

IUCN SSC African Elephant Specialist Group



2019 Report



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Co-Chairs

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Location/Affiliation

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Number of members

62

Social networks

Website:

<https://www.iucn.org/ssc-groups/mammals/specialist-groups-a-e/african-elephant>



Mission statement

The mission of the African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) is to promote the long-term conservation of Africa's elephant throughout their range.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

An average population decline of approximately 21%, mainly due to illegal killing, was reported between 2007 and 2016, a period that partly overlapped with the previous quadrennium. We expect that illegal killing of elephants will decline and population numbers will increase in the available and potential range during this quadrennium. A confirmation of the forest and savannah elephants as separate species is likely to lead to more conservation focus on each species separately, thus improving their conservation status. Similarly, the results of the red listing process, the draft of which was submitted for review by the IUCN Red List team in 2019, will reshape the conservation focus for African Elephants. The July 2019 AfESG members meeting will generate emerging issues and urgent areas of focus to improve on the science and conservation of the elephants. The publication of the 2016 African Elephant Status Report on a website platform, now provides a wider audience with the latest population status of the species and is eliciting questions that would prompt the AfESG to update the status report through a functional African Elephant Database.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Agreements: finalise African Elephant Database (AED) data acquisition and use license.

Red List: update the Red List assessment of the

African Elephant.

Research activities: (1) enhance functionality and performance of the African Elephant Database (AED); (2) contract University of Washington to carry out the African Elephant Taxonomy project; (3) scope the African Elephant Database's integration into the IUCN database systems and capacity to host multiple elephant species.

Plan

Policy: (1) determine whether the African Elephant is one or two species and revise policy accordingly; (2) review proposals for the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CITES CoP18) and attend the CoP.

Proposal development and funding: fund-raise for AfESG activities and support for its Secretariat.

Technical advice: provide technical input for revision of the African Elephant Action Plan.

Network

Capacity building: strengthen the AfESG Secretariat.

Membership: strengthen AfESG membership.

Proposal development and funding: secure funding for the AfESG members meeting.

Scientific meetings: hold the AfESG meeting.

Synergy: (1) handover the AfESG leadership to the new Co-Chairs; (2) reach out to elephant technical experts within government conservation agencies; (3) build synergies with other Specialist Groups and multi-lateral agencies.

Communicate

Scientific meetings: participate in the CITES Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants-Elephant Trade Information System Technical Advisory Group (MIKE-ETIS TAG) meeting.

Technical advice: respond to technical requests by the Global Species Programme.



Monitoring elephants in the Nazinga Game Reserve, Burkina Faso
Photo: Emmanuel Hema

Activities and results 2019

Assess

Agreements

i. Draft AED data acquisition and use licence submitted to IUCN Headquarters' legal department. The AED Data Terms of Use were forwarded to the IUCN Headquarters legal team for review and approval before final implementation. In the meantime, a draft version is in use for all requests for AED data. (KSR #14)

Red List

i. Draft assessment report submitted to the IUCN Standards and Petitions Committee. The process was initiated in the group, and a draft submission submitted to the IUCN process. Feedback was received from the Standards and Petitions Committee, including comments about sensitivity to assumptions of the modelling. The team worked through the issues at the end of 2019, without a satisfactory outcome. At the end of 2019, we initiated revising the Red List assessment to consider the Forest and Savanna species separately, which will provide a more robust assessment outcome. (KSR #1)

Research activities

i. The African Elephant Database (AED) officer was recruited, and refreshed all of the processes for getting new data from the various populations. She engaged with the stakeholders and the data are flowing. We have not been able to finalise the software of the database as it is a complex process. We issued a contract to the IUCN Global Species Programme to do an assessment of the best way forward, and we await that report prior to proceeding further. The Data Review Working Group has been

restarted, and is functional in terms of ability to conduct data quality and review. More than 100 recent survey reports were collated and stored in the AED. The new AED officer will maintain the AED. (KSR #14)

ii. The African Elephant Taxonomy report was part of a discussion at the July meeting of the AfESG, where there was a session on taxonomy. The details are captured in the proceedings from the meeting. This has reinforced a decision to initiate a process to recognise two species of African Elephant – forest and savannah. (KSR #12)

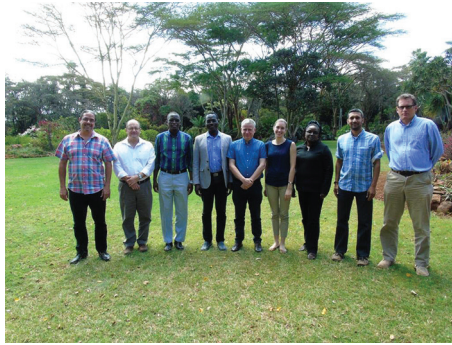
iii. Integration of the African Elephant Database into the IUCN database systems and capacity to host multiple elephant species: the draft report was received, we're awaiting the final report. The draft report recommends a rethink of the whole approach for the AED and focusing on the core work with respect to elephant data. AED in its current status would require significant input/investment, in terms of resources (money and developer resources) and time from other members. For this to happen, it is critical that the key people are in place and collaborate well together. The report contains a brief review of the AED database, outlining the current status of the systems, as well as mentioning areas where improvements could be made. AED is a core biodiversity dataset which is recognised internationally and supported by international conventions like CITES and Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE); therefore, it is critical that such a dataset/database is stable and has good support behind it. (KSR #14)

