



Etosha National Park

Conservation Counts

- 22 935 km² – the size of the Etosha National Park
- 4 730 km² – the size of the Etosha Pan
- 114 – the number of small and large mammal species
- 340 – the number of resident and migratory bird species
- 3 551 – kilometres of road in the park
- 850 – kilometres of fence surrounding the park
- 86 – the number of waterholes (natural and man-made) in the park
- 200 000 – the number of visitors to the park annually
- 295 – the number of Ministry of Environment and Tourism staff in Etosha.

The human component – which is vital to the continued well-being of the Etosha National Park – is dedicated and knowledgeable. The fact that Etosha is a cohesive ecosystem which is well adapted to environmental fluctuations and extremes over hundreds of millions of years, helps tremendously.

Both humans and the environment are resilient, and in the Etosha National Park, thanks to many conservation initiatives, they are both successful.

Drilling for elephants?

In 1954, 26 elephants were counted in the park. Today this is the number of elephants you might see at Olifantsbad waterhole in a single afternoon. How did this happen?

Boreholes were drilled along the 19th latitude, principally to draw elephants into the park from farms in the Outjo and Kamanjab districts. By 1967, the elephant population was estimated at 500. Today there are more than 2 500 elephants resident in the Etosha National Park, and they are some of the most intensively studied elephants in the world.

Some of the earliest elephant studies in Etosha were designed to establish baseline information – the number of elephants, their home ranges, and their movements in and out of Etosha, especially when these moves brought them into contact with people living outside of the park. Two other studies have focused on communication.

Long-distance calling

Elephants communicate via infrasound, sound below our threshold of hearing. In Etosha it was discovered that certain atmospheric conditions allow elephants to send infrasonic sounds for greater distances. Under a veil called a 'thermal inversion', elephants bounce sound off the inversion, sending it more than a hundred kilometres further at certain times of day. At sunset and sunrise, the inversion is sometimes so clearly visible that you'll see a line in the sky. Elephants also receive audio clues of events such as distant thunderstorms, precipitating their movements to the north-east of the park as they await the coming rains.



Foot fetish

A second study focused on elephants' feet. Given their unique physiological make up, their feet may be able to detect sound waves from underground. Foot stomping, mock charges and low-frequency rumbling generate seismic waves in the ground, separate from what we hear, and these waves can travel up to 32 kilometres along the surface of the earth. By detecting and interpreting messages sent seismically, elephants have yet another way of gathering and sharing important information and one that is independent of the weather and time of day.

What goes around comes around

Another animal that was moved back into the park is the black-faced impala (*Aepyceros melampus petersi*). It isn't found anywhere else in the world, it numbers less than 4 000 in the wild, and almost half its population is found in Etosha. That wasn't always the case.

In the early 1970s, 200 black-faced impala were moved from the Kunene Region, where they were almost extinct, to Etosha. Thirty years later, the population of black-faced impala in Etosha is thriving, and at least 23 game farms have established small populations of black-faced impala. Moreover, in the early 1990s, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism was able to move black-faced impala from Etosha back to the Kunene.

Back from the brink

Within a relatively short period of time the Etosha National Park went from harbouring 48 black rhino to

becoming the single-most important custodian of the black rhino in the world. The rehabilitation of Etosha's black-rhino population was so successful that in 1993, two male and four female rhino were placed on 7 300 ha of private land under the newly conceived Rhino Custodianship programme. These six animals represented the first satellite population.

Today, there are over 260 black rhinos in the hands of 28 custodians, including both commercial farm owners and communal conservancies.

In 2007, for the first time, rhinos were returned from Etosha National Park to areas in the Kunene Region from which they had been removed in the 1970s in an attempt to help save the last remaining few.

The mystery number

This is the number of black rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) currently living in Etosha. It is well known that Etosha has the single-largest population of black rhinos in the world, but the actual count is kept secret so that this fact – and the population of rhinos it defines – is never threatened.

Last but not least

One incredible experience within a bundle of countless memories awaits each and every visitor to Etosha.

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Environmental Care Code

Kindly respect the fact that the Etosha National Park is a haven for wild animals; you are the visitor. Please adhere to the following while enjoying a memorable trip to this fascinating place:

- Stay on existing roads.
- Do not exceed speed limits.
- Do not get out of your vehicle unless you are at a rest camp or rest area.
- Do not harass or feed the animals.
- Do not litter.
- Follow the park rules and regulations as listed on your permit.

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