

# The Torra Conservancy



## • QUICK FACTS AND SUCCESSES •

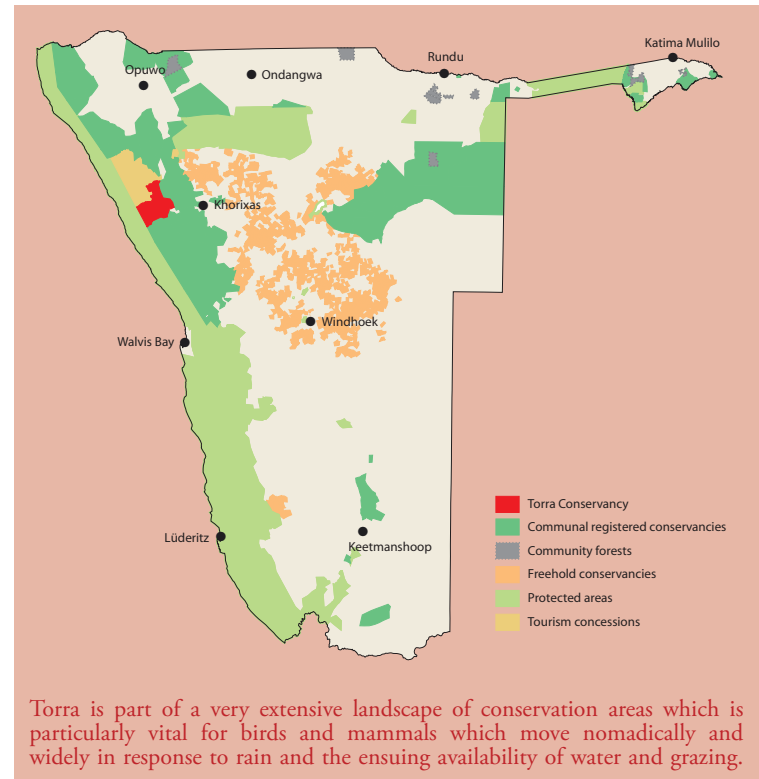
- Torra is a legal management body run by the community for the development of its people and the sustainable use of natural resources.
- The conservancy is situated in the Kunene Region, north-western Namibia.
- It was registered as a conservancy by government in June 1998.
- Torra covers an area of 3,522 square kilometres.
- Most of the approximately 1,200 people living in Torra are from the Riemvasmaak community.
- Wildlife includes elephant, black rhino, lion, leopard, cheetah, hyaena, giraffe, mountain zebra, springbok, oryx and kudu.
- The main economic activities developed by the conservancy are trophy hunting, tourism and hunting for meat.
- The conservancy employs its own game guards, has set aside large areas of land for wildlife and tourism and works with government and NGOs to monitor wildlife.

## • LOCATION OF TORRA CONSERVANCY •

Torra is in the south of the Kunene Region. Most of the conservancy lies in the Khorixas constituency, while the northern tip falls in the Sesfontein constituency. The 3,522 square kilometres that make up Torra form a significant part of a large swathe of land managed for conservation that extends from the Kunene River in the north to the Orange River in the south. The Skeleton Coast National Park lies immediately to the west of the conservancy, while the Palmwag and Etendeka Tourism Concessions lie to the north, and ≠Khoadi-//Hôas and Doro !Nawas conservancies to the east and south. The country-wide veterinary cordon fence that separates the conservancy from the Palmwag and Etendeka tourism concessions is the only fence in this whole area.

## • WHAT HAPPENS IN A CONSERVANCY? •

- Incomes from traditional farming activities are supplemented by incomes – largely in the form of cash – gained from wildlife and tourism.
- Wildlife multiplies because it gains productive value in conservancies.
- Natural resources and conservancy land increase in value.
- The conservancy and its natural resources are managed by a group elected to serve the interests of its members,
- A forum is provided through which services and developments can be channeled and integrated.



## • THE HISTORY AND BACKGROUND TO TORRA •

Torra rises from gravel plains close to sea level in the west to an escarpment of basalts in the east where altitudes reach 1,600 metres. These basalts underlie much of the conservancy, and were deposited during a series of volcanic eruptions which occurred about 125 to 132 million years ago when the old continent of Gondwana split apart. The hard basalt layers cap the nearby Etendeka Mountains and litter the landscape with red rocks, after which the conservancy (Torra = red rock) is named. In the wet season, seepage from the flat-topped Etendekas form pools of water, attracting wildlife from across the arid north-west.

