

Twelve Month Report for the Namibian Chamber of Environment, May 2018 to April 2019

31 May 2019

Executive Summary

Our broad focus is to respond to Human Lion Conflict(HLC) incidents in the Kunene Region, reduce livestock losses and increase tolerance and understanding amongst local farmers and residents. It is particularly important to foster relationships with farmers, conservancies and stakeholders such as the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Traditional Authorities and Tourism industry operators.

The Rapid Response Team (RRT) focuses on the primary focal lion conflict areas, which are conservancies the North-West Lion Management Plan (NWLMP) was initially designed to focus; with focus on the implementation of Early Warning Systems (towers, collaring), predator proof kraals as well as establishment of lion rangers Furthermore, the team also focuses on the secondary focal areas which are conservancies with severe human-lion conflict hotspots, but were the work of the RRT is limited to a certain extend due to resources constraints and vastness of the area, for example, providing support to Tsiseb conservancy which resorts under the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) as a support organization. However, NNF do not have the field capacity to deal with Human Lion Conflict and thus requested the involvement of RRT. In addition, the RRT team has been dealing with more incidents, especially responding to incidents in Ehirovipuka conservancy which is a prime hot spot because of regular lion movements from Etosha National Park.

Activities carried by RRT over the period included proactive patrolling, lion monitoring and awareness creation and engagement with the farmers and broader community. The component of community and stakeholder engagement is critical to the successes of the RR activities. In key lion hotspot areas activities also included reactive and responding to incidences, monitoring of lion movements, erecting Early Warning Systems (EWS) towers, support to the collaring of lions as well as erecting predator proof kraals in lion conflict hotspots. During the reporting period, over 20 lions were fitted with EWS collars, while 4 EWS towers were erected at strategic places (Driefontein, Mbakondja, and two in the Ugab valley(Tsiseb Conservancy)) as well as 2 loggers, one in the Uniab catchment and one at Elephant song in the Hoanib River. All four of the EWS towers have been activated by the presence of collared lions on numerous occasions and are fast showing their value in mitigating and managing incidents.

Due to intensive growing conflicts with Elephant-Human Conflict, the team also assisted with patrolling with Community Game Guards in one of the focal Elephant areas. Furthermore, awareness and discussion with regard to Elephant-Human Conflict was held in a respective village with the farmers affected.

There are peripheral benefits of the RRT operating in the field. While tracking lions in the Torra conservancy in February, the Team, together with Lion Rangers detected and observed a group of three poachers and dogs who had just poached a kudu calf. The Namibian Police intervened and took the case further. One of the suspects was out on bail for a previous poaching incidence involving rhino.

Monitoring, mitigation measures and Team Effort

During the reporting period, the Rapid Response team led by IRDNC responded to different incidents, amounting to about 87 incidents. A summary of the measures are summarized below.

	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Totals
Response to incidents			6	12		21	8 ¹	8	8	8	8	9	87
Patrols and monitoring			4	18	8	13	17						60
Cattle killed			5			5	3	2	10	17	9	4	45
Donkeys killed		1				0	0	1	0	2	4	0	8
Small livestock killed			18			28	0	0	0	3	0	2	51
Lions killed			1			3					3 ²	1	5
Community and planning meetings		3	12	3			6					15	39

The number of livestock losses to lions as indicated in the table shows an increase on the livestock losses in the beginning of 2019 compared to the end of 2018. Many of these incidents took place in the Ehirovipuka and Omatendeka Conservancies with most of the problem causing lions coming from Etosha. The boundary fence of the Etosha National Park is old and quite porous. IRDNC only has one Team member on site and he was extremely busy. Early scattered rains at the beginning of the year caused livestock and wildlife to disperse which exacerbated the problem.

