

# SECTION 1: CONSERVATION



November 2005

## What is biodiversity and why is there a need to conserve it?

Biological diversity (biodiversity) is defined as *the variety and variability among living organisms and the natural environments in which they occur.*

Namibia's biodiversity includes innumerable species of wild plants, birds, animals, insects and microbes which can collectively be called indigenous or native to the country.

Only a small number (possibly as little as 20%) of Namibia's indigenous species have been described to date. Of the 13 637 species that have been described, almost 19% are endemic or unique to Namibia

Although some animals and plants provide humans with food, fibres and medicine, most species have no immediate obvious value for mankind.

Consequently, many people believe that their loss should not matter. Unfortunately this is far from true.

It is the interaction of a diverse number of species functioning together that keeps our world stable and our natural systems productive.

Every time a species is lost, the earth's ecosystems become less complex, outbreaks of pests and disease are more likely to occur

and essential ecological functions become disrupted.

Ultimately, the loss of wild species increases vulnerability to drought, floods and other extreme events like global climate change.

In turn, these impacts threaten food supplies, sources of wood and medicines, and the sustainability of the tourism industry.

## The causes of biodiversity loss

- **Habitat destruction** as a result of deforestation, agricultural and urban expansion.
- **Poor and inappropriate land management**, resulting in all forms of land degradation including soil erosion, desertification and bush encroachment.
- **Pollution of air, soil and water**. Pesticide residue in particular can be responsible for the extinction of many aquatic species.

- **The introduction of alien invasive organisms** that threaten the survival of indigenous species.
- **The illegal and unsustainable harvesting of wild plants and animals and wildlife products.**

In addition to the poaching of rhino and elephant, illegal trade in many of Namibia's succulent plant species, insects, reptiles, birds (particularly parrots) and unusual small mammals like pangolins is believed to be considerable.



*The loss of natural habitats and wild species in a country like Namibia can quickly lead to a loss of tourism potential. © Wilderness Safaris*

### The goal:

To promote the sustainable management of the area and the wise and ethical use of its landscapes, ecosystems and indigenous wildlife, so that these may be passed on to future generations in productive, diverse, aesthetically attractive and healthy condition.

## What is the purpose of a conservation management plan?

The main aim of a conservation management plan is to help ensure a conservation ethic within the tourism industry.

This is vital because the impacts that result from poorly planned and/or badly managed tourism enterprises can end up diminishing the attraction value of an area.

Tourists are unlikely to return to a destination if there is poor waste management, noise pollution, and no 'sense of place' due to fenced in

or caged animals, the presence of non-indigenous wildlife, and unsightly buildings.

Poor veld management on a private farm or reserve and the unrestrained use of water and wood is environmentally irresponsible in an arid country like Namibia where land degradation, water shortages and deforestation are issues of major concern.

Ultimately, environmental degradation will erode the sustainability of the tourism industry.

Good practice demands a vision that aims to conserve the natural resources that uphold the tourism industry within the area where a campsite/lodge or hotel is located.

A well thought out conservation management plan that is properly implemented will help to achieve this vision.



The conservation plan must be carefully thought out: it must address real priorities

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## Drawing up a conservation management plan

Ideally the development and implementation of a conservation management plan should encourage the active participation of all stakeholders, including :

- all staff members of your establishment;
- local communities;
- neighbouring land owners or members of a conservancy (a conservancy is where a community/group of commercial farmers formally agree to manage wildlife collectively—they register the conservancy with MET);
- local authorities, and
- government officials (if the land adjoins a State protected area).

A conservation management plan should include:-

### **A Mission or Vision Statement.**

For example: *'The Vision of Olumbingi Lodge is to maintain the integrity of the natural habitats and wildlife populations of the Olumbingi Conservancy, whilst supporting the socio-economic development of local communities through sustainable low-impact, high quality tourism activities.'*

The **Goals and Strategies** needed to help you achieve your Vision. For example:

**Goal 1.** *To ensure that all staff members are kept informed about the ecological and cultural value of the Conservancy* by: holding regular staff education workshops; keeping an up to date library of informative literature for use by staff and tourists; etc.

**Goal 2.** *To minimise all forms of dangerous pollution by:-* Forbidding the use of polluting pesticides; using only biodegradable soaps and washing powders; establishing a proper waste management system whereby all solid waste is removed from the lodge and deposited in the nearest municipal dump site; etc.

A **Monitoring System** for priority issues e.g. rhino, predators, water use, etc.

An **adaptive management approach** – the establishment has the flexibility to change the way it goes about its business in order to achieve its stated objectives. If the original strategy does not produce desired results – improve it!

## What are alien species and why are they undesirable?

An alien plant or animal species is one that does not occur naturally in an area. These species are introduced, either wittingly or unwittingly, by man. In the absence of their natural predators, these introduced species can begin to spread at a very rapid rate. They spread in a number of ways—usually animals, birds, wind and water distribute their seeds.

When this happens the alien species is called an *alien invasive*. Invasive

species can threaten the survival of native species, cause habitat destruction and the genetic pollution of closely related indigenous species (e.g. domestic cats interbreed with wild cats).

Not all alien species are invasive but best practice demands that no alien species are introduced to a tourism establishment because, if nothing else, they will undermine the 'sense of place'. Tour-

ism staff must be informed about Namibia's 'Nasty Nine' alien invasive plants which include *Datura* sp, *Prosopis* sp, *Nicotiana* sp, and others (see appendix).

Under no circumstances must these plants be used in gardens. If they are already present in the area, then concerted efforts should be made to eradicate them.

## Creating awareness and contributing to conservation

The World Commission on Sustainable Development urges the tourism industry to provide tourists with valid information on ecological and cultural issues within the country of destination.

Staff at tourism facilities should be well informed so that they are able to answer pertinent questions regarding wildlife, the customs of the local people and the history of the area in an accurate and unbiased manner.

Several valuable field guides for bird, tree, grass, insect and game identification are available locally. These books, as well as any other relevant literature which may enhance a visitors experience in Namibia, should be made available to all staff and guests.

Display boards and posters can be used to inform visitors about the need for conservation and other important environmental issues.

Tourism enterprises should actively get involved with conservation programmes in their area. For example:

- sponsoring clean up campaigns (these are usually the removal of litter by children and volunteers—often as

part of a school activity);

- supporting organisations such as Save the Rhino Fund or the Cheetah Conservation Fund;
- helping to eradicate alien invasive plants from river beds, etc.

Water is Namibia's most limited resource. Tourists must be informed about the need to conserve water.

Keeping wild animals in cages is inhumane and should not be considered under any circumstances – even for the purposes of 'education'. A cage is defined as an unnaturally small enclosure where normal behaviour is impossible (e.g. natural food gathering).



*Tourism establishments must identify worthy conservation projects, and commit resources that will "make a difference". Supporting conservation must not be a public relations exercise—it must be a long term commitment.*

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