The area is extremely dry, with annual average rainfall ranging from 150 millimetres along the hills in the east to just 50 millimetres along the Skeleton Coast. Most rains fall during occasional thunderstorms which usually develop during afternoons in the late summer, between January and March. Apart from its shortage, the other fundamental feature of rainfall is that it is extremely variable: from month to month, from year to year, and also from one place to another. The area thus experiences both good and bad times, the latter manifesting as long periods of extreme aridity.

Evaporation rates are very high, ranging from 2,800 millimetres in the west to 3,400 millimetres per year in the east. Temperatures are lower in the west where the cool winds from the Atlantic Ocean keep the average temperature at 17°C, four degrees cooler than in the eastern areas of the conservancy. Torra receives up to 50 days of fog a year, most frequently and vitally in the western lowlands where the fog that rolls in from the ocean provides moisture to many plants and animals.

The sparse vegetation cover and low height of most plants are largely a consequence of aridity, but plant growth is also limited by the scarcity of soil in most parts of the conservancy. The plains are dominated by grasses and scattered Euphorbia bushes, an important browse for black rhino. Several paper-bark tree species characteristically grow on hill slopes. Shallow drainage lines that feed into the Springbokwasser and Huab Rivers are home to the Welwitschia, a unique plant with no close relatives anywhere in the world. Relatively tall trees line the larger rivers where they are rooted in deep sandy beds that hold moisture after infrequent flows. Ana, mopane and camel thorn trees are the most abundant species, and they provide important sustenance for the elephants that frequent the riverbeds. The elephants especially like to bash against the ana trees to knock their nutritious pods to the ground. Some pods get missed by the elephants and are then available to other wildlife and livestock.







The bottle tree (above), paper-bark trees and the Welwitchia are some of the special desert adapted plants found in Torra.

Many Torra residents originated from the Riemvasmaak community near Upington in South Africa, from where they were forcibly moved in 1973 and 1974 by the South African administration. Many others are Damara people from within the general area, while others were forcibly resettled there when the Damaraland homeland was created. Other residents of the conservancy are more recent immigrants from elsewhere in Namibia. The main languages spoken are Khoekhoegowab (Damara>Nama) and Afrikaans.

Around 1,200 people now live in settlements scattered across the Torra conservancy. Most of the main settlements are along the main road from Khorixas to Bergsig and Palmwag. The biggest settlement and 'capital' of Torra is Bergsig, where there are a few small shops and tyre-repair services, a clinic, the conservancy office, a kindergarten and the Jakob Basson Combined School.

The people who were moved to Torra found it very hard to eke out an existence in this environment. There were virtually no jobs in the area and most people farmed with a handful of cattle, sheep and goats, and used donkeys for transport. The Riemvasmakers started small fruit and vegetable gardens close to their new settlements where water was available. However, they shared the area with elephants and predators such as lions. The elephants raided their gardens, damaged water installations in their quest for drinking water and sometimes injured or killed local people.

During the early 1980s there was a major drought throughout north-west Namibia and much of the livestock died. Predators, such as lions, increased because lots of food was available in the form of weak or dead livestock. At the same time poaching for ivory and rhino horn, and also for meat, was rampant in the area.

Both the drought and poaching caused game numbers to decline drastically. This led local conservationist Garth Owen-Smith, then working for the Namibia Wildlife Trust, and a government nature conservator, Chris Eyre, to discuss the decline with local traditional leaders. The headmen were as concerned as they were about the decrease in wildlife. Together they decided to institute a system of community game guards to try to stop the poaching.

The game guards reported to local headmen, looked out for signs of poaching, and kept a count of all the wildlife or signs of wildlife they saw while out herding their livestock. Protection offered by game guards, increased patrols by government conservators, surveillance of special species such as black rhino by Save the Rhino Trust (SRT), and better rainfall meant that by the early 1990s game numbers were beginning to recover.

