

Whose Elephants? Conserving, Compensating, and Competing in Northern Botswana

RACHEL DEMOTTS

Environmental Policy and Decision-Making Program, Department of
Politics and Government, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma,
Washington, USA

PARAKH HOON

Department of Political Science, Virginia Polytechnic and
State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

While conservationists and politicians applaud the recent growth of Botswana's elephant population, farmers and residents of northern Botswana struggle to live with elephants who destroy crops and threaten livelihoods. The state's response has been to implement a narrowly applied compensation policy that reinforces government control over wildlife while communities affected by so-called human–elephant conflict demand increased rights to deal with the problem themselves. In this way, elephants represent contested ground between the state and local communities that can only be fully understood by considering the experiences and views of those who live with them as well as the national policy context in which management decisions are made. This article focuses on the hidden costs of attempting to live with elephants, framing this struggle as contestation over ownership of elephants in a political context that is increasingly focused on generating tourism revenues and expanding conservation territories.

Keywords Botswana, conservation, elephants, human–wildlife conflict, rural livelihoods

Botswana's growing elephant population is a matter of urgent concern for conservationists and local communities, with the elephants having increased from 55,000 in 1990 to approximately 123,000 in 2002 (Republic of Botswana 2003), 133,829 in 2006 (Blanc et al. 2007), and 128,340 in 2010 (Chase 2011). More than 70% of the population is found outside of protected areas (Blanc et al. 2007), bringing elephants into contact with local residents and fueling conflicts over water, fodder, and space. This article juxtaposes the experience of living with elephants with the policies governing them by framing interaction between people and wildlife as an intensifying struggle over ownership. While the economic valuation of wildlife may seem beneficial for its survival, providing monetary compensation for loss and framing

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Address correspondence to Rachel DeMotts, Department of Politics and Government, University of Puget Sound, 1500 N. Warner Street, Tacoma, WA 98416-1052, USA. E-mail: rdemotts@pugetsound.edu

human–elephant interactions as conflict transforms wildlife into “problem animals” without recognizing the broader sociopolitical context. Human–elephant conflict (HEC) focuses narrowly on “costs and benefits,” reinforcing state control instead of fostering local ownership and commitment toward conservation.

To elucidate this tension, we use a political ecology approach that privileges “the environmental actions of local resource users, combined with an analysis of how these actions are linked to wider economic and sociopolitical conditions, and the historical changes involved” (Nygren and Rikoon 2008, 769; see also Blaikie 1995; Neumann 2005; Paulson et al. 2003; Robbins 2004). First, we discuss relevant literature on human–wildlife conflict (HWC), how political ecology can address the “cost–benefit” limitations of current work on HWC, and our methodological approach. We also consider current work on HEC in southern Africa. Second, we describe the place of compensation in Botswana’s conservation policy. Third, we examine human–elephant interaction on the eastern edge of the Okavango Delta’s panhandle to illustrate the experience of living with elephants and navigating the compensation process. We conclude by revisiting national contestation around ideas of ownership, identity, and benefits from conservation.

Human–Wildlife Conflict: Context for Costs and Benefits

Competition between people and wildlife for space and resources is not new, but continues to cause damage and losses on both sides (Dickman 2010; Ogra and Badola 2008; Treves et al. 2006). At the same time, conservation values proliferate and killing “problem animals” meets with disapproval (Breitenmoser 1998; Knight 2003; Ogra and Badola 2008; Treves and Naughton-Treves 2005; Treves et al. 2006). In this light, human behavior and “how to directly change it to solve wildlife conflicts” (Baruch-Mordo et al. 2009, 220) become the focus. Especially in the context of national parks, biodiversity wars “humanize wild animals and denigrate poachers, including impoverished peasants searching for small game or fish” (Neumann 2004, 813), prioritizing conservation of emblematic species over basic human needs and excising the act of local hunting from the complex motives that drive it. Despite the growing acknowledgment that “human–wildlife conflicts can also represent social conflicts” (Dickman 2010, 462), much literature on HWC is narrowly managerial, focusing on identifying problems, generating alternatives, and evaluating outcomes (Baruch-Mordo et al. 2009). These efforts have resulted in methodologies for measuring and assessing damages and “emphasized the direct causes, immediate impacts, and economic costs of HWC” (Ogra 2008, 1409). Focusing on the direct, immediate, and economic leads to assertions that local involvement in debate about HWC can be negative rather than positive (Treves and Karanth 2003), that people living with wildlife exaggerate the extent of problems and respond disproportionately (Dickman 2010), or even that using violence against poachers is an increasingly acceptable approach (Neumann 2004).

