing to the economic viability of individual farms and to the national economy, game farming requires very little financial and technological support from the state.

In the communal areas, state control of wildlife resources has alienated people from that resource. This resulted in a severe decline in game numbers in many areas, mostly due to increased poaching, and pressure for land proclaimed as game reserves to be returned to the people for grazing, water and other uses. No mechanisms existed for rural communities to participate in, or benefit from, wildlife management. All revenue from consumptive or non-consumptive use of wildlife went to the private sector or the Central Revenue Fund.

The conservancy system enables people on communal land to enjoy similar rights to manage and use wildlife as those granted to commercial farmers. As people share the responsibility of wildlife management and income from wildlife, it serves as an incentive to protect and conserve wildlife in their areas. This fosters wildlife-based rural development and improves the conservation status of wildlife as residents develop a vested economic interest.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism has adopted a policy document on conservancies in Namibia. This makes no distinction between conservancies on commercial or communal land. The overall objectives are the same for both, namely to pool natural and economic resources and to collectively manage and utilise them on a sustainable basis.





Chris Weaver

People in communal areas are showing a growing interest in benefiting from wildlife through forming conservancies. Ministry official John Angula is pictured discussing resource management issues with a community near Oshivelo.



Bruno Nebe

The capture and sale of live game is a million dollar industry. This group of oryx is being held in a boma prior to release. Rubber hose-pipes are placed over their sharp horns to reduce injury to handlers and animals.



Johan Jooste

In 1993, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism held its first annual game auction at the Waterberg Plateau Park. Since 1967, commercial farmers were granted conditional ownership of the wildlife on their farms, resulting in increased game farming in the country. Game auctions attract keen interest from buyers who wish to re-stock their farms with wildlife.

Conservancies should have a properly drawn up constitution and set of rules, in line with the regulations laid down by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. The constitution outlines the goals and objectives, while the rules spell out management and utilisation actions. The latter includes determining quotas for hunting and other uses, monitoring and recording aspects such as rainfall and vegetation. Wildlife numbers, sex ratios, mortalities and births should also be recorded. Monitoring wildlife populations on conservancies is vital for detecting trends and implementing effective management.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism assists and guides conservancies on wildlife management and related matters during the forming years of the conservancy. Training will play a major role in the management, monitoring and determining of quotas, especially on communal conservancies.

In communal areas the conditions for fencing for migratory game species cannot be applied as a criterion for the granting of wildlife utilisation rights. This would be impractical and undesirable given the migration patterns of large mammals such as elephants, besides being contrary to current government policy.

Any system for communal lands must balance the need of the people to have secure access to natural resources and the right to use and benefit from these resources, even if the land is owned by the State. The Ministry believes the conservancy concept is the most appropriate way to address this.

Conservancies in communal areas would have the right to use and benefit from wildlife. Once a quota has been set for each species, the committee may allow hunting by members of the conservancy, culling of game for meat, sale of animals for trophy hunting or the sale of live game. The conservancy could enter into business contracts with private companies for some of these activities. It would have the right to build tourist facilities or to engage in commercial arrangements with a registered tourism operator to act on its behalf.

To obtain these rights, the communal conservancy must satisfy the Ministry of its capacity to manage wildlife resources. It must be legally constituted with clearly defined boundaries. The members of the conservancy would be defined by the individuals in the conservancy. It could consist of all adults living within its boundaries. The members must be sufficiently representative of the community served by the conservancy.

Cabinet in March 1995 approved the establishment of communal area conservancies with rights to use and benefit from wildlife. The next step is to amend legislation so that the state can devolve these rights to communal area conservancies.