

IUCN SSC African Elephant Specialist Group



2020 Report



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Co-Chairs

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Location/Affiliation

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Number of members

84

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. Illegal killing of elephants declined in the 2017–2020 quadrennium. A formal confirmation of the forest and savannah elephants as separate species in 2021 will lead to more conservation focus on each species separately, thus improving their conservation status. Similarly, the results of the Red List reassessment, due for publication in 2021, will reshape the conservation focus for African elephants. The July 2019 AfESG members meeting generated 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 revamped African Elephant Database. Its review and update from 2021 will contribute to improved policy and decision making.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

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

Documents review: initiate the production of the African Elephant Status Report 2021.

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) 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

Agreements: activate the Memorandum of Understanding on conservation of the West African elephant population with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

Planning: provide technical support for National Elephant Action Plans (NEAPS).

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; (3) participate in CITES Working Groups; (4) respond to CITES' Notifications to the Parties; (5) report to CITES Standing Committee 73 (SC73).

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

Synergy: endorse elephant conservation projects.

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

Dr. Lucy Vigne with an elephant,
Ol Pejeta Conservancy, 2020
Photo: Lucy Vigne



Act

Conservation actions: form task forces and working groups.

Technical advice: provide technical advice in an elephant crisis.

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 multilateral agencies.

Communicate

Communication: (1) respond to the media regarding the effects of COVID-19 on elephant conservation; (2) respond to AED data requests; (3) communicate to AfESG members and wider audience;

Scientific meetings: (1) participate in the CITES Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants-Elephant Trade Information System Technical Advisory Group (MIKE-ETIS TAG) meeting; (2) organise Pachyderm meetings.

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



Dr. Shifra Goldenberg collects behavioral observations of African Savanna Elephants, *Loxodonta africana*, in Samburu National Reserve, Kenya
Photo: George Wittemyer

Endangered African Savanna Elephants,
Loxodonta africana, in Tsavo
Photo: Dr. Lydia Tiller



Activities and results 2020

Assess

Agreements

i. The AED Data Terms of Use were forwarded to the IUCN Headquarters' legal team in 2019 for review and approval before final implementation. A draft version is in use for all requests for AED data. (KSR #14)

Documents review

i. African Elephant Status Report (AESR) 2021: The Data Review Working Group (DRWG) initiated the process of producing a full status report, following recommendations made at the Members meeting in 2019 that we should be updating AESR every five to six years. The current full update process will involve Number replacement, Range revision, Protected Area compilation, and writing the accompanying Narratives. The aim is to produce the AESR in 2022. This timing may allow for a biological evaluation of CITES CoP19 proposals in 2022 using an updated status report. The 2021 AESR will incorporate surveys and population data including guesstimates since 2015. All AfESG members are encouraged to provide any additional information or point us to sources for more data and information. In the meantime, the DRWG initiated a dry run status report 2021 for central Africa in December 2020 as part of the production process of the full AESR 2021. We have produced a Gantt chart to track the process of producing the AESR 2021, but the AfESG Secretariat is lacking both a professional projects manager to track the Gantt chart and funds to support that manager. We encourage support for these two aspects from the AfESG membership and donors as we source funds. (KSR #8, 14)

Red List

i. The African Elephant, as a single species (*Loxodonta africana*), was previously listed as Vulnerable (VU) on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™. In July 2017, a team of six assessors from the AfESG and an expert modeller were commissioned by the Chair of AfESG to reassess the African Elephant's status. The assessors had experience of forest and savannah elephant populations across all regions of the continent. The process followed the established steps for IUCN's Red List assessment process. The team delivered a revised assessment of the African Elephant in August 2020, after addressing all the issues raised by the IUCN SSC Standards and Petitions Committee (SPC) and AfESG members in 2019. This included the need to consider two species of African elephant, which required separate assessments for the Forest (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) and Savanna (*Loxodonta africana*) populations. Running separate models generated robust results and addressed a number of concerns raised in the review process. The SPC responded in November 2020 that the assessments for the Forest Elephant and the Savanna Elephant as separate species were acceptable pending minor changes. The team of assessors embarked on finalising the assessments for publication, expected to occur in 2021. (KSR #1)