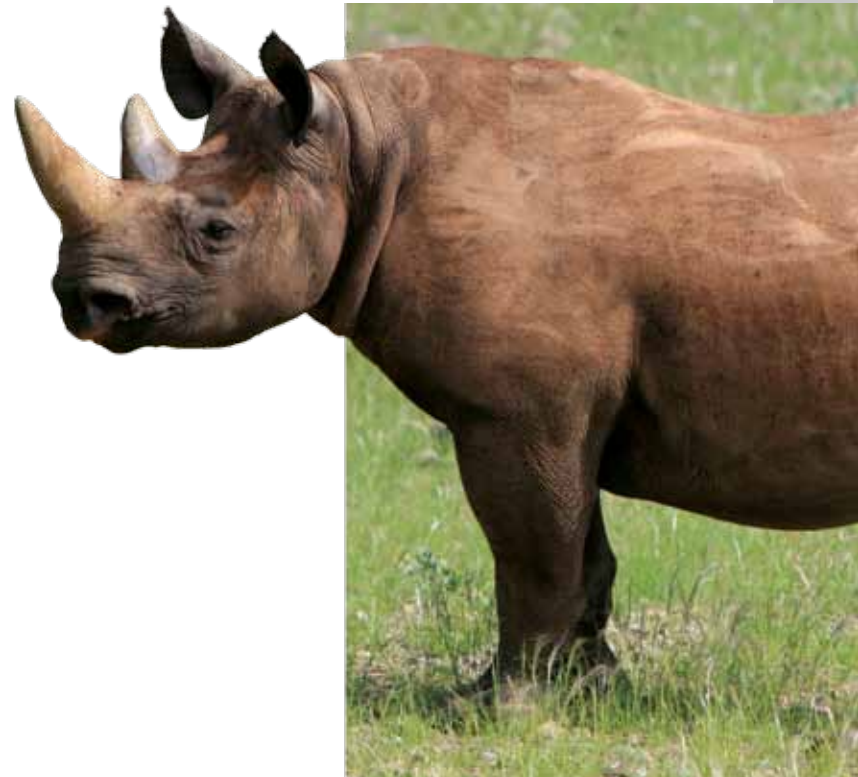
In the mid-1990s, various investors were approached by the local NGO Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) to develop a lodge in Torra area because of the spectacular scenery and increasing abundance of wildlife. In 1995 the Ward 11 Residents' Association Trust was constituted as a legal body to represent the community in negotiations with investors. Every household was visited by a team to register members of the Association. The southern African tourism company Wilderness Safaris was later chosen by the Association to develop a lodge, and the result was the formation of Namibia's first joint-venture agreement between a community and a private tourism company. Developing the agreement was a drawn-out process since it involved many stakeholders, some of whom were new to the processes involved. The negotiations were facilitated by a government economist, IRDNC and the Legal Assistance Centre.

The Residents' Trust and Wilderness finally signed a contract for the development of a lodge called Damaraland Camp. The contract provided the community with a rental fee for the use of the land and 10% of the net daily rate on each bed night sold. In addition, the contract stipulated that local people be employed in the lodge and trained to managerial levels, and that laundry would be subcontracted locally. Provision was also made for the community to gradually acquire ownership of the lodge.

As the negotiations with Wilderness Safaris were taking place, the Namibian government was developing new legislation for local communities to gain rights over wildlife and tourism on their land if they formed a management body called a conservancy. Torra was one of the first communities to establish a conservancy and apply to the Ministry of Environment & Tourism (MET) for formal registration. This process was made easier because the community was already organized through the

Residents' Trust. Once registered, the conservancy was able to acquire a trophy hunting quota from MET, after which it entered into a contract with a professional hunter in 1999.

The people of Torra have come a long way since they were forcibly resettled, struggling to survive in a remote and harshly arid environment with dangerous wildlife. Torra has evolved into one of the most successful conservancies in Namibia. Populations of elephant, lion, black rhino and other wildlife have increased and considerable income has been earned from tourism, trophy and meat hunting and the live sales of wildlife.



Black rhinos in north-western Namibia have increased to become the largest free-roaming population in the world. After the Palmwag Tourism Concession, Torra holds more black rhinos than any other conservation area in communal land.