On the ground, emphasis on direct costs has also led to the implementation of compensation schemes for wildlife damage; for example, South Africa’s Kruger National Park pays funeral costs for individuals killed by wildlife, while the reintroduction of wolves in the western United States led some states to compensate cattle ranchers for losses. These programs, however, are problematic; they may cost more to administer than they provide in benefits, be hampered by corruption or inefficiency, prove difficult to access, or fail to provide replacement value when they

do “work” (Jackson et al. 2008; Ogra and Badola 2008; Wambugh 2007). Compensation also may not improve local opinions about wildlife (Hussain 2003; Naughton-Treves et al. 2003). What these pitfalls reflect is that HWC programs and analysis often remain socially acontextual and fail to consider multiple underlying factors that are crucial for generating effective solutions. Female-headed households are often disproportionately affected by HWC, not only because they lack economic means to mitigate wildlife damage through costly preventative strategies but also because they are disempowered and access to institutional assistance may be limited (Ogra 2008; Ogra and Badola 2008). Perceptions of personal risk and fear of wildlife may be more significant among some local groups than others (Kaltenborn et al. 2006), while farmers may make livelihood shifts such as moving fields or changing crops that if poorly understood can aggravate or ameliorate conflict (Okello 2005). Chasing away wildlife creates a strain on available labor, especially in poorer or smaller households (Graham and Ochieng 2008), and cultural identity may also influence varying perceptions of wildlife (Goldman et al. 2010; Naughton-Treves et al. 2003). Understanding such complexity is crucial for effective policy—yet it is a recent realization that compensation schemes must be understood in social context (Agarwala et al. 2010).

Placing HWC in sociopolitical context engenders, for political ecologists, construction of a fuller picture of “nature-as-experience” (Rikoon 2006, 201). Since Blaikie and Brookfield’s (1987) call to connect ecology and political economy, extensive work situating local ecologies in sociopolitical context has emerged (Blaikie 1995; Neumann 2005; Nygren and Rikoon 2008; Paulson et al. 2003; Rikoon 2006; Robbins 2004; Watts 2000; Zimmerer and Bassett 2003). Here, local resource use demands examination relative not only to patterns in “nature” (such as species reintroduction or drought), but also to the larger political context in which relationships to resources are shaped by political priorities. When HWC is situated in the broader landscape, responding to wildlife damage becomes “as much a conflict over institutions as over animals” (Anthony et al. 2010, 226; see also Laudati 2010), because “Human wildlife conflicts are often manifestations of underlying human–human conflicts, such as between authorities and local people, or between people of different cultural backgrounds” (Dickman 2010, 458). Consideration of context suggests that government-driven compensation is different from that offered by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), for example, because it raises questions about the effectiveness of institutions, local participation, and ownership of wildlife and land (Agarwala et al. 2010; Anthony et al. 2010; Laudati 2010; Rikoon 2006; Treves et al. 2006). In Botswana, for example, while the dynamics of a growing elephant population matter, it is also crucial to consider that tourism depends on wildlife located in an ethnically and politically marginalized region of the country.

Given this complexity, we argue that hidden costs and the articulation of state control—two key issues that are often invisible in discussions of HWC—can be better understood through a close examination of the Botswana case. First, following Ogra (2008), we seek to address one of two “large gaps” (Ogra 2008, 1409) in the HWC literature by more fully examining the hidden costs of HWC. Hidden costs are those that are “(a) uncompensated, (b) temporally delayed, or (c) psychological or social in nature” (Ogra 2008, 1409). These may include added demands for labor, disproportionate impacts on women, stress, and emotional strain. In Botswana, navigating the compensation process itself is also an expense due to poor accessibility and dissatisfying outcomes. Second, drawing on Laudati’s (2010) assertion that

efforts to protect gorillas in Uganda have circumscribed farmers' ability to control their own land, we expand on the ways in which "conservation planning has actually contributed to new layers of outside control to communities surrounding protected areas" (Laudati 2010, 777). In the Uganda case, farmers' ability to deal with HWC is limited on their own land by new policies that reduce access to their own fields and alter land use practices to protect gorillas at all costs (Laudati 2010). Botswana's compensation policy also reflects this extension of authority by reinforcing the state's ownership of elephants through a national discussion of their importance for economic development and a refusal to acknowledge the differential impact of the hidden costs of living with wildlife.