Research activities

i. We are implementing some of the short- and longer-term priorities such as the data release policy, collation of reports on elephant surveys and review and documentation of the current AED schema, calculations and metrics. As of January 2020, we had collated some 128 new survey reports out of a possible 455 reports since the production of the Status Report of 2016. Activities are coordinated by a full-time AED officer hired in March 2019 under

the European Union's CITES Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKES+) grant. We submitted a financial and technical requirement document to the Vulcan Inc. The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation for consideration of support. The purpose of the document was to provide information to various partners (consortium) for their endorsement and commitment to support the technical and financial sustainability of the AED, the generation of data and information for it, and production of its key outputs: mainly the African Elephant Status Report (AESR). It also proposed a budget of USD 1,015,830 to revamp and support the AED for five years, and to support the production of AESR 2021. The proposal's consideration was delayed by COVID-19 but we expect feedback in 2021. The AfESG envisions a revamped AED, which is more responsive to users' needs, including the generation of data that focuses on AfESG's core mandates. (KSR #14)

ii. There has been ongoing discussion as to whether the two subspecies of African elephant, the Forest Elephant (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*) and the Savannah Elephant (*Loxodonta africana africana*), should each be elevated to species status. Accumulating genetic, ecological and demographic evidence indicates a separation between these two subspecies. The established IUCN Red List convention is to use the Third Edition of *Mammal Species of the World* as its main taxonomic source for mammals (Wilson, D.E. and Reeder, D.M. (eds.) (2005). *Mammal Species of the World. A Taxonomic and Geographic Reference (3rd ed)*. Baltimore, MD, USA: John Hopkins University Press.), and this splits the African Elephant into two species (see <https://www.departments.bucknell.edu/biology/resources/msw3/browse.asp?s=y&id=11500008>). However, the hybridisation that occurs in some of the convergence

Dr Winnie Kiiru, of AfESG, inspecting ivory storerooms with senior officials of NESREA in Lagos, Nigeria
Photo: Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI)



Dr. Winnie Kiiru, of AfESG, conducting training on ivory stockpile inventory in Nanyuki, Kenya
Photo: Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI)



zones separating the rainforest and woodland-savannah habitats poses uncertainty and conservation challenges. The AfESG commissioned a study to conduct further genetic analyses on the occurrence of hybrids after collecting additional sampling in the areas surrounding these convergence zones. The results of this study, completed in March 2019, showed that, despite numerous opportunities to hybridise, hybridisation was in fact extremely rare across Africa. There were, however, exceptions in areas of high human conflict, such as the Albertine Rift and in West Africa. Here, high levels of asymmetric poaching appeared to have increased hybridisation as elephants of one subspecies sought safe haven in the lesser poached habitat of the other. Individuals in a few populations that have a combined population size totalling <2000 elephants had evidence of hybridisation. As part of the Red List process, we have identified all populations known to have hybrids, and each has pure populations of only one or the other species present, and not both. For practical purposes, these populations have been assigned to the pure species which occurs there. Given the low level of hybridisation, this should not be of such a concern as to distract from the need to focus on the conservation of each of the species separately, with an emphasis needed on conservation of remaining populations of Forest Elephants. A conservation news article on the taxonomy process and its incorporation into the Red List assessment has been submitted to *Oryx* journal for publication. (KSR #12)

Plan

Agreements

i. In January 2020, we provided written comments to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) CoP13 regarding AfESG's technical input for a possible revision of the African

Elephant Action Plan (AEAP). We expressed AfESG's readiness to collaborate with CMS and the African Elephant Fund (AEF) in the coordination, and implementation, of the Memorandum of Understanding concerning conservation measures for the West African elephant populations, particularly on the activities linked to the AEAP. Lamine Sebogo provided his views on the 12 projects developed in 2011 under the framework of the West African Elephant MOU. A CMS contact person at the UN met us in September 2020 to discuss relevant CMS CoP13 decisions 13.99 and 13.100 on the AEAP – Decision 13.99: Decision directed to Parties. "The Signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for the West African Populations of the African Elephant (West African Elephant MOU) are encouraged to consider replacing their Work Programme with the African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) and to implement the MOU through the AEAP and the African Elephant Fund structure. The Signatories of this MOU are encouraged to meet and decide on the future of this MOU." Decision 13.100: Decision directed to Secretariat. "Subject to external resources, the Secretariat shall facilitate communication among the Signatories of the West African Elephant MOU, in order to assist their discussions and catalyze conclusions as per Decision 13.99." There were plans by CMS to initiate the implementation of these decisions in November in Niger and use the meeting opportunities to update projects including discussions on the two elephant species, but the COVID-19 situation and changes at AEF Secretariat have affected progress. (KSR #26)