Plan

Policy

i. The issue of whether the African Elephant is one or two species was a key topic on the first day of the AfESG members meeting in July 2019. Experts made presentations, and then there was a facilitated discussion on the matter. It was agreed by the delegates that there are indeed two species. However, concern was raised as to the legal and political implications of such a decision, for example in terms of illegal trade laws in different countries. The delegates agreed that we would initiate a process to move to two species, taking into account the political dimensions, and that a task force would be established to take this matter forward. This will be done in 2020. (KSR #27)

ii. AfESG studied and provided input on 18 relevant documents for CITES CoP18, including three African Elephant listing proposals, the Extinct Woolly Mammoth listing in CITES Appendix II, documents defining 'appropriate and acceptable' destinations for traded live elephants, MIKE and Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) documents, and several compliance matters. All proposals related to Appendices changes in African Elephant populations at CITES CoP18 were rejected through a vote, which retained the status quo. As Parties prepare for CoP19, it will be important to make deliberate efforts to unite African Elephant Range States and focus on the review and implementation of the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP), developed and owned by all 37 African Elephant Range States and formalised through CITES CoP14 in 2010. The AEAP seeks to address those actions that must be taken in order to effectively conserve elephants across their African range, and in so doing it identifies activities that most urgently require funding to achieve this goal. The AfESG is currently engaged in providing technical input



AfESG handover meeting in Nairobi - November 2019
SSC Chair, co-Chairs, GSP Staff, Luther and AfESG staff

Kathleen Gobush monitoring elephants
in Odzala Kokoua National Park, Republic of Congo
Photo: Ted Shmitt



for potential review of the AEAP; Dr Ben Okita-Ouma attended the CITES CoP18 meeting as one of the Co-Chairs, and was supported by the Senior Programme Officer Lamine Sebogo and Dr Jeanetta Sellier, an AfESG member from South Africa with CITES experience. Besides the direct work at CITES, the AfESG team participated in a MIKES-CITES side event, and an African Range States meeting with African Elephant Fund Secretariat. There was a lot of exciting networking taking place including meetings with Wildlife Conservation Society, the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), US Fish and Wildlife Service, foreign affairs representative of France, World Bank, and African Elephant Coalition. (KSR #26)

Proposal development and funding

i. Fundraising for the AfESG activities and support for its Secretariat is in progress. There are strong commitments and interest to support from the organisations approached so far. Proposals and concepts have been developed and various organisations approached: African Wildlife Fund (AWF), Save the Elephants (STE), Vulcan, CITES-MIKE under European Union funding. A sustainable financial model for AED and AfESG will be developed and implemented in 2020.

Technical advice

i. A technical input document on the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) was received and submitted to the African Elephant Fund (AEF) Steering Committee. The AfESG meeting in July 2019 presented an opportunity for our experts to engage with the AEAP. The expert members focused their attention on technical inputs and insights into the AEAP's vision, goal, and objectives (including prioritisation); in addition, each

of the strategies and activities were considered for gaps, emerging issues, or a need for rewording/rephrasing. This was in response to a request by the African Elephant Fund Steering Committee to AfESG to provide technical input for consideration by the Range States, who will through their own process decide whether to review or update the AEAP (which, having been adopted in 2010, will be 10 years old in 2020). Although the AEAP goal remains very relevant, the actions required to achieve this goal, and thus the AEAP itself, could benefit from a review. It was reported to us by the AEF Secretariat in November that the African Elephant Range States agreed through a postal procedure to review the AEAP through a process that will be discussed and hopefully determined by the AEF Steering Committee in the first quarter of 2020. (KSR #32)

Network

Capacity building

i. Lamine Sebogo was appointed as Senior Programme Officer; Rose Mayienda was appointed as Database Officer.

Membership

i. We decided to delay appointment of any new members until the new quadrennium; however, we identified a number of key people involved with elephant conservation across the world, including from priority Range States with under-representation, and invited them to the AfESG members meeting, where they participated very well. Analysis of skills, identification of gaps and appointment of new members will be done in 2020.