To examine compensation in context, we collected quantitative data from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) logbooks that record claims filed in 2007 and 2009; these were then aggregated and sorted by claim type to determine frequency of claims of elephant damage. Wildlife officials compile these logbooks by hand, and in some places information is missing, but they remain important because they inform policy, and because flaws in the data elucidate problems with the process itself—inefficiency, unresolved claims, and misinformation. We are not attempting to measure crop damage; rather, we focus on the compensation process and the experience of negotiating it. We also conducted 25 unstructured interviews and several dozen informal discussions during fieldwork in 2007, 2008, and 2009, and examined all individual comments made at village consultation meetings under the Okavango Delta Management Plan planning process (Bendsen 2005a, 2005b). These comments describe frustrations and problems encountered in dealing with wildlife and government institutions. We also reviewed secondary literature on HEC in southern Africa to elucidate current understandings of elephant behavior.

Human–Elephant Interactions as Human–Elephant Conflict (HEC)

Human–elephant conflict occurs "at almost every interface between elephant range and human settlement, even in areas with very few remaining elephants and regardless of the availability of formally protected refuges for the species" (Dublin and Hoare 2004, 272). HEC scholarship seeks to elucidate when, where, and why elephants venture into cultivated fields, and to identify mitigation strategies. Researchers have quantified crop damage and studied seasonal frequency (Dublin and Hoare 2004; Graham and Ochieng 2008; Hoare 1999; 2000; Jackson et al. 2008; Mosojane 2004; Naughton-Treves et al. 2000; Sitati et al. 2003). HEC may be a function of "opportunistic nutrition" (Hoare 1999; Naughton-Treves et al. 2000)—that is, the presence of better quality forage attracts elephants, and crops such as watermelons may motivate sweet-seeking behavior. Most crop damage takes place at night and when harvest approaches (Jackson et al. 2008; Mosojane 2004). Recent evidence shows that bull elephants have become bolder in venturing close to settlements and are more likely to enter fields than females (Jackson et al. 2008; Sitati et al. 2003).

Individual elephant ranges may also be larger than previously thought (Cushman et al. 2005; Van Aarde 2005). Seasonality, drought, and water availability are major factors in movement. But while we understand more about when elephants move, the ability to anticipate where remains elusive (Cushman et al. 2005; Jackson et al. 2008; Sitati et al. 2003). Mitigation strategies for HEC include both scientific approaches (such as birth control) and traditional means. "Repeat offenders" may

be shot as problem animals. Further mediation efforts can involve repellent sprays, alarm calls, translocation, and zoning (Hoare 2000). Farmers' mediation strategies include nighttime fires, noisemaking with cans or drums, and burning "chili bombs" made of dung and capsicum (Graham and Ochieng 2008). These efforts are time-consuming and labor-intensive; they can also be dangerous. One of the central questions of the HEC literature is whether damage is actually "as bad" as residents claim. Studies tend to find that it is not (Naughton-Treves et al. 2000; Dublin and Hoare 2004; Dickman 2010), while sometimes acknowledging that measuring damages may fail to indicate the importance of social factors such as risk perception or a lack of local voice in policymaking (Treves et al. 2006).

Compensating for Conservation in Northern Botswana

Botswana's Okavango Delta is more than 1000 km from the capital of Gaborone and equally distant in the minds of many urban Batswana. With a population of just under 2 million in an area roughly the size of Texas, Botswana's people are concentrated in the southeast while wildlife is plentiful further north. The north is, in many ways, marginal—far from the capital, with poorer infrastructure, and populated largely by minority ethnic groups. By some estimates, tourism accounts for more than 50% of employment in Ngamiland (Silitshena and McLeod 1998), although this is highly concentrated in Maun and often does not reach areas further into the Delta (Plantec Africa 2003).