Planning

i. The AfESG continues to be involved either directly as a group, through its expert members in their personal capacities, or collaboratively, in providing support to range States

with the development of elephant strategies and management plans. This includes, among others, support to the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI) that has, since 2018, been involved in National Elephant Action Planning (NEAP) processes. The AfESG will continue to provide inputs and technical support to the NEAP processes. The AfESG sees NEAPs as important frameworks to conserve elephants, and to facilitate reporting elephant status across Africa. This will increase the robustness of data used for a wide range of decisions. Range States are encouraged to develop and implement their NEAPs. The Co-Chairs met EPI technical personnel on NEAPs and discussed collaboration. Further discussion will continue with the new CEO of EPI in 2021. In 2020, AfESG was involved in the NEAPs for Kenya and South Africa. (KSR #15, 21)

Policy

i. Following the findings of the elephant taxonomy project already described, and consideration of additional work on genetics, morphology, reproductive behaviour, and distribution patterns in a panel discussion and general engagement at the recent AfESG meeting (July 2019, Pretoria, South Africa), that meeting concluded that AfESG should recognise two species of African elephant – the Forest and the Bush/Savannah Elephant – on biological grounds, but that finalisation of such a decision should also consider the economic, political and conservation implications. Specifically, such a change to the recognised taxonomy will require production of materials to support range States, conservation agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders in their efforts to manage these two species, as well as processes for engaging with intergovernmental policy and law enforcement institutions such as CITES, TRAFFIC, MIKE ETIS TAG, INTERPOL and others whose data

Prof. George Wittemyer in Samburu National Reserve, Kenya, with a well known elephant bull
Photo: David Daballen/STE



collection and protection policies are based on the current subspecies designation. Most importantly, various national laws and regulations may need to be revised to accommodate two species instead of one, to assure that national and international laws continue to protect all African elephants under this revised designation. The Co-Chairs established a Task Force, convened by Dr John Hart's team, to steer the process of formalising AfESG's adoption of the two species. AfESG has engaged with the IUCN SSC leadership to initiate a process of engagement with some of the intergovernmental and law enforcement institutions. (KSR #26)

ii. Participation in CITES Working Groups: (1) Winnie Kiiru represented AfESG in the CITES working group on ivory stockpiles. The working group mandate is contained in Decision 18.182 and is to "review and consider for approval the practical guidance prepared by the Secretariat for the management of ivory stockpiles, including their disposal" (<https://cites.org/eng/node/55976>). The final version will be posted on the CITES website. (2) Rob Slotow is representing AfESG in the intersessional working group of the Animals Committee on the definition of 'appropriate and acceptable destinations' for species relocations. The Animals Committee intersessional working group started the implementation of their mandate in November 2020. The working group's mandate is to prepare a draft best practice guide (non-binding) on how to determine whether "the trade would promote in situ conservation", building on the existing non-binding guidance contained in document CITES CoP18 Doc 44.1. The group will also prepare a more detailed species-specific guide for living specimens of the African elephants and Southern White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum simum*). This will be carried out in consultation with relevant

experts (including species and zoological facility experts) and the Secretariat; they will report on the outcomes of their work at the next meeting of the Animals Committee. (KSR #26)

iii. In May 2020, the AfESG, through its new task force on movement of elephants from in situ to ex situ, led by Rob Slotow, responded to the request from the CITES Secretariat as per Notification to the Parties No. 2019/070. The Secretariat sought any material that may assist the Animals Committee in their implementation of CITES decisions at CoP18, which direct the Animals Committee to prepare more detailed species-specific guidance for living specimens of African elephants and Southern White Rhinoceros, building on the existing non-binding guidance. Notification No. 2019/070 dealt specifically with non-binding guidance for determining whether a proposed recipient of a living specimen is suitably equipped to house and care for it. In its response, which was published on the CITES website, the AfESG task force noted that there are currently African elephants held in ex situ facilities, and not endorsing this; the AfESG provided inputs based on its experience and expertise with wild elephants in promotion of its mission on two specific components of the non-binding guidelines: dietary needs (species-specific food and nutritional requirements, access to potable water), and social