In addition to the key measures indicated above, the RRT focused energy on capacitating community members to tackle HLC issues through extensive training of the RRT and the conservancy lion rangers at every opportunity. Most of this has been done on site at actual scenarios. This includes response situations, patrolling, immobilizing and working with lions and meeting with stakeholders. This ongoing training is seen as a high priority. For example,

¹ Total incidents responded to were 39 between November 2018 and March 2019. Therefore, on average per month the number of incidents reported to are 8.

² A total of 3 lions (2 lions were shoot and another 1 lion was poisoned) killed by farmers between October 2018 and March 2019.

having CGG and Lion rangers accompany every patrol creates a sense of ownership of the program and interventions. In February 2019, a total of 30 Conservancy Lion Rangers from 8 conservancies including a partner NGO took part in one hands-on a training held at Werelsend Environmental Centre.

The team has also been able to explore innovative measures in collaboration with the farmers. On several occasions, the RRT at the request of the farmers assisted to move their livestock away from high risks areas. One outstanding success was recorded in Sesfontein conservancy (Ganamub and Elephant song) where the team actively collected livestock from the field to kraals at night. This has not only prevented retaliation killing, but also there was no need to call in Desert Lion Conservation Project for translation. Furthermore, the Teams have poured a lot of time and energy into the aspect of influencing community attitudes towards lions. On two separate occasions local farmers were taken to witness the darting and translocation of lions. Several farmers who were extremely challenging and anti-lions have publicly expressed their gratitude and have welcomed the continued support by the RRT in their respective areas. This remains crucial when dealing with HLC, and the RRT will continue to proactively work together with farmers and understand their perspectives on HLC issues as well as continue to strengthen trust and existing relationships.

Trans-locating lions is one of the strategies to avert lion killing (retaliation killing) by farmers. Thus, in October 2018 and March 2019, lions were translocated out of Ugab river and Sesfontein conservancy. In July in Anabeb Conservancy, we had an incident of lions killing some 18 goats in a kraal. Our Teams were deployed at other problems and could not respond immediately. The MET field staff were also not able to respond. The farmers, two men involved, put poison out in a carcass and a lioness, hyena and several jackals were killed. Our discussions with a top independent Investigative Consultant with Nampol and MET led to a thorough investigation of the incident. Two men were arrested, charged and appeared in court. They pleaded guilty and the case has been postponed for sentencing. This is a highly significant landmark case and is, to my knowledge, the first time a person has been charged after poisoning lions or predators. This has sent a clear message out to all that this is unacceptable and that there will be consequences. In another situation, one male lion moved from the Oruwau area (Sesfontein Conservancy) through the Hoanib River, Ganamub area, Puros and went all the way north to just west of Orupembe. He then returned to the Puros area where he finally disappeared, we suspect killed and buried. Our Teams spent much time monitoring his movements and actions and communicating with local farmers. Unfortunately, prey species were few and far between and this lion lived largely off livestock. It appears as if this male's movements were in response to other dominant males in the area and, in conjunction with Desert Lion Conservation, it was decided not to translocate this male. It was almost certain that this would precipitate other problems.

In addition to translocating, collaring of lions remains an important aspect in early detection of lion movements working hand-in hand with the EWS. Over 20 lions have been fitted with the new EWS collars during the reporting period. The EW towers erected at Driefontein and Mbakondja have proved successful and provided warning on several occasions. The RRT provided support during some of the collaring events. This is an ongoing priority and the systems' expected efficiency depends on at least another 30 collars being fitted.

Constructing predator proof kraals also remain a crucial mitigation measure. During the reporting period, IRDNC has been responsible for the construction of five new predator proof kraals. These situated in the hotspot areas of Torra and Anabeb Conservancies.

Recognizing and identifying individual lions is also critical for the interventions and mitigation of the HLC. The RRT is familiar with at least 8 pride consisting of about 27 individual lions. These are the lions most frequently causing problems and conflict.

Despite IRDNC geographical area being mainly Kunene North, the RRT Team responded to several calls in the Brandberg area and then assisted the Desert Lion Project and Ministry of Environment and Tourism in monitoring and ultimately relocating several problem lions. These have been translocated to a private property. Negotiations led to agreement that these can be returned to the area once certain mitigation measures are in place and when game/prey numbers have increased.