Proposal development and funding

i. A total of \$128,891.00 in funds were raised, sourced from CITES MIKES (\$58,000.00), African Elephant Fund (\$52,195.00), WWF International (\$10,000.00) and WWF-Namibia (\$8,696.00, provided by WWF-US). (KSR #30)

Scientific meetings

i. A members meeting was convened in Pretoria in July 2019 over a period of four working days. The meeting gathered over 50 of our 62 members, but we also made a point of identifying and inviting delegates from across the Range States who work closely with elephants, whether as managers of reserves with elephants, or as the practitioners in government responsible for their conservation. We specifically targeted additional delegates from Range States that did not have existing representation among the AfESG membership. Through this process, almost 100 delegates in total attended our meeting, including a substantial representation from Francophone Africa, which is an important voice for elephant conservation within the Range States. Delegates were present from 27 of the Range States. Topics we discussed included monitoring and the African Elephant Database, the Red List assessment revision, taxonomy (whether one or two species), and sustainable use and trade. Importantly, we facilitated a workshop for the non-member delegates, to provide an opportunity for the practitioners to participate and influence our thinking and processes as we go forward. Issues related to people were highlighted as important in the fourth day of the meeting, when we addressed elephants in a human landscape. The AfESG recognises the African Elephant Action Plan as the framework for conservation of elephants as provided, and agreed, by the Range States, and we had a meaningful engagement with the Plan on the third day, to understand it better among members, as well as discussing gaps, emerging issues and reframing that may impact on the effectiveness of the Plan. At the meeting, the members also provided input and direction for the Co-Chairs in terms of priorities to take forward, and task teams that need to be formed for priority work. This includes, for example,



Elephants & Bees Team of Tsavo at Lewa, Kenya
Photo: RAJA 2018

re-establishing the Data Review Working Group, and establishing a still-to-be-formed task team to better understand sustainable use of elephants. In addition, as Co-Chairs, we are taking the approach of creating small groups of members to engage with what we see as key issues for the group, where we have to prioritise serving the various stakeholders that draw on our expertise, and where investment can have substantial impact to improve the conservation status of elephants. (KSR #28)

Synergy

i. Dr Holly Dublin, the outgoing Chair, provided a detailed handover report and was available to discuss and clarify any aspects, and the Co-Chairs regularly engaged with her through the year about various matters. Jon Paul Rodriguez convened a handover meeting in Nairobi in late 2018 to ensure that the handover went smoothly, as well as to orientate the Co-Chairs into the work of the IUCN SSC.

ii. Outreach to elephant technical experts within government conservation agencies will only be completed in 2020, although work has already started in 2019 – see results reported about engaging with potential new members from Range States. This engagement will be incorporated into a new membership list in time.

iii. Synergies were formed with the Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULI), Asian Elephant Specialist Group, Human-Wildlife Conflict Task Force, Conservation Genetics Specialist Group, Species Monitoring Specialist Group, Wildlife Diseases Working Group, Conservation Planning Specialist Group, the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management (BIOPAMA) Programme at the IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO); Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild

Animals (CMS) and TRAFFIC. Most of these synergies were made when Prof. Rob Slotow and Dr Ben Okita-Ouma attended the SSC Leaders' Meeting in Abu Dhabi in September 2019. There were many other prospects that were made and will be followed up, such as working with the Indianapolis Zoo on *in situ* conservation or approaching National Geographic to consider supporting implementation of the AEAP. Dr Ben Okita-Ouma also attended the 10th meeting of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG). This was to reciprocate representation of the AsESG at the AfESG meeting. For the first time, these two 'sister' Specialist Groups attended each other's member's meeting. Dr Ben Okita-Ouma also attended and made presentations to five heads of States from KAZA TFCA at the Kasane Elephant Summit in 2019. Strong synergies were made with the KAZA TFCA Secretariat, especially given that the TCFA holds close to 50% of the African Elephants. (KSR #29).

Communicate

Scientific meetings

i. Dr Ben Okita-Ouma is the representative Co-Chair on MIKE-ETIS TAG, and attended all meetings through the year, as well as providing the information requested for various meetings by the Chair of the TAG. He also represented AfESG at the MIKE Africa regional meeting. (KSR #28)

Technical advice

i. Technical requests generally consisted of opinions or additional information to help IUCN respond to or assess the implementation of high level policies. The majority of the responses were made by the Co-Chairs in consultation with the AfESG group members. Topics included: live trade *in situ* to *ex situ* statement, additional information to CITES on countries for national ivory action plans (NIAPs), progress

with implementation of WCC-2016-Res-011 on domestic markets for elephant ivory, AfESG position on *in situ ex situ* animal movement, CITES CoP18 assessments of listing proposals, CITES CoP18 overall takeaway message for African Elephant, and Draft statement to the IUCN Director General on movement of baby elephants from the wild in Zimbabwe. (KSR #29)

Acknowledgements

The European Union, through the CITES-MIKE project, WWF-Namibia (The Luc Hoffmann Institute), WWF International, Save the Elephants and The African Elephant Fund are thanked for their financial support. The IUCN Global Species Programme is thanked for its continued support. We sincerely thank both Cecily Nyaga and Lamine Sebogo, who unfortunately had to move on for reasons beyond the AfESG's control, for their dedication and contribution to AfESG as staff. We hope to continue working with them closely from time to time when the need arises. Rose Mayienda is also thanked for helping with the administrative work of AfESG in addition to her African Elephant Database duties. All the AfESG members are thanked for their continued support and commitment to the Specialist Group's mission. We hope to achieve even more for happy elephants and happy people in 2020.

Summary of activities 2019

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 4/5

Assess	5	
Plan	4	
Network	7	
Communicate	2	

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 12, 14, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32

Resolutions addressed: WCC-2016-Res-011

KSR: Key Species Result