well-being and animal behaviour (appropriate social groupings for the species, methods of integration, appropriate social and behavioural enrichment, ability to separate the group where needed). It concluded in its submission that the needs of African elephants, as studied in the wild, cannot be met by captive facilities. (KSR #26)

iv. AfESG draws its reporting requirement to, and participation in, CITES Standing Committee (SC) meetings from Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP18) which requires AfESG to share elephant conservation information with the CITES Secretariat (see details in paragraphs 12b, 27c & 27h of this Resolution). We compiled a report as per this resolution for the SC73 meeting, initially scheduled to take place in October 2020. We reported on the Status, Threats, Conservation Strategies, and Action Plan for African elephants and submitted the information to the MIKE Central Coordination Unit for compilation into a joint report with MIKE and ETIS. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the SC73 meeting did not take place, and the combined report will be dealt with intersessionally. The MIKE and ETIS reports will however be posted on the CITES website after consideration by the MIKE ETIS Subgroup. Therefore, AfESG will have to update its report in 2021 in preparation for the SC meeting, to be held on a date yet to be determined. (KSR #26)



Dr. Andrea K. Turkalo, Principal Investigator
Dzanga Forest Elephant Study, at the Dzanga
Clearing, Central African Republic
Photo: A. K. Turkalo/WCS

Proposal development and funding

i. In April 2020, AfESG signed a 4-year contract of USD 300,000 with MIKES+, under the European Union's funding for the maintenance and enhancement of the African Elephant Database (AED). This contract will enable ongoing monitoring of the status of Africa's elephant populations and facilitate reporting to the CITES Standing Committee on the conservation status of African elephants. This was a new contract following the expiry of a similar agreement in December 2019. In addition, other organisations approached so far show strong commitments and interest to support our work. Proposals and concepts were submitted to Vulcan Inc. and Save the Elephants for longer term financial support for the AED and AfESG activities and targets for 2021–2024. It is estimated that running core AfESG activities and a functional secretariat would cost approx. USD 1,679,668 for five years beginning 2021. We are seeking to fundraise a deficit of USD 1,454,668.

Synergy

i. We endorsed a number of conservation and research proposals. If funded and implemented, these projects would contribute to the AfESG mission or to the African Elephant Action Plan. They include the following: (1) From milk to microbes: enhancing hand- and assist-rearing outcomes in African elephants, *Loxodonta africana*, through a multidisciplinary approach; by San Diego Zoo Global/USA. (2) Preventing local extinction of Namibia's desert-dwelling elephants through a holistic long-term conservation and monitoring programme; by Elephant–Human Relations Aid/Namibia. (3) Community programmes that promote

ecotourism, livelihoods and human–wildlife co-existence; by Big Life Foundation/Kenya. (4) Improved Security and Conservation of Elephant in Tsavo, Kenya; by Tsavo Trust/Kenya. (5) Investigation into the sudden mortality of elephants in Botswana; by Queen's University Belfast and the Royal Veterinary College London. (KSR #15)

Technical advice

i. Developed and owned by all 37 African elephant range States and formalised in 2010, the AEAP aims to secure, and restore where possible, sustainable elephant populations throughout their present and potential range in Africa, recognising their potential to provide ecological, social, cultural and economic benefits. The AfESG acknowledges the AEAP as the framing plan for the conservation of elephants as provided, and agreed, by the range States. The range States, through the African Elephant Fund (AEF) Steering Committee, requested the AfESG to provide technical input for their consideration through their own process should they decide to review or update the Plan, which will be 10 years old in 2020. The AfESG members' meeting in July 2019 presented an opportunity for a meaningful engagement and better understanding of the Plan. The expert members focused their attention on technical inputs and insights into the Plan's Vision, Goal, and Objectives (including prioritisation). Each of the Plan's strategies and activities were considered for gaps, emerging issues, or rewording/reframing to make it more effective. We received the technical input document and submitted it to the range States through the AEF Steering Committee. In November, the AEF Secretariat informed us that the range States agreed through a postal procedure to

review the plan through a process that was to be discussed and determined at a meeting in Uganda in March 2020. However, due to the widely restricted movement of people caused by COVID-19, the meeting was postponed to a later date that is yet to be announced. (KSR #32)

Network

Capacity building

i. Both Cecily Nyaga (Administration Officer) and Lamine Sebogo (Programme Officer) moved on for reasons beyond the AfESG's control. We continue to work with them closely from time to time, when need arises. Rose Mayienda, the Database Officer, is helping with the administrative work of AfESG in addition to her AED duties.