## • THE ENVIRONMENTAL VALUE OF TORRA CONSERVANCY •

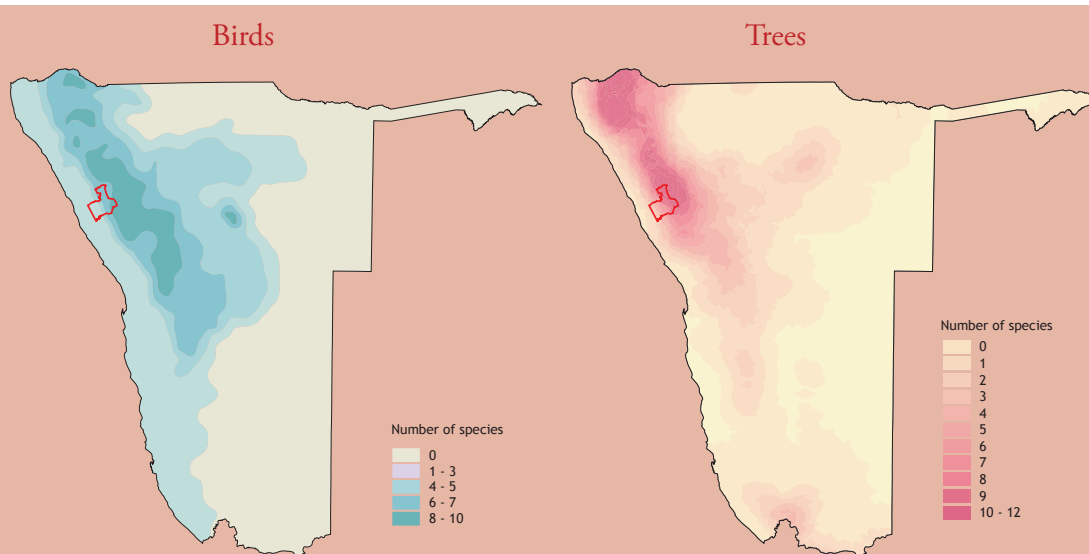
The varied topography and habitats provides home to a diverse assemblage of animals and plants. The western lowlands are characterised by species of the Namib, while the eastern mountainous landscape has particularly high concentrations of endemic species. These are species that occur only, or very largely in Namibia, making the conservancy important for their conservation. The maps below show the distribution of endemic trees and birds, the two groups for which the most comprehensive information is available. Other plants and animals show similar trends, and therefore have high levels of endemism in and around Torra.

One of the endemic mammal species found along the escarpment is the Hartmann's mountain zebra. The conservancy further provides one of the largest safe refuges in Namibia for black rhino, a species that is internationally classified as endangered. The conservancy has set aside land bordering the Palmwag tourism concession for wildlife and tourism,

where livestock are not to be grazed. However, wildlife roams throughout the conservancy, and it is common to see springbok close to settlements or grazing alongside herds of goats – a good indication of the level of tolerance that residents now have for wildlife on their land.

Although the numbers of game vary from year to year as animals move around, annual game counts conducted over the past few years indicate the following approximate numbers in Torra:

Giraffe	60–70
Kudu	450–500
Ostrich	650–700
Zebra	1,600–1,700
Gemsbok	2,500–2,600
Springbok	5,000–5,500

