



Bwabwata National Park

People and wildlife – a shared history

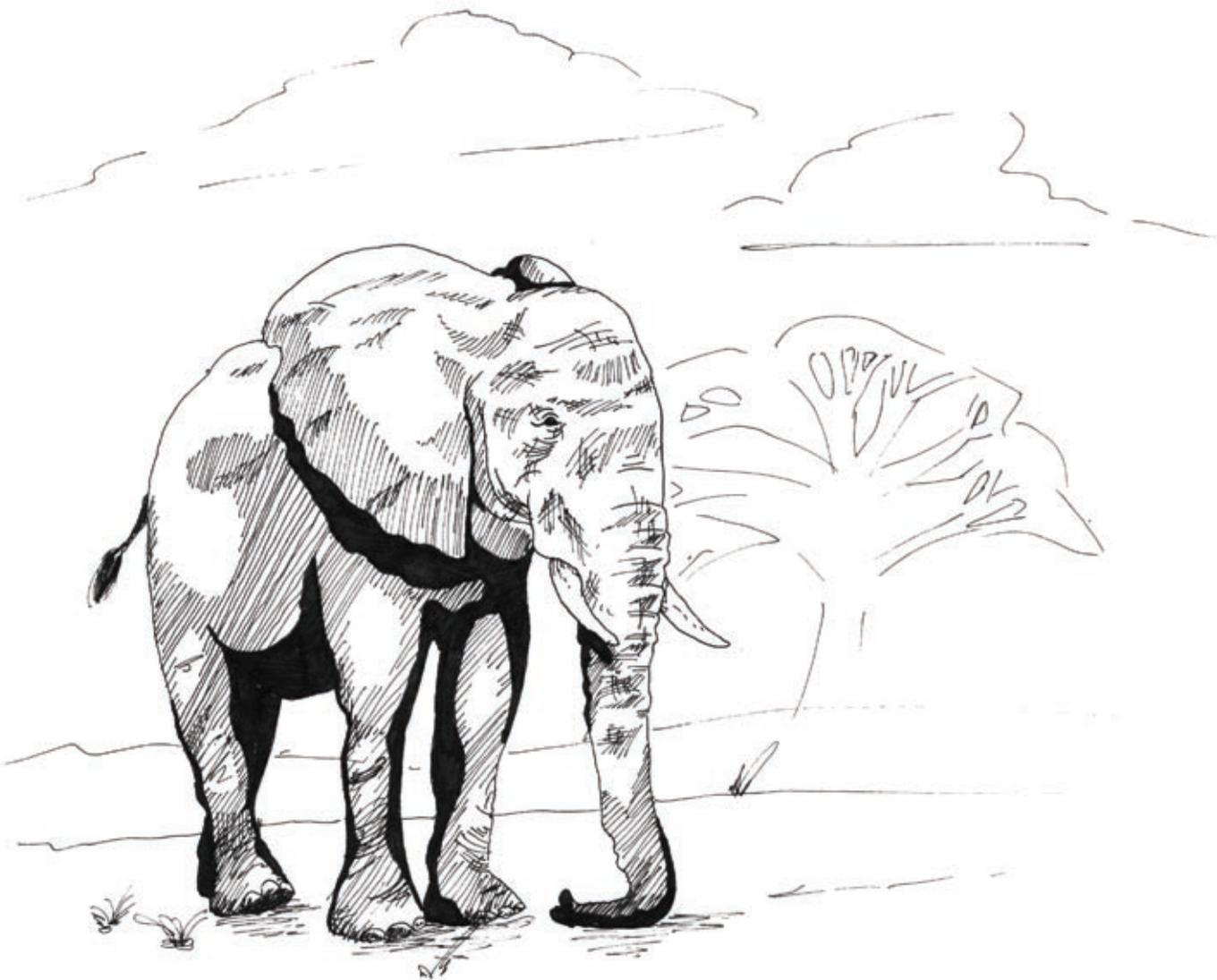
Bwabwata has been inhabited for millennia, but it is the more recent history that has shaped the Bwabwata National Park of today. Proclaimed in the 1960s as the Caprivi Nature Reserve, then as the Caprivi Game Park, no initial wildlife management took place because the area was a restricted security zone, occupied first by the South African police and subsequently by the South African Defence Force (SADF). Many locals were conscripted into the army. Weapons proliferated during the fighting and the early 1990s saw high incidences of poaching by both Namibian and foreign nationals.

Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) decided that given the large human population, a community-based conservation approach was the logical way to manage the wildlife and environment. A community game-guard system was established in 1992 and in 1996 the MET gave its approval for the establishment of con-

servancies adjoining the park. Community-run campsites were also organised to spread tourism income to the local people. Although the spillover of the Angolan civil war disrupted the area, the Bwabwata National Park now enjoys stability and stands as a remarkable success story of community and MET co-operation for local development and conservation. Ruined military installations in the Bwabwata National Park still stand as reminders of past conflict.

Wildlife history – a story of recovery

The wildlife in parts of what is now the Bwabwata National Park was severely depleted by poaching in the past. This is changing dramatically. The MET has been relocating, restocking and monitoring the progress of lost or denuded species. Waterbuck and tsessebe have been released in the Mahango Core Area, and overall, the results are encouraging.



Then and now

A wildlife survey conducted in 1978 yielded counts of just one breeding herd of 35 elephant (there are now at least 340 and thousands more that move through the area), a single sable (there are now at least 277), a small herd of red lechwe (142 were counted in 2007) and one hippo (there are now approximately 350).

'Core' and 'Multiple Use' Areas

The Bwabwata National Park is zoned into three 'Core Conservation Areas' – the Mahango, Buffalo and Kwando. The bird species count in Mahango exceeds 450, representing the highest bird diversity in any protected area in Namibia. Over 1 000 buffalo occur between the Mahango and the Buffalo Core Areas.

The Mudumu North Complex, including the Kwando Core Area, four communal conservancies and the community forests between Bwabwata and Mudumu national parks, serves to link conservation areas. Transfrontier conservation initiatives are currently underway, including the Kavango-Zambezi (KaZa) initiative.

The rest of the park is designated a 'Multiple Use' area. Shops, clinics, schools and villages are found within the park's borders. Park residents can continue with their daily lives, planting staple crops such as millet, sorghum and maize, and operating community-based tourism programmes and two trophy-hunting concessions. Four thousand tons of elephant and buffalo meat resulting from trophy hunting have thus far been distributed to

residents and profits from hunting are shared between the MET and communities.

Local conservation initiatives have put a system of compensation payments in place to ensure that local people who lose livestock to large predators or suffer crop damage are not forced to resort to drastic measures. The Kyaramacan Residents Association (KA, established in 2004) not only oversees community-based tourism development and distributes income from the Bwabwata National Park's two hunting concessions to all residents, but also employs 27 Community Game Guards who operate game-monitoring patrols in the Multiple Use Area and assist the MET in annual game counts. The residents association also employs 10 Community Resource Monitors, a number that is set to increase.

Overall the Bwabwata National Park is changing attitudes and changing the face of conservation in Namibia. By visiting Bwabwata National Park, you can also be a part of this change.

"We cannot invite tourists to come and see our maize fields, but we can invite them to see the wildlife that is so close to us. This is the most important point."

Traditional Authority Chief, Joseph Tembwe Mayuni
(award-winning conservationist)

www.met.gov.na



Environmental Care Code

Please adhere to the following:

- **Keep your distance from elephants, particularly those grazing or resting between the road and the river. They may feel trapped if you try to drive past them, so it is best to give them time to move away first.**
- **Do not drive off designated roads and tracks.**
- **Camp only in designated areas.**
- **Fishing and boating are prohibited in the park.**
- **Remove all your litter.**
- **Be aware that you enter the park at your own risk.**
- **Follow the rules and regulations on your park permit.**

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