

ELEPHANTS, ZIMBABWE AND CITES

Peter Mundy

The savanna elephant *Loxodonta africana africana* occurs over much of Zimbabwe, but in four populations, viz. northwest Matabeleland (centred on the Hwange National Park), Sebungwe (centred on the Chizarira and Matusadona National Parks), Zambezi Valley (centred on the Mana Pools National Park), and the southeast Lowveld (centred on the Gonarezhou National Park). Elephants throughout the country are surveyed and counted about every three years, the last whole-country census being in 2001. In that year, a national estimate of 88123 (+/- 8% for the 95% confidence intervals) animals was obtained.

Earlier national censuses indicate an average annual increase in the population of 2.1%, which in the last few years has itself increased to about 5%. Note however, that censuses are always done in the late dry season, August to September, and it may be that some of the animals leave Zimbabwe during the wet season, and others may be attracted in during the period of the aerial surveys because of the pumped water.

The lower earlier rate of increase is accounted for by the culling of elephants since 1960, totalling about 50 000. Culling is legal, government off-take, and does not include poaching which continues at a low level all the time.

Due to the massive poaching of elephants to the north of us in the 1970s and 1980s, both the African and Asian species were put onto Appendix I of the CITES at the 7th meeting in Lausanne in October 1989. Commercial trade was therefore banned. However, Zimbabwe had a thriving trade in trophies (tusks, with or without the head), leather goods, ivory trinkets, and live animals, and took out a reservation, as did other countries. At the 8th CITES CoP, Appendix II listing was allowed, but no trade in raw ivory. At the 10th CoP, in Harare in June 1997, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia were permitted to sell 20 tonnes, 20t and 10t raw ivory (=tusks) by auction sale to one importing country only (=Japan). No further sales have been allowed, except that Botswana, Namibia and South Africa may sell raw ivory after April 2004, by decision of the 12th CoP in Santiago.

Zimbabwe can still keep its elephants on Appendix II for purposes of trade in, and export of, elephant products and live animals, but NOT in raw ivory. Meanwhile our elephant population continues to increase.

Through the TRAFFIC organisation, CITES has called on several countries in Africa - including Zimbabwe - to make a success of MIKE (monitoring the illegal killing of elephants).