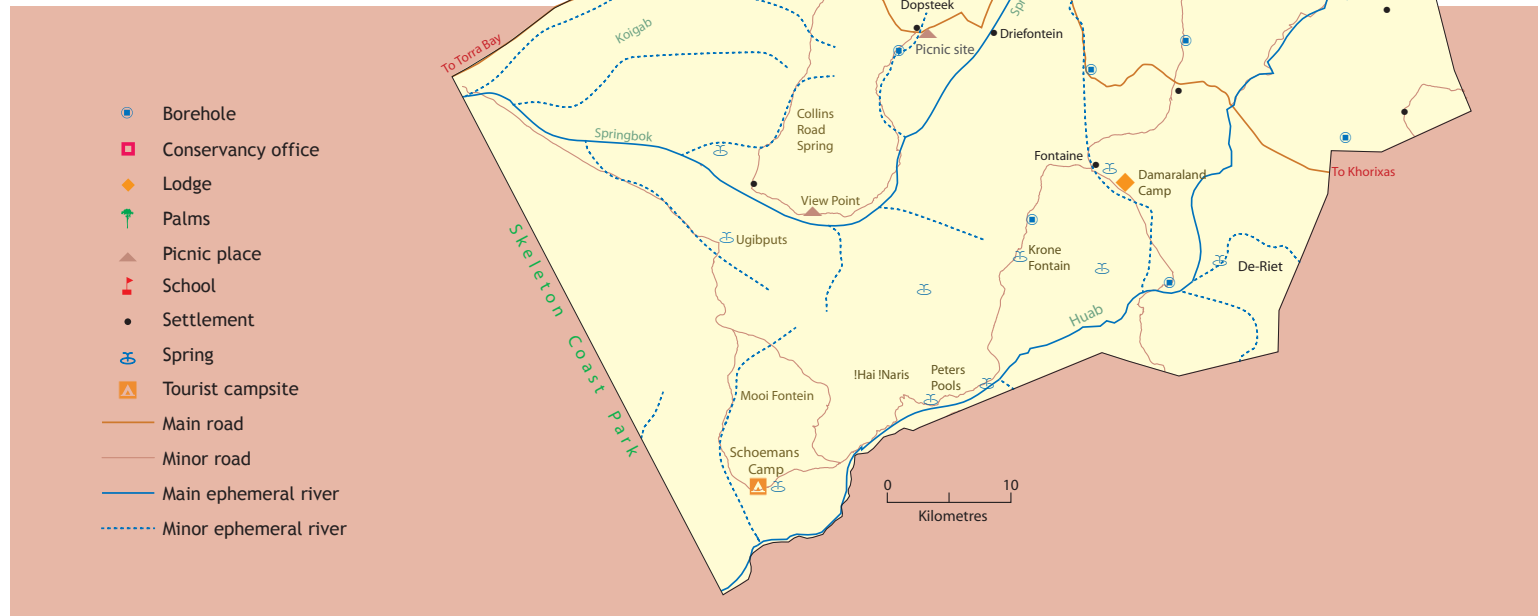


High proportions of Namibia's endemic plants and birds occur in the eastern highlands of Torra.



Many other species occur there as well, but their numbers are harder to estimate. These include black rhino, elephant, lion, cheetah, leopard, brown hyaena, spotted hyaena, steenbok and klipspringer. Smaller animals are abundant:

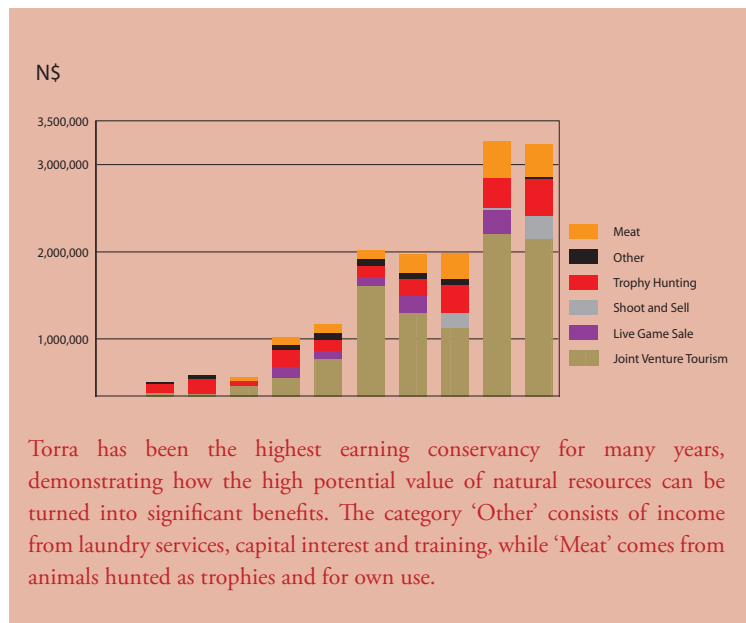
- Around 40% of the 24 snake species, and 20% of the 35 lizard species are endemic
- 23 species of rodents (7 are endemic)
- over 15 bat species
- 7 species of frogs (3 are endemic)
- 17 species of scorpions (8 are endemic)
- over 170 bird species (10 are endemic)



## • THE ECONOMY OF TORRA •

Much of Torra is desert and completely unsuited to conventional farming. People were pastoral farmers in the past, moving their animals between areas where it had rained and grazing had become available. Nowadays, homes are permanent because of the provision of pumped water, but farming remains a difficult enterprise. Although conditions are slightly better in the eastern, wetter areas, there is little to be grazed in most places.

