

Living with wildlife –  
the story of **King Nehale Conservancy**



King Nehale – after the late Nehale Iya Mpingana, King of the Ondonga Traditional Authority



## Living with wildlife – the story of KING NEHALE CONSERVANCY

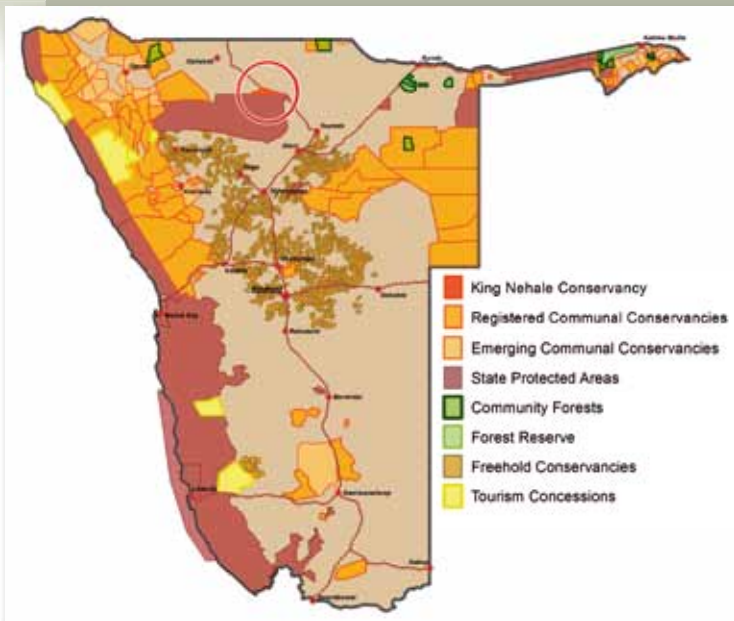
Conservancies  
enable conservation and development over large areas...

### MILESTONES AND SUCCESSES

- 1996** – policy changes allow communal area residents to benefit from wildlife and tourism by forming conservancies
- 1998** – the King Nehale community begins the process to register as a conservancy
- 1998** – construction of the road from Etosha National Park to Okashana begins
- 2002** – Tulongeni Crafts is established
- 2003** – the Nehale Iya Mpingana Gate (also known as the King Nehale Gate) between Etosha National Park and King Nehale Conservancy is officially opened to the public
- 2003** – implementation of the Event Book monitoring system in King Nehale Conservancy
- 2005** – King Nehale Conservancy is registered in September and is officially inaugurated by Honourable Willem Konjore, Minister of Environment & Tourism
- 2010** – implementation of an annual game count in King Nehale Conservancy

### QUICK FACTS

**Region:** Oshikoto  
**Size:** 508 square kilometres  
**Approximate population:** 20,000  
**Main language:** Oshiwambo  
**Date of registration:** September 2005



### A CONSERVANCY IS...

- a legally registered area with clearly defined borders and a constituted management body run by the community for the development of residents and the sustainable use of wildlife and tourism
- managed by a group elected to serve the interests of all its members
- a place where residents can add income from wildlife and tourism to traditional farming activities
- a place where wildlife populations increase as they are managed for productive gain
- a place where the value of the natural resources increases, enhancing the value of the land
- a forum through which services and developments can be channelled and integrated
- zoned for multiple uses to minimise conflict and maximise the interests of all stakeholders

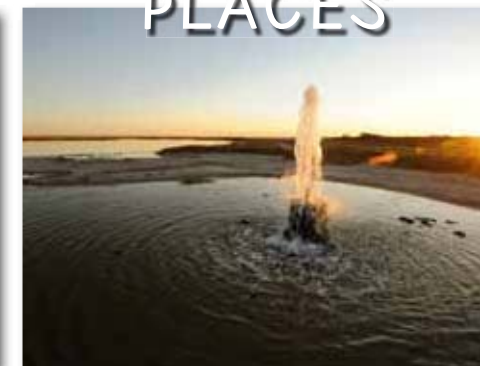
## KING NEHALE offers an enchanting mix of

### PEOPLE



*interesting cultures and dynamic communities committed to sustainability - people living in King Nehale share a common vision for managing their area and its resources*

### PLACES



*vast, diverse and spectacular landscapes – Andoni Plains, artesian springs, woodlands... a healthy environment diversifies economic opportunities and drives economic growth*

### & WILDLIFE



*charismatic, free-roaming wildlife – antelope grazing amongst cattle, abundant birdlife attracted by diverse habitats... wildlife generates a variety of benefits for local people*