Botswana has a strong conservationist impulse, but cattle temper parks' importance. Though diamonds provide more than 80% of export earnings, cattle have been a mainstay of Botswana's elites. Historically, the strong cattle constituency, including politicians, has tended to privilege cattle interests over wildlife (Neme 1995; Parson 1981). Consequently, Botswana has an extensive network of veterinary fences to prevent disease transmission. Conservationists criticize fences' impact on wildlife migration, but have not succeeded in preventing their construction.

Compensation originated under British administration, allowing landowners or occupiers to destroy damage-causing animals. Resulting trophies were the property of the colonial administration (or on tribal land, customary authorities), which gave farmers monetary compensation. In post-independence Botswana this policy was retained under the Fauna Conservation Act, but amended in 1979 to allow farmers to kill wildlife without damage occurring if wildlife threatened livestock, crops, water installations, or fences. As compensation, farmers could keep or sell the skin and meat. According to wildlife officials, this provision led to abuses—killing wildlife without cause, or targeting lucrative trophy animals rather than those actually causing damage (Neme 1995). Allowing trophies as compensation reflected livestock's greater value. When these loopholes became apparent and wildlife trophy values outpaced livestock, monetary compensation (first managed by agricultural officers rather than DWNP) was introduced. These policy shifts indicate wildlife's growing importance for tourism, but they also reflect a narrow, incentive-based understanding of human-wildlife interaction.

The Biggest Pest of All? Living With Elephants

Elephants here cause serious problems. But the people in other parts of this country are not aware of how these animals make life difficult for

us. I suggest that 1000 elephants should be translocated to the following villages: Mochudi, Serowe, Molepolole and Kanye. The general public is not aware how severe the elephant conflict is.—Resident of Seronga. (Bendsen 2005a)

Elephants should be relocated to other elephant-free areas such as Gaborone so that people who make the laws can experience what damage they cause. These animals used to be distributed over many countries but are concentrated in Botswana now.—Resident of Mogotho (Bendsen 2005a)

These comments show that living with elephants means fear, risk, and frustration with outsiders. In the panhandle of the Delta where these villages are located, people and cattle compete with increasing wildlife for grazing, water, and safety, even as this area receives only limited economic benefits from tourism. As the elephant population in northern Botswana has nearly tripled in the past 20 years, concerns about the damage they cause have also multiplied. Despite the elephant population's recovery, the first sentence of Botswana's national elephant management policy frames elephants in an imperiled context: "Africa's remaining elephants are considered, at a continental level, to be under threat" (Republic of Botswana 2003, 3). In Botswana, "threats" to elephants are not due to decline, but rather to increasing competition with people.

Risk to Property, Fear of Loss

Elephants are causing a lot of damage to fields and even to water tanks and borehole equipment. Elephants are also breaking the border fences. Government should increase its efforts to deal with this problem.—Resident of Ngarange (Bendsen 2005a)

Residents of the Delta clearly assert that problems with elephants are increasing.¹ "There are too many elephants in our area. Numbers have drastically increased. They cause a lot of damage to field fences and crops and even kill human beings" (Bendsen 2005a). In concert with scientific studies, local residents assert that it is usually bull elephants entering fields. A resident of Gudigwa, a remote Basarwa/San village, noted, "The mitigation measure suggested by the DWNP to hang tins up on strings around our fields did not help. We are afraid of male elephants. They cause most of the damage. The male elephants are not scared of the tins but female elephants can be scared away by this measure" (Bendsen 2005a). Local residents argue that bulls have lost their fear of people: "In the olden days elephants were scared of people as they experienced that they get shot when they come too close to human settlements. You cannot guard your property against elephants" (Bendsen 2005a). DWNP suggests that people not cultivate in high elephant traffic areas, and some residents have voluntarily stopped planting because of losses. Others are torn: "When we cultivate we lose our crops. If we do not cultivate we are told that we are lazy" (Bendsen 2005a).