Farming, mostly with small stock, in this trying environment provided the only local source of income prior to the formation of the conservancy. Livestock still consists largely of goats and fat-tailed sheep, together with some cattle, donkeys and horses. The numbers of animals are highest in the east and lowest in the west. There is considerable variation in livestock ownership between families. The poorest homes keep less than 10 goats or sheep, while the wealthiest farmers have several hundred animals.



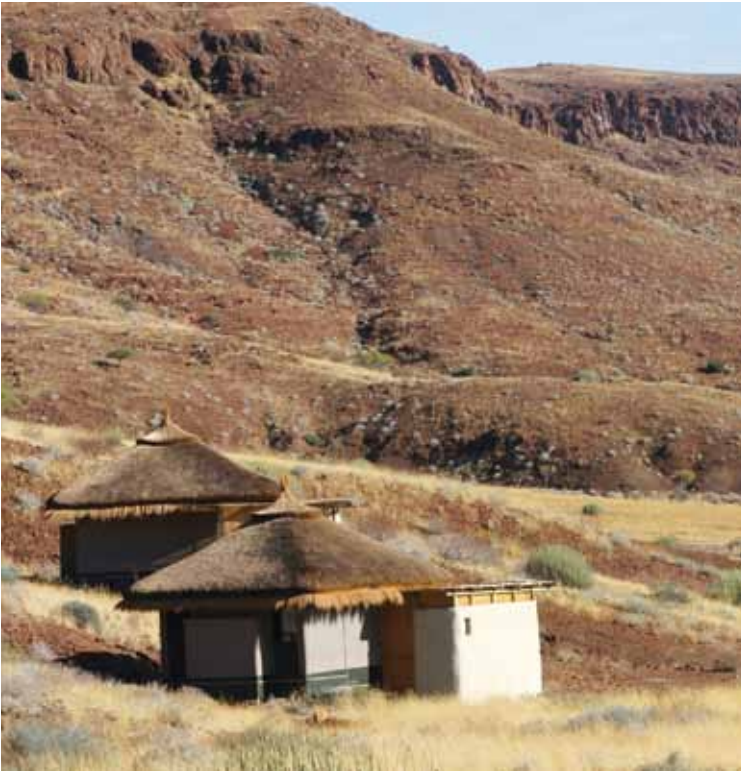
Most households now supplement their income with pension payments and remittances from family members working elsewhere, since earnings from livestock are generally extremely modest, especially for families with few animals.

Since the formation of the conservancy, a variety of new incomes have become available. The value of these has risen spectacularly over the years, for example from about \$300,000 in 1998 to over \$3 million in 2007 and 2008. About two-thirds of all income has been earned from tourism - largely in the form of salaried jobs - while trophy and own-use hunting, and the sale of meat and live game have made up most of the remaining income.

**TOURISM:** Of all its sources of income, the Damaraland Camp has been the most lucrative. This is a luxury tented lodge situated with a spectacular view southwards to the Huab River valley, where guests are taken on drives in search of the desert-dwelling elephants. Black rhino and predators such as cheetah and lion are also found close to the lodge. About 25 people are usually employed at the lodge, more than 20 of whom are local residents of Torra. Two local women now hold managerial positions. Lena Florry was a goat herder who started work as a junior staff member at the lodge. She later became lodge manager and was then appointed Area Manager for Damaraland Camp and the nearby Doro !Nawas Camp, which is also operated by Wilderness Safaris in a neighbouring conservancy. Cornelia Adams began working as a chef at Damaraland Camp and is now an assistant manager. A number of other local residents were trained at Damaraland Camp and then moved to other Wilderness camps or to jobs in other companies in the tourism industry.

The conservancy has signed a new agreement with Wilderness that has secured them a shareholding in the business. This will provide the community with a share in profits in addition to a continued annual income based on turnover. Joint Management Committee meetings are held every three months to ensure good communication between the conservancy and Wilderness.