Membership

i. We initiated the process of appointing new members and renewing the membership of existing members. We asked current members to help us identify key people involved with elephant conservation across the world, including priority African elephant range States with under-representation. We sent out a skillset questionnaire to existing members and potential new members to enable us to analyse and identify the gaps. We will be revealing the results of the analyses to the members through an online link in due course. In the meantime, based on our assessment, we will be automatically renewing all current 2017–2020 memberships in 2021 (when the 2017–2020 quadrennium ends), for the 2021–2024 quadrennium. Additionally, we admitted 25 new members as guided by the results of the skillset analyses. The Group's number of members now stands at 84 (see <https://portals.iucn.org/commissions/>).

Dr. Chris Thouless of AfESG
and STE on elephants
monitoring research expedition
in Mukogodo Forest, Kenya
Photo: AESG archives



Synergy

i. We encouraged AfESG members to read the Co-Chairs' report published in the latest issue of *Pachyderm* (Volume 61), available at: <https://pachydermjournal.org/index.php/pachyderm/article/view/66>. In this report, we highlight progress on some of the AfESG activities. We also reported our group's achievements for 2019 to the IUCN SSC, as far as the 'IUCN 2017–2020 Species Strategic Plan' is concerned, as reported here: https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/2019_african_elephant_sg_report_publication.pdf. AfESG scores contributed to 18 Key Species Results on the following four out of five components of IUCN's Species Strategic Plan: Assess, Plan, Network and Communicate. In the next quadrennium, AfESG will initiate projects to contribute to the fifth component, 'Act'. AfESG will also upload its 2021–2024 targets/priorities, that will align to the revised Species Strategic Plan, by 31 December 2020.

ii. Task Forces and Working Groups formed: (1) Human–Elephant Coexistence Task Force: to develop and review human–elephant coexistence tools; (2) African Elephant Taxonomy Task Force: to finalise a statement on the two species of African elephant and develop a process for release of the statement, as well as dealing with the uncertainties and consequences of recognising two species; (3) Sustainable Use Task Force: to provide a better understanding of the context and conceptualisation of sustainable use of African elephants through the consumptive and non-consumptive uses continuum, with the aim of bridging the sharply divergent views between regions on this issue; (4) Movement of Elephants from *In-situ* to *Ex-situ* Task Force: to be responsible for leading the review of the existing AfESG statement

on the removal of elephants from the wild for captive use. The task force also considers principles or positions that the AfESG should have in terms of Resolution Conf. 11.20 (Rev. CoP18) in order to respond to requests relating to 'appropriate and acceptable destinations' with reference to the trade in live elephants taken from the wild; (5) African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) Task Force: to identify opportunities to support range States in review of the plan if called upon and to build capacity across range States in conservation planning and management of elephants. To position the AfESG in a manner that actively supports the implementation of the AEAP and to build capacity across the group; (6) African Elephant Library (AEL) Task Force: to craft a long-term, sustainable plan for the library, which is a key resource; (7) Communication Task Force: for visibility and impact of the Group; (8) AED and Data Review Working Group: for data collection, methodological and analytical improvements, survey designs, data storage, strategic advice, and review of analytical outputs/products. (KSR #31)

iii. We reached out to other countries in Eastern and Southern Africa. More work still needs to be done in reaching out to countries in West and Central Africa. (KSR #26).

Communicate

Communication

i. The AfESG issued a statement in July 2020 to express its concern, but most importantly its willingness to provide support in unravelling the cause(s) of the mass die-off of over 300 elephants in the areas around Seronga in the Okavango Panhandle of Botswana. The statement had the input of our membership and the Co-Chairs of the IUCN Wildlife Health Specialist Group (WHSG). The Government of Botswana received this AfESG gesture positively and were open to invite AfESG expertise