While crop loss is the most frequently cited example of elephant damage, elephants sometimes damage boreholes. Put simply by a resident of Beetsa, "When open water sources are diminishing, people and elephants are congested in the same

areas” (Bendsen 2005a). While it is assumed that many elephants move north away from the river during the wet season to access waterholes, recent evidence shows that bull behavior is not affected by season and it is primarily females who move away from the panhandle (Mosojane 2004).

Botswana’s elephant management policy states that “Between 1997 and 2002 there were on average 150 reported cases per year of human–elephant conflicts” (Republic of Botswana 2003, 7). Interestingly, the government’s policy adds that the most incidents are reported in the Central District, not Ngamiland or Chobe, and that “the high to medium density elephant areas are producing relatively few reports” (Republic of Botswana 2003, 4). These studies imply that elephant damage is not as frequent or severe as local complaints indicate; there is, however, no accounting for the strain of waiting for devastation. The cost of bearing the possibility of losing one’s life or livelihood has weight—clearly more than is taken into consideration in national discussions about wildlife. But as the next section illustrates, compensation becomes a distant gesture of paternalistic caretaking, where urban Batswana and politicians are removed from the daily realities of interacting with wildlife. Claiming compensation symbolically reinforces state ownership of elephants, rather than local capacity to address costs of living with them.

The Process of Reporting and Claiming Compensation

I think the word compensation is not correctly interpreted in Setswana by DWNP. This may be the reason for complaints that the amount of compensation is not enough. Compensation means replacement of the losses people had. Also the cost of transport to report the damage should be compensated for.—Resident of Seronga (Bendsen 2005a)

Despite the goal of proactive natural resource management (Republic of Botswana 2003), compensation is by nature reactive. While other parts of the policy discuss prevention, including mitigation strategies, local perception remains that DWNP is unhelpful (Bendsen 2005a; 2005b).² When damage occurs, individuals can apply for compensation. Individuals must travel to Seronga (the largest village on the eastern side of the panhandle) to file a report within 7 days of when the damage occurs. Officials then must visit the site to verify damage.

Elephant damage dominates the compensation process; of 1,061 claims filed in Seronga between April of 2005 and 5 July 2007, 595 referred to elephants.³ DWNP logbooks show that most claims were resolved within 3 months (614 out of 669). But this means that the remaining 55 claims were either not resolved, or that their resolution was not recorded. Either way, this reflects a problem with the process, and complains about not being paid remain. Approximately 3 months after filing a claim in 2008, one woman in Takai commented, “I have not been compensated. When we made a report they [DWNP] did come and they said they would pay, but they haven’t yet.” Inefficiency is further compounded by difficult logistics. With DWNP officials not arriving to evaluate loss when expected and poor local transportation, it also takes too long to receive compensation once a claim is verified—and the money is not enough (Bendsen 2005a; 2005b). Simply put by a woman in Seronga, “We report sometimes only now, because we are tired of reporting, sometimes they take so long.” A male farmer in Takai added, “I filed no reports the last two years—my

crops got eaten but I don't go to report because I don't see the point of going and they take so long to come here."

These practical difficulties create distrust of the process, but they also feed government suspicion of exaggeration. Wildlife officials comment that local residents exaggerate; at the same time, local residents' frustrations become criticisms of the compensation policy itself. This includes mistakes and false information; a resident of Gunotsoga stated, "I reported a case of crop damage. When I checked on the issue later, the DWNP pretended to never have received the claim" (Bendsen 2005a). Frustrations amplify when incorrect information is received: "Some elephants entered my field and my wife reported the case to the DWNP office. I was shocked when we were told that no assessment will be made until the elephants have destroyed the whole field" (Bendsen 2005a). This is untrue as a statement of policy; DWNP regularly compensates for partial loss. But timing also matters; a male farmer in Takai stated, "We go to the Wildlife Department to report but they wait until after harvesting to come and see what has been destroyed."

The remaining important element of experiencing the compensation process is found in recording the incidents. In addition to the individual's name, residence, ID number, dates, wildlife, and damage, a brief personal account of the incident is written. Some individuals are able to write their own accounts, but many are illiterate, and the style in which wildlife officials write reflects a standard format for experiencing damage. Stories take the same shape—using the same framing, the same words, and describing the same events: "that I of the above mentioned particulars, do remember well that it was on [date] when I [woke up and went to my field]." Next, "I discovered that elephants entered into my field and destroyed my crops such as millet, maize, sorghum, and beans." Most then "saw spoors" and "went home," and shortly after, "left to Seronga wildlife office to report the incident." Statements are often then signed with a shaky printed name, or a fingerprint as verification.