Damaraland Camp can accommodate up to 22 guests in luxury tents. The lodge was built, and continues to be run along strict environmental guidelines. The use of eco-sandbags, poles and reeds reduced the amount of cement used in construction. Other measures to minimise environmental impacts include the use of solar water geysers, the establishment of a 'grey waste water' system and the eradication of alien plants.

**HUNTING:** Torra obtains annual quotas from the Ministry of Environment & Tourism for the hunting of trophy species. The trophy quotas are carefully worked out to ensure that only a very small percentage of mature animals are hunted. Certain commoner species may be hunted throughout the year without permits by the conservancy. These animals are sold as meat ('shoot-and-sell') or the meat is distributed to its members ('own-use'). The results of annual game counts carried out in conjunction

with Ministry officials and support organizations are used to estimate both the quota for trophies and numbers that Torra may hunt for meat.

**LIVE SALES:** Torra pioneered the sale of live game by communal area conservancies when it sold animals to Nyae Nyae Conservancy in 2002. In a two-stage transaction, 441 springbok were caught and sent to a freehold conservancy which in turn provided Nyae Nyae with 226 red hartebeest as a swap for the springbok. Another sale earned the conservancy N\$283,000 in direct cash revenue for 763 springbok.

**THE USE OF INCOMES:** Over the years the conservancy has taken different approaches to its use of income. Most of these have been led by a policy adopted in 2001 for the equitable distribution of benefits. For example, in 2003 the conservancy paid N\$630 to each member as a cash dividend. This amount may seem modest, but at the time it would have covered the costs of basic groceries for an average, local household for three months; it was almost equivalent to the average amount raised annually from the sale of live goats; and was equivalent to 14% of the annual, average, individual income (N\$4,500) in the region.

More recently, the conservancy has opted to provide significant funding for social projects. These include the development of a community hall and kindergarten; provision of office equipment and supplies and wood for the Bergsig school; support for various community celebrations; emergency transport; and an emergency fund to help members in times of drought or wildlife-related deaths.

In addition to meat from own-use hunting, meat from animals hunted for trophies is also distributed to individual members. In years with good quotas, meat has also been given to community groups, such as the church, the youth group, the soccer team, clinic and the police. A cooling facility is available so that meat is not lost to spoiling.

In addition to the more than 20 jobs normally available at Damaraland Camp, the conservancy itself employs nine local people: a Field Officer, a Community Activator, an Office Administrator, a Conservancy Manager, four Community Game Guards and a Security Guard at the office. The trophy hunting concessionaire employs temporary staff during the hunting season.

## • CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE •

Torra is managed by a committee of seven residents who are elected by the members for a five-year term. Many decisions are guided by information made available by field and office staff through a monitoring system known as the Event Book which covers both natural resources and institutional management. Natural resources, especially wildlife numbers, are also monitored using information obtained during annual game counts and by community game guards.

Calls for greater financial transparency from members need to be addressed, and communication channels between the committee, staff and members of the conservancy must be maintained to ensure that common objectives are clear and agreed upon. The conservancy needs to seize opportunities for further job creation and training. More local involvement in hunting should occur when hunting guides are trained to higher levels of proficiency by the professional hunter.

There are considerable opportunities for further economic development in Torra, including additional tourism facilities and products. Scope also exists for the local development of associated businesses and the provision of local support services. Finally, the conservancy needs to become more competitive by relying more on its own resources and less on the recent tourism boom in Namibia.



There are now many more lions in Torra than before, a consequence of greater tolerance by Torra residents and an increase in the available prey.