*people are living with wildlife, are managing natural resources wisely and are reaping the benefits...*

### A LITTLE HISTORY

Prior to Namibia's independence in 1990, communal area residents had few rights to use wildlife. Wild animals were often seen as little more than a threat to crops, livestock and infrastructure, as well as community safety. Ground-breaking legislation passed in the mid-nineties laid the foundation for a new approach to the sustainable use of natural resources. By forming a conservancy, people in communal areas can now actively manage – and generate benefits from – wildlife and other resources in their area, encouraging wildlife recoveries and environmental restoration. While a conservancy is a natural resource management structure, it is defined by social ties. Conservancies unite groups of people with the common goal of managing their resources. Today, over 60 communal conservancies embrace one in four rural Namibians, underlining a national commitment to both rural development and conservation.

At just over 500 square kilometres, **King Nehale** is a relatively small conservancy, yet one with a large population of around 20,000 residents.

Most people in the conservancy speak Oshiwambo. Eight main Owambo traditional authorities or kingdoms are widely recognised and the residents of King Nehale Conservancy live within the Ondonga Kingdom. The conservancy is named after the late King Nehale Iya Mpingana, signifying the importance of the traditional leadership. Historically, the Owambo first settled in northern Namibia around 500 years ago, attracted by the resources of the Cuvelai drainage. Before the proclamation of the Etosha Game Reserve by the German colonial administration in 1907, Owambo people utilised the rich wildlife, grazing and water resources of the vast Etosha area. The battle of Namutoni in 1904 was a key event in the early struggle against colonialism and the historic Namutoni fort is now integrated into the tourism camp of the same name within the national park. Today, Etosha is Namibia's primary tourism attraction and the King Nehale Conservancy is well placed to channel natural resource benefits, including those from tourism, to the residents of the conservancy.







## RESOURCES AND ATTRACTIONS

Conservancies  
are living landscapes...

The **culture** of the Owambo kingdoms is rich in heritage and Ondonga is the largest of the kingdoms. Today, the vibrant mix of modern lifestyles and traditions makes this one of the most interesting areas of Namibia. Traditional homesteads built of wood and thatch nestle in fields of mahangu, stately indigenous fruit trees cast their cooling shade, long-horned cattle graze amongst wildlife, while bustling markets, colourful cuca shops and other small businesses signify a diverse economy. The region has a dynamic and unique atmosphere, and aspects of the culture have been embraced by the national mainstream, such as the traditional Oshitaka and Oshikandela dairy drinks that are available in supermarkets countrywide.



*traditional homesteads surrounded by mahangu fields, wildlife grazing peacefully amongst herds of long-horned cattle, vast grasslands and crowded, bustling urban life — the area is characterised by contrast and diversity*

The **environment** of the King Nehale Conservancy is shaped by the dynamics of the Cuvelai Basin, also referred to as the Owambo Basin. The conservancy lies on the eastern fringes of this basin, a landlocked depression into which rainwater from southern Angola drains along broad, shallow waterways called Oshanas, which culminate in the Omadhiya Lakes and Etosha Pan. The area is characterised by very flat topography and generally sandy or clayey soils, deposited over millions of years from the higher ground surrounding the basin. The eastern part of the basin is dominated by deep Kalahari sands and the King Nehale conservancy lies on the south-western edge of this deposit.

The conservancy is around 1,100 metres above sea level. Rainfall is higher than in western and southern Namibia, but still relatively low and unpredictable, with an annual average of around 450 millimetres. The low and variable rainfall, high evaporation and relatively poor, sandy and often saline soils make agriculture difficult. The moderate temperatures vary between lows of five degrees Celsius in winter and highs of up to 35 degrees in summer.

Artesian wells are a prominent feature of King Nehale and are an important resource. The shallow groundwater is often brackish although there are deeper freshwater reserves.