Here, even the process of reporting creates a disjuncture between actual costs—what is experienced, lost, as well as the time, effort, and expense involved in making a claim—and what the compensation policy counts as costs. The standardized form homogenizes the experience of devastation and events are sanitized of personal aspects regarding what has occurred. This standardizing focuses only on a quantifiable loss, further excising a cost-benefit calculation from its social context by refusing to engage with complexity—for example, the amount of labor spent staying up all night for weeks on end tending fires and beating drums in a field to keep elephants out. It also refuses to recognize that what happens to one person is not necessarily the same as another—the single mother who loses her entire crop in one night, for example, versus a local headman in a stronger position who loses a goat. Stories told in person about encountering elephants are rarely dispassionate, but instead full of emotion and a sense of disempowerment. Experience is lost in the translation of the claims process, raising difficult questions about who decides what constitutes exaggeration rather than exposing the roots of the struggles that local residents face in dealing with elephants. These practices—efforts at cataloging and documenting everyday practices—can be viewed as everyday forms of state making or state simplification (Agrawal 2005; Scott 1998). Standardizing social reality makes state control possible; this may not be inherently pernicious but it clearly discounts the complexity of local experiences.

How Bad is Bad? Assessing and Valuing Damage

I also can testify that when damage to my crops was reported to the DWNP office, my wife was told to leave the elephants to continue the destruction.—Resident of Sekondomboro (Bendsen 2005a)

Once a claim is filed in Seronga, DWNP officials assess damage by hectares lost, livestock killed, and/or fencing broken. Tables 1 and 2 shows the number of claims filed for compensation for elephant damage. Table 1 shows that crop damage is by far the most frequent complaint, and that claims of all kinds have increased over time (varying seasonally). Table 2 shows that March and April tend to have the most complaints about elephants, but this can extend to February and May. The wet season is November–March, so conflict appears to intensify at its end, intersecting with harvest season. This timing also points to the importance of recurring drought for understanding when damage occurs. From 1999 to 2009—with variation in between—the number of annual reports made increased substantially from 32 in 1999 to 415 in 2009. What is perhaps most dramatic, however, is the jump in the number of reports from 87 in 2006 to 415 in 2007, which is consistent with DWNP officials’ perceived increase in early 2007. The DWNP attributed this to a lack of rain, increasing the number of elephants coming to the river.

At the same time, the compensation data are clearly not a comprehensive scientific measure of all damage that is taking place. While these numbers show a general tendency to increase—certainly overall since 1999—there is also a great deal that is left out. Part of what is missing is the ability to tell with more precision exactly where incidents are most frequent (location is given by name of nearest village, and/or the individual’s post box—often far from fields and cattle posts). DWNP has started to take global positioning system (GPS) points at the incident’s exact location. But without more systematic data collection, it is impossible for DWNP to discern more precise patterns. It also cannot be determined whether the same elephants—especially bulls—cause repeated damage. These data reflect only those incidents that are actually reported to DWNP; some of the difficulties in filing a claim or a belief that it is not worth the effort are almost certainly depressing numbers of incidents reported. So this dramatic increase in complaints indicates a number of factors to consider. Obviously, the intersection of drought with harvest season can be particularly dangerous. But the increase may also represent increasing local efforts to

Table 1. Annual reports of elephant damage, 1999–2003: Seronga Subdistrict, Ngamiland

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Crop damage	31	87	102	87	78
Fence damage	1	9	0	10	16
Borehole damage	0	0	0	1	2
Total annual incidents	32	96	102	98	96

Note. All tables with compensation data aggregated from DWNP Problem Animal Control log books kept in Seronga office. Data collected July 2007. Month-by-month data for 1999–2002 not available.