The 2018/19 rain season has not been good and is certainly below average. Rains have been sporadic and localized. The persistent drought has caused a dramatic decline in wildlife populations in north west Namibia. The following three species that are very important to lions clearly illustrate this. These estimates are from the annual fixed route game count and are published on the NACSO website. Oryx; 2014 estimate 17 627, 2018 estimate 5 900. Springbok; 2014 estimate 79 364, 2018 estimate 59 750. Hartmann's Zebra; in 2014 about 20 133 and in 2018 about 15260.

The Rapid Response Team is now at full strength with its third member being appointed in June 2018. IRDNC have sourced funding for a new vehicle and this vehicle was deployed in December 2018. This additional vehicle has been tremendous help to supporting HLC and other associated social-ecological issues within the communities. Basic equipment, binoculars, spotlights, GPS, headlight, bedroll, tent, chair, 12v fridge have been purchased and will make a huge difference to operational efficiency. Teams will now be able to spend longer extended time in the bush. Furthermore, Satellite phone has been ordered, and this will also be helpful to the team operating in a rather remote area with limited access to communication. The team will continue its effort in ensuring that the core functions of the RRT and the NWLMP is implemented.

As reported above, due to intensive growing conflicts with Elephant-Human Conflict, the team also assisted with patrolling with Community Game Guards in one of the focal Elephant areas. Funding has been in principle acquired to support one coordinator and Community Game Guards in Ongongo, Otjiuwest and Otjikongo. Funds for a vehicle to support this team is still being sourced.

During the period under review there have been three meetings of the North West Lion Working Group, all conducted timeously and very useful indeed. Issues discussed relate to response protocols, Early Warning Systems and the implementation, community attitudes strategies for surveying areas not currently being researched and protocols surrounding the dissemination of sensitive information(particularly "live" information on lion's whereabouts.

Challenges

- It appears as if the persistent drought conditions have caused prides or groupings of lions to either shift or enlarge their normal ranges. This is in line with the decline of prey species because of 5 years of drought. We are witnessing lions being extremely mobile daily to find prey. An example is a pride of 4 females who include Wereldsend in their territory and who have been seen near Hunkab, some hundred kilometers north. We have received reports of increases in the prides using the Ugab and lower Huab rivers. This still needs to be verified.
- The persistent drought has caused a dramatic decline in wildlife populations in north west Namibia, and subsequently caused an increase in HWC incidents.
- The vast area we operate in remains a major challenge. This demands an enormous amount of mileage monthly and long dedicated time in the field. Some equipment still needs to be sourced, this includes sat phone, cameras and a mobile small projector for giving presentations to communities.
- There is no one solution to human-lion conflict, different piece and pieces must work together to achieve results. Despite the different human-lion conflict mitigation measures being implemented in Torra conservancy, conflict remains rise in Torra, because of the human component missing from the whole early warning system. The RRT has no lion rangers on foot or eyes on the ground in Torra conservancy, and to rely on early warning (towers/loggers or geo-fencing alone), to reduce human-lion conflict, the deploying lion rangers is very crucial in the whole process and that remains a constraint with Torra conservancy, as it has produced results in Anabeb and Tsiseb conservancy, where they have lion rangers.
- More funding required to jump-start the lion rangers and provide impetus to this line of mitigation.



EW Logger, erected at #Gaus, Tsiseb



RRT patrols along Etosha fence, Ehi-rovipuka



RRT and MET stuff, camping, at Ganamub, during response; Sesfontein



Lion lying next to a deadwood, at Ganamub, in day light, Sesfontein



RRT assisting farmers retrieving livestock from imminent lion conflict, Elephant-song, Sesfontein area



RRT and police officers investigating kudu poaching



A cow bull carcass just killed by lions, Oromauua, Ehi-rovipuka