

DUMELA



Newsletter from Botswana Sweden Friendship Association No 3/2019

Dear BOTSFA members

It is getting darker and calder in Sweden and I decided to be in Botswana for a while to enjoy hot weather.

In August, KTM participated in the European Choir Games in Gothenburg and came at position 3 ranking in folklore music. We are proud! This was followed by the Zhizha/Letlhafula/Sköderfest event organised by Boma Cuisine in Älvsjö. Very nice food.



The 53rd Independence Anniversary celebration was held in Solna, with entertainment by musician Tomeletso Sereetsi and a fashion show led by Lesedi Matlapeng. Thank you Ambassador Chandapiwa Nteta for a great event!



Last but not least, I exercised my constitutional right by voting at the Embassy in Sweden and was happy to be in Botswana for the inauguration of the 5th President of the country, Dr Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi on November 1.

PULA!!

Nelly Kabomo-Hogård
BOTSFA
Chairperson



KTM Choir

Welcome to BOTSFA!

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THE HISTORY OF HUMANS AND ELEPHANTS IN BOTSWANA

– ANOTHER OPINION

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY Christina Skarpe



A family group of elephants at Chobe river. The big dark male has swum the river to join the group, and is black because he is wet.

Humankind has evolved in Africa and has from the very beginning impacted the environment, plants, animals, soils, even if the impact to start with was small.

Elephants and humans have lived together in Botswana for a long time, interacting in different ways, including hunting. The number of elephants that lived in Botswana before the Europeans came and before the Big Ivory Hunt is not known. That number of elephants, and the impact they and other creatures had on vegetation and other ecosystem components, can be described as the »pristine« situation in Botswana. Then it is a question whether the modern society wants to have this »pristine« situation, how it agrees with space requirements for agriculture and infrastructure, with tourism, economy, personal safety etc. Follow-up to the article published in Dumela 2/19 I am, below, giving an account of the history and ecology of elephants in Botswana and my own ideas of the directions and effects of elephant management.

It is loosely estimated that Botswana about the year 1800 had between 200 000 and 400 000 elephants (1), probably rather variable. During the Big Ivory Hunt in the 1800's these were reduced to a few remaining individuals. At about the same time, in 1896, the animal disease »rinderpest« came to Botswana, killing a large proportion of even-toed ungulates (e.g. buffalos, warthogs and antelopes) including domestic livestock. Botswana was then virtually without large herbivores. The result was that trees started to grow in areas that had up to then largely been open grass - and herb flats, as described from the Chobe region by early white hunters and adventurers (2). These areas were the nutrient-rich savannas occurring, among other places, close

to Chobe River and in Sidudu and other valleys on alluvial soils. The trees grew into proper woodlands, with large trees of *Acacia nigra* and species of *Combretum*. In many of the areas on sand there were other kinds of woodlands, the nutrient-poor savannas, with trees like *Baikiaea plurijuga* and *Pterocarpus angolensis*, at that time as now.

After the Big Ivory Hunt the local chiefs were first in trying to protect their elephants, forbidding the hunting of elephants and creating »no-hunting« areas. Later there came various rules to protect the few remaining elephants. After the rinderpest outbreak in 1905, the disease vanished from Botswana and the herbivore populations, both elephants and others, started to recover. In the 1960's, when Botswana gained independence, elephants may have numbered between 10 000 and 20 000 animals, and were already creating concern for the nutrient-rich woodlands, that people now remembered as the original vegetation. Elephants browsed from the trees, felling trees that they could fell, browsing and strip-barking the others. As old trees must die sooner or later, the real problem was the lack of regeneration. That was shown to depend mainly on browsing of the very young tree plants by small antelopes, particularly impala (3). These small antelopes might be capable of turning the nutrient-rich woodlands into open flats also without elephants, although at a slower rate. Once more the nutrient-rich areas were switching into open grass - herb - and shrub flats, as they had been before the Big Ivory Hunt and before the rinderpest. The nutrient-poor woodlands, on the sand, are not browsed by small antelopes, and even elephants do not, to any extent, browse or fell the large tree species, but eat some

of the small tree species and shrubs. (In the Chobe region, humans have, however, logged intensively in the nutrient-poor woodlands).

The growing together of the open flats by woodlands and then the opening up again, all with the changes in the elephant population, must have affected not only plants but also many animals. Grazing species such as wildebeest and zebra and also mixed feeders such as impala should be favoured, but some have later declined due to other reasons, and some browsing thicket species such as the Chobe bush-buck should suffer. Many other species of birds, reptiles, fishes, insects and plants should increase, decrease or not respond to heavy elephant impact, as to the cessation thereof.

Elephants are water-dependent and drink every day, often twice, and they need to drink at least every second (or third) day. Family groups are little mobile because of young calves, and do not move more than some 5–7 km from water, males perhaps double the distance. In this way diversity is created between areas with and without permanent water, areas that are heavily grazed and browsed, and areas that are not, or are mainly grazed in the rainy season. The provision of man-made, artificial water holes for wildlife can greatly extend the range of elephants and their dry season browsing, favouring organisms adapted for heavy elephant impact and disfavouring other species. As, thus, the variation between areas with heavy impact and areas with no or little impact ceases, the diversity is reduced. Increased water availability also causes an increase in elephant numbers with improved reproduction and good survival.