when required. See <https://www.iucn.org/news/species-survival-commission/202007/statement-iucn-ssc-african-elephant-specialist-group-elephant-deaths-botswana>. In October 2020, the Government of Botswana revealed in a statement that field observations, clinical, post-mortem, histopathological, and laboratory findings suggested that the 330 elephants died from neurotoxic cyanobacterium (blue-green alga). Toxicosis was associated with a toxic bloom of cyanobacterium in seasonal pans in the region. Neurotoxins from cyanobacteria living in contaminated water could have affected the transmission of neurologic signals within an animal, causing paralysis and death, predominately related to respiratory failure. However, investigations are still ongoing in an attempt to answer unresolved questions, such as why did elephants only die, and why that area alone? Queen's University Belfast and the Royal Veterinary College London approached WHSG and AfESG for a letter of support for their proposal to investigate the mass mortality further. (KSR #32)

ii. Various experts in IUCN's networks, especially across Africa, responded to questions about the impact of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic on the conservation of wildlife species. This was also done through IUCN's communications departments with the support of some of our AfESG members. Importantly, we asked for a lot of caution in how stories were reported, because they could be counterproductive and worsen situations, especially if a number of media reports were to suggest that "the guards/rangers are down" (which they largely are not); poachers might actually perceive this as an opportunity to increase their activities, posing more risks to



Collecting harvest records from farmers involved in the EleSenses Elephants Without Borders repellent project. Tempe Adams, Jackson Maroza, Kavimba-Botswana
Photo: Tempe Adams

the guards/rangers and to wildlife. It was essential not to create a distorted image of an easing of anti-poaching efforts. We set up a shared Google sheet for our AfESG expert members to update regularly with any anecdotes or their observations on the effects of COVID-19 on elephants. While some experts heard anecdotes of poaching incidents since COVID-19-related lockdowns began, we could not confirm an overall increase. As of December 2020, at the time of writing this report, we had not received reports of an increase in poaching of elephants. While the market for ivory has been depressed lately (though this could change), we have received mixed reports on a slight rising trend of killings for bush meat. In many countries, anti-poaching activities (considered a national essential service) by both the state and private sectors continue as normal despite the high costs and losses in revenue, especially from tourism. (KSR #28)

iii. AfESG’s AED Officer responded to data requests, mainly from students from various universities across the globe; we also responded to data requests from journalists. (KSR #43)

iv. *Pachyderm* fulfils the role of providing good quality, academically robust information, vital to progress research in relation to the essential area we work in for rhinos and elephants. It is not poaching alone that threatens the iconic megafauna; there are additional challenges to the long-term conservation of each species represented by the IUCN Specialist Groups AfESG, African Rhino Specialist Group (AfrSG) and Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG), from combatting the illegal ivory trade, to human–elephant conflict, and rapid and extensive land conversion. Addressing each threat, directly and indirectly, requires investigation,

long-term cooperative action and sharing of solutions among managers, researchers, and policy makers. *Pachyderm* provides a forum for the Chairs of the three specialist groups to report back on group activities and conservation issues, trends and developments over the preceding year, and disseminates the Chair reports widely:

AfESG Chair report: <https://pachydermjournal.org/index.php/pachyderm/article/view/66/381>

AfrSG Chair report: <https://pachydermjournal.org/index.php/pachyderm/article/view/67/382>

AsRSG Chair report: <https://pachydermjournal.org/index.php/pachyderm/article/view/68/383>

The *Pachyderm* meeting deliberated on fundraising strategies for *Pachyderm*, migration of *Pachyderm* from print to online, and other strategies to improve/increase readership. (KSR #28)

Scientific meetings

i. The MIKE Central Coordination Unit convened the sixteenth meeting of the MIKE ETIS TAG virtually on 1–2 July 2020. Ben Okita represented the AfESG as a co-opted member to the TAG. Some AfESG members are also members of the TAG in their individual capacity either as technical experts in MIKE and ETIS, or as MIKE regional representatives. On the agenda were discussions on Proportion of Illegally Killed Elephants (PIKE) estimates with and without management related deaths, MIKE analysis for Africa, ETIS analyses, carcass detection probability, and the range of natural mortality rates based on a literature review in determining poaching rates. For more information visit: <https://cites.org/eng/prog/mike/index.php/portal>. (KSR #43)

Acknowledgements

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Summary of activities 2020

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 4/5

Assess	5	
Plan	9	
Network	5	
Communicate	5	

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 8, 12, 14, 15, 21, 26, 28, 31, 32, 43

Resolutions addressed: WCC-2016-Res-011

KSR: Key Species Result