Table 2. Month-by-month reports of elephant damage, 2003 to mid-2009, Seronga Subdistrict, Ngamiland

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
January	n/a*	1	4	5	28	2	20
February	4	3	0	7	139	10	54
March	31	33	56	16	86	38	72
April	15	20	34	17	69	44	76
May	17	5	11	19	14	93	7
June	6	2	28	14	9	44	16
July	3	n/a	8	3	26**	30	***
August	3	2	2	1	24	24	
September	5	n/a	7	2	0	2	
October	0	5	5	1	18	6	
November	3	n/a	4	0	1	2	
December	1	1	0	2	1	2	
Annual total (number of months included)	88 (11)	72 (9)	159 (12)	87 (12)	415 (12)	297 (12)	245 (6)

Note. n/a, Not available (missing) in data examined in early July 2007 in Seronga.

*Based on annual aggregate data, it appears likely that there were eight incidents in January, but because this individual monthly report was unavailable, we have not included it in this chart.

**Data from 6 July 2007–June 2009 collected in Seronga in July of 2009, but only monthly aggregates were available. Consequently, the previous analysis of average time required to resolve a claim focuses on this time frame, because the detailed claim information for late July 2007–June 2009 was unavailable.

***Data from July 2009 onward not available because second round of fieldwork was conducted in July 2009.

access the compensation process, frustrations or no, as damage becomes more frequent and extensive; the most likely explanation is that as damage increases, so do complaints about it.

The policy has recently changed to allow for assessment that is more reflective of losses. In the past, damage was paid per hectare without attention to the type of crop. In April 2009 DWNP implemented new guidelines for calculating damage, differentiating between horticultural crops, commercial arable, and subsistence, covering 50% of what was lost. Compensation now bears a more direct relationship to actual losses, but the 50% coverage is still likely to incur criticism from local residents.

The compensation reports represent an important source of data about interaction between people and wildlife. What is missing from the numbers, however, is a clearer sense of which groups are most affected by losses. While logbooks do not record gender, local residents state that it is usually women who report elephant damage and men who report livestock losses. This compounds the seriousness of crop loss and the difficulty of dealing with elephants. Female-headed households may have less diversified means of income, and women with children to care for may be less able to travel to file a report or defend their fields from elephants by staying out to tend nighttime fires.⁴ These local struggles are left out of national discussions about wildlife. But it is in these broader debates about natural resources that centralized control and ownership become visible.

From Diamonds to Elephants?

With a national economy driven by natural resources, Botswana's political debates about diamonds and wildlife have recently shifted. Subsequent generations of post-independence Botswana politicians (especially of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party) have articulated the view that diamond wealth should be used to benefit the entire country. In mid 2007, then-President Festus Mogae spoke clearly about the relationship between natural resources and national unity:

In Botswana collective ownership of our natural resources is fundamental to our development strategy. . . . The sharing of the benefits accruing from natural resources strengthens national unity and cohesion and moves the entire Nation forward in the development continuum. . . . In fact, all natural resources are shared. . . . Government is the custodian of our wildlife resources. This ensures that all our citizens have a common stake and enjoy unqualified benefits from our natural resources. . . . When we have issues with the international community about the sale of ivory, it is a matter for the entire nation and not just for those where elephants are found.⁵

This issue was taken up in the national media, where it became the “doctrine of collective ownership” (Ntuane 2007a). Referring to the ongoing parliamentary debate on a decade-long experiment with decentralized natural resource management, one of the local members of parliament (MPs) targeted community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) as a threat to national cohesiveness:

Any legislation that promotes separate ownership of natural resources only serves to sow the seeds of national discord. Any semblance of separate ownership and preferential treatment, no matter how well meant is injurious and engenders a sense of injustice. Agitators who resent having to share resources on equal terms with everyone will be provided with enough reason to preach the gospel of resource chauvinism.⁶

This discussion was prompted in part by the perceived failures of CBNRM, which allowed communities to establish trusts through which they could partner with private safari operators (Hoon 2004; DeMotts et al. 2009; Swatuk 2005; Thakadu 2005). Consequently, Ntuane's (2007b) “agitators” are northern, minority ethnic groups living with wildlife but seen to be abusing tourism benefits by withholding Gaborone's rightful share.