By constructing water for wildlife Botswana is increasing the number of elephants, instead of reducing it, as seems to be the desire! What does Botswana want regarding elephants? It is necessary for Government to define for the Botswana what the plans are and why and for what cost. A cheap solution, tried by the Tawana Land Board, is to try to co-exist and to avoid conflict, try to protect farmer's fields and keeping wildlife corridors open. With this solution, the money saved on not culling could instead be used to protect fields and for development and improvement of the households and villages. To in addition have some controlled tourist hunting targeting the males may create some income and will not much disturb the social system in elephants.

As elephants have not had a predator that could affect the population size (apart from humans), they have managed to control their own population. Densities have actually seemed to stabilize during the last decades, although results from different studies vary much. This suggests that culling will result in enhanced annual increase from increased reproduction and decreased mortality. Thus, if the desire is to reduce the population, a large number of animals, counted by the tens of thousands, depending on what numbers of elephants are desired, must be shot initially, and then the growth of that population must be culled each year. This will imply a high cost and require a complex infrastructure, even if the carcasses are left. To take care of the carcasses and process them would require an even more complex infrastructure, and what should they be used for?

Most Botswana do traditionally not eat elephant meat.

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Dumelang dear Botsfa members!

On October 23, elections were held in Botswana. These elections were very different to any we have had before. Main reason being that a former President broke ranks with the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and started an opposition party. As most of you probably know, the transition from President Khama to President Masisi, in April 2018, did not go as smooth as we have been used to. Soon after the hand-over, the relationship between the former President and the new President went sour. President Masisi started changing some of the policies introduced by his predecessor, and this did not seem to go well with Khama. A few months before the elections, former President Khama decided to leave BDP and established a new Party – the Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF). No clear agenda or manifesto has been declared more than that Masisi was to be taken down and BDP destroyed. The brother of Ian Khama, TK Khama, who was the Minister of Sports and Youth, resigned a few weeks before the elections to join BPF.

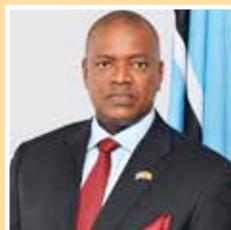
The main opposition, Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) that went to the polls this year was different to the UDC that challenged BDP in 2014. The Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD) was no longer part of the UDC and the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) had joined the coalition. Duma Boko was still UDC's Presidential candidate, with the BCP leader, Dumelang Saleshando, Vice President. Khama campaigned for BPF in Serowe urging the people to follow their Kgosi Kgosi and to abandon the BDP.

BDP won with 38 out of the 57 constituencies or parliamentary seats – adding one to the previous election results of 37 seats. UDC got 15 seats; AP 1 and BPF 3 seats – all in Serowe, the home of the Khama family.

All opposition party leaders, including Boko Duma, lost their constituencies. Out of the 15 seats that UDC won, only 4 were for Boko's party (BNF) and the rest (11) for BCP. Boko lost big and will most likely be replaced as the opposition leader. In the Gaborone region, BDP won all seats and it's the first time since the 80:s that BDP controls Gaborone. Serowe is now for the first time in the hands of an opposition party – a breakaway from the BDP.

What had not changed this time was the tradition of peaceful elections. No violence, no military patrol and no intimidation. We who live in Botswana cherish this more than anything else. Sweden's Ambassador to Pretoria, Cecilia Julin was here to visit polling stations during the day.

Congratulations to President Masisi!



*Kent Nilsson
Swedish Honorary Consul*

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As elephants are highly social and there are strong social ties in a family group, culling should take out whole family groups at the same time, in Botswana meaning about 10 animals, to avoid creating social unrest and, perhaps, aggressive elephants.

Culling of elephants will not bring the woodlands on nutrient-rich soil back, for that also the browsing antelopes, e.g. impala, must be culled. As these nutrient-rich areas are preferred habitats, both species must be culled to very low numbers, something like in the early 1900's. It is also questionable whether farmer's fields will be saved by a reduction in elephant numbers without other deterring measures, as they also are »preferred habitats«. Elephants are bringing in a considerable tourist income, mainly from the National

Parks in the northern part of the country, where livestock and agriculture is not as widespread as further south. An idea could be to allow elephants to develop freely in the northern part of the country, but allow culling, if judged desirable, in the southern part.

References:

- 1) Campbell, A.C. 1990. History of elephants in Botswana. In Hancock, P., Cantress, M. and Hughes, S. (eds) The future of Botswana's elephants. Kalahari Conservation Society Symposium, Gaborone, Botswana, pp 5-15.
- 2) Selous, F.C. 1881. A hunters wanderings in Africa. Richard Bentley & Son, London, UK.
- 3) Moe, S.R., Rutina, L.P., Hytteborn, H. & du Toit J.T. 2009. What controls woodland regeneration after elephants have killed the big trees? Journal of Applied Ecology 46: 223-230.

Glimpses from celebrations



1-4 Zhizha/Letlhafula/Skördefest organized by Boma Cuisine and held on August 24th at Älvsjökyrkan in Älvsjö.

5 Ambassador Chandapiwa Nteta delivering the Independence Anniversary Speech on September 26th at Frösunda Port in Solna.

6 Musician Tomeletso Sereetsi entertaining guests at the Independence Anniversary Celebration.



Pictures by Per Järtby

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