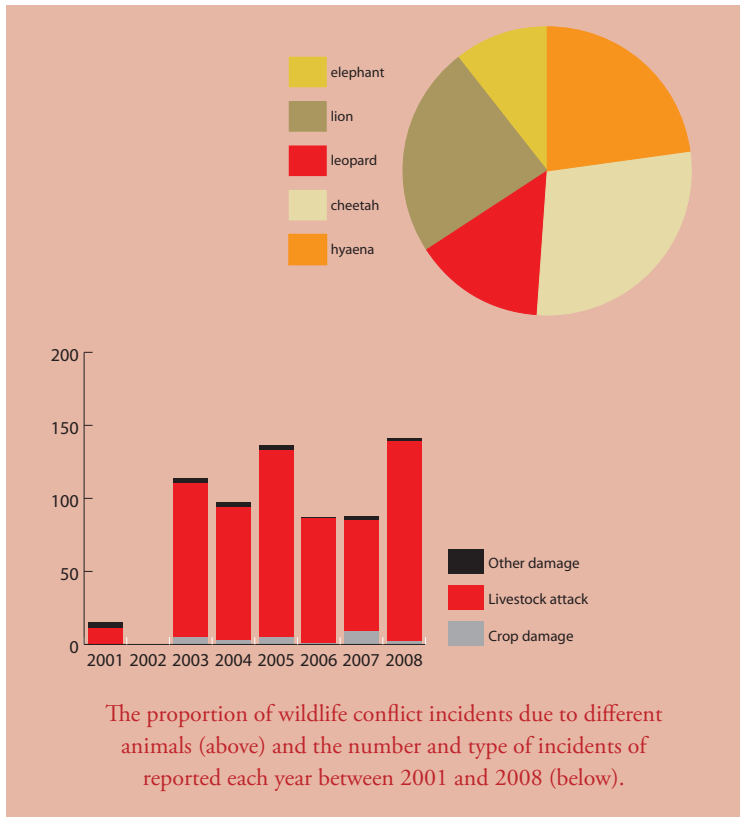
The management of Torra has thus far focused on wildlife and tourism within the boundaries of the conservancy. Broadening this focus would be desirable for several reasons. First, there is a need for large-scale biodiversity co-management across the broad surrounding conservation landscape that includes nearby conservancies, the Skeleton Coast Park and Palmwag Tourism Concession. This may help with the management of widely roaming animals that may occasionally cause problems, such as elephants or lions.

Second, as a legally representative institution, the conservancy should expand its management activities to other natural resources, such as grazing and water, and any other resources of value to people with rights over the area gazetted as Torra. The conservancy should thus take greater ownership to safeguard the land and its resources for legitimate residents.

Third, the wealth of natural resources at Torra is now higher than before. This is due to conservation and management by the conservancy and because rainfall in the past 10 years has generally been good. Much drier conditions, similar to those experienced in the early 1980s and early 1990s are certain to occur again. Severe competition and conflict between livestock and wildlife will then occur, as well as large-scale mortality of both domestic and wild animals. Residents will lose the potential income value of meat and trophies. Pre-emptive measures are required from both the conservancy and the Ministry of Environment & Tourism to avoid these consequences.

Conflicts between people and wildlife were limited when wildlife numbers were low, but Torra's successes in boosting wildlife numbers have led to more frequent damage to property by wildlife, particularly elephants and predators. The worst conflicts arise from livestock predation by lion, leopard, hyaena, cheetah and also jackal. The predators are responsible for a near average of 80 incidents a year, making up 93% of all reported damage. Most of the remaining incidents are due to elephants damaging gardens, fences and water infrastructure.

Income derived from the use of wildlife through hunting, meat and tourism now makes it easier for residents to bear the costs of living with wildlife, and Torra was one of the first communities to start a scheme to



help mitigate residents' livestock losses. The scheme provides financial compensation to farmers who can show that their livestock were killed by predators. A committee of representatives made up of conservancy, IRDNC and Ministry of Environment and Tourism members evaluates claims and approves compensation for those that meet agreed criteria. But other innovative ways of dealing with conflicts must be found, not least so that residents can retain faith in the benefits that the conservancy provides.



**ACHIEVEMENTS:** The successes of the conservancy and its flagship tourism operation, Damaraland Camp, include the following:

**1995:** The first joint partnership between a community and the private sector in Namibia.

**1998:** Damaraland Camp wins an international tourism award – the Silver Otter.

**2001:** Torra became the first communal conservancy to become financially sustainable, meeting all its own management costs and a making profit for its members.

**2001:** Benny Roman, Chairman of Torra, won the Namibian Professional Hunting Association (NAPHA) Conservationist of the Year Award.

**2002:** The first communal area conservancy to sell live game.

**2004:** Torra won the UNDP Equator prize at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This prestigious US\$30,000 prize goes to community projects that effectively reduce poverty through conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity.

**2001-2005:** Damaraland Camp acknowledged in the World Travel & Tourism Council 'Tourism for Tomorrow' Conservation Awards.

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