This shift also represents the capture of wildlife in a larger state project around constructing what it means to be a citizen of Botswana. Arguing that all Botswana should share the wealth of natural resources reinforces ethnically neutral notions of citizenship. The state expects the assertion of primary identity to be that of a *Motswana*, and not of an ethnic group. Claiming that those who bear the costs of living with wildlife should benefit more from it than those who do not, then, challenges this position.

CBNRM projects in the Delta provided a mechanism not only to benefit from wildlife but also for making claims based on ethnic identities—for example, when several Basarwa/San groups in Xai Xai, Mababe, and Sankuyu attempted to define membership in community trusts based on ethnicity. DWNP refused to accept this

ethnic basis and instead emphasized shared interests and geographic proximity of different communities. From the community perspective, participation in CBNRM allows the exercise of collective rights and benefit from wildlife. But the state interprets local claims about CBNRM and living with wildlife as a resurgence of identity politics that challenges ethnically neutral citizenship. In response, 2007 CBNRM policy legislation (yet to be implemented) states that 65% of all revenue generated by local CBNRM projects must be turned over to the state rather than kept in communities, reasserting state ownership of benefits.

Concluding Thoughts: “Elephants are DWNP’s Cattle”⁷

Botswana’s compensation scheme represents a token from the state in return for sharing space with wildlife. It reminds residents of the Delta that they do not own elephants—which are the property of the state. The language of compensation masks loss, but not without notice: “The Government tells us that the elephants belong to us but we do not get any income from them” (Bendsen 2005a). This shift in rights and benefits is accompanied by an inability to use some traditional methods of dealing with wildlife: “We used to kill and eat elephants to keep their numbers at an acceptable level” (Bendsen 2005a). The loss of control, then, is of both practical and symbolic consequence.

Even as reports of elephant damage increase in the panhandle in recent years, quantifying elephant damage often leads scholars and conservationists to the conclusion that the losses are not “as bad” as people say, and that local residents exaggerate the seriousness of the problem. But there are two fundamental problems with this interpretation. First, there is a certain detachment in external assessments used to argue about what is bad enough to merit compensation. Botswana’s national debate largely ignores the very real consequences of living with wildlife on the ground. Equating diamonds with elephants functions as a national justification for benefit sharing, as diamond revenues have “developed” Botswana. Elephants thus become another tool for accomplishing the state’s goals. This narrative reinforces the marginality of communities living with wildlife, and may also reify potential fault lines between ethnic groups in single villages (DeMotts et al. 2009).

Second, in measuring what is “bad,” there is no consideration of what it is like to live with the anxiety and pressure of *possible* wildlife damage. There is no consideration of fear of total destruction of a year’s harvest, or labor exerted preventing loss through nights tending fires and making noise. While gesturing toward local costs, compensation reasserts state control and ownership, masking inequalities in the name of a greater national good that hides costs of living with wildlife. Rural communities and elephants thus become central but marginalize protagonists in debates over conservation and development in Botswana—as national discussions of nature and identity assert that benefits must be shared while costs are not, rather than constructing inclusive space for understanding localized costs of elephants and how to more fully mitigate them.

Notes

1. Public consultations (Bendsen 2005a; 2005b) reflect this, as have personal communications with panhandle residents during fieldwork over the last 4 years and discussions in a European Union (EU)-funded CROSCOG (Cross-Sectoral Commons Governance in

- Southern Africa) workshop conducted by DeMotts with board members of the Okavango Community Trust, Seronga, 2 July 2008.
2. Also, discussion with Okavango Community Trust (OCT) board members, CROSCOG workshop, Seronga, 2 July 2008.
 3. All data referring to claims come from our analysis of DWNP Problem Animal Logbooks, 1999–2009.
 4. While our data are not able to support this assertion because of lack of gender specificity, this concern was articulated by several prominent conservationists in Botswana as well as acknowledged by several DWNP officials. It is also borne out in other research (for example, Ogra 2008) that women often bear a heavier burden in dealing with HEC as well as in accessing compensation. We make this point because it merits further research and is a subject of concern.
 5. Address by His Excellency, Mr. Festus G. Mogae, President of the Republic of Botswana, at the University of Botswana graduation, 4 September 2007, Gaborone.
 6. Ntuane, *Mmegi/The Reporter*, Gaborone, 24 September 2007.
 7. Comment made by female resident of Seronga during interview.

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