*the dynamic and vibrant mix of traditions and modern lifestyles creates a colourful and lively atmosphere in the conservancy and throughout the region*

The high human population and resultant pressures on resources have reduced **wildlife** diversity and numbers north of Etosha, while the park's boundary fence restricts wildlife movement. Yet springbok are ever present on the Andoni plains and blue wildebeest are common. Elephant occur in small numbers, but often come into conflict with people. Giraffe, kudu and gemsbok are less common. Predators include spotted hyenas, occasional nomadic lions out of Etosha and the ubiquitous jackal. The

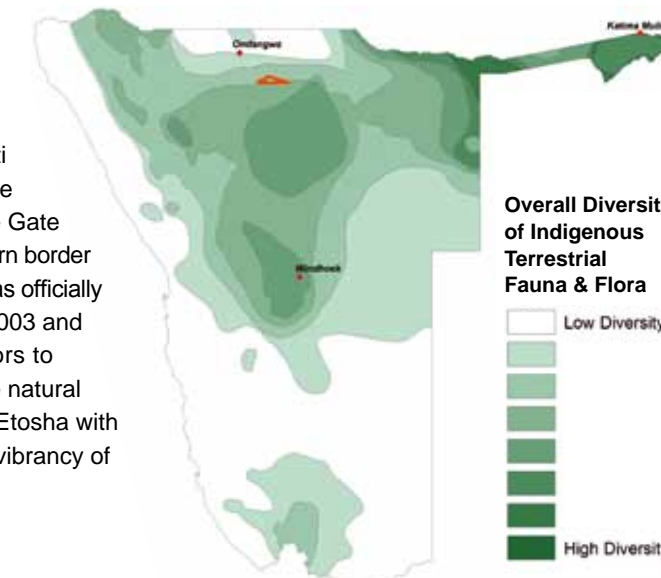


woodland, grassland and wetland habitats of King Nehale are home to a diversity of birds. Large numbers of wetland birds congregate around the seasonal pans. Abundant species include Abdim's stork, cattle egret and red-billed teal. The grasslands and wetlands also provide ideal habitat for the rare blue crane.

The Andoni grasslands fringing the northern edges of the Etosha Pan dominate a large part of the conservancy and provide important grazing for wildlife and livestock. The grassland fringes are lined by acacia thickets, while higher ground supports woodland and scrubland, generally dominated by terminalia species but also including camel thorn and other acacias. These areas are also used extensively for small scale crop production and settlement, with the result that much woodland has been thinned or cleared.

**Around King Nehale...** the conservancy is wedged along the northern border of Namibia's renowned wildlife spectacle, Etosha. To the north, the conservancy is surrounded by the pulsating life of the communal areas

of the Oshikoto, Oshana, Oshangwena and Omusati Regions. The King Nehale Gate in the northern border of Etosha was officially opened in 2003 and allows visitors to combine the natural wonders of Etosha with the cultural vibrancy of Owambo.







## LIVELIHOODS AND DEVELOPMENT

### Conservancies empower rural people...

Oshiwambo is the largest Namibian language group and the four regions north of Etosha embrace the most densely populated area of Namibia, with close to half the national population living here. Although farming is central to their culture, the Owambo have a long tradition as traders and entrepreneurs. Local barter rapidly developed into active regional trade during the second half of the 19th century, including large quantities of ivory transported from the Ondonga Kingdom to Walvis Bay.

Development of this part of the country was sorely neglected during colonial times. What was then known as 'Owamboland' fell outside the so called police zone during German rule and was largely

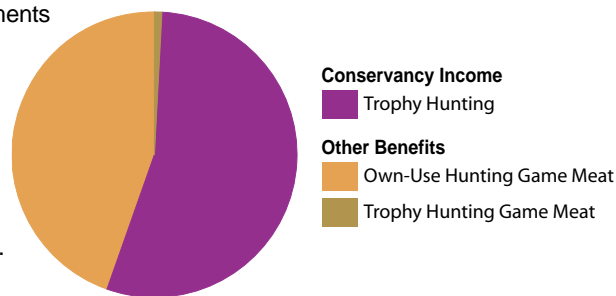


*King Nehale facilitates access to diverse training and capacity building, empowers individuals, especially women, to actively take part in decision-making, as well as instilling a renewed sense of pride in cultural heritage*

ignored, a trend that continued during the South African administration of Namibia. The labour potential of the area was first tapped during the 19th century to supply Angolan plantations with workers. The use of migrant labour to mines and other industries in Namibia began in the early 1900s and became large scale from the 1960s onwards. The trend of leaving the region for employment in Windhoek and other parts of Namibia continues today, though of course voluntarily and under much better conditions. Periodic famines that feature prominently in the history of the area necessitated a tradition of long term food storage and investment into resources that were available during bad times, a tradition that still influences the economy of the area. Since independence, a great deal of development has taken place, with significant improvements in most aspects of infrastructure.

Most residents of King Nehale have good access to government facilities and services. A network of schools puts most households within direct reach of primary and secondary education. The northern campus of the University of Namibia at Ongwediva, 120 kilometres west of the conservancy, opens access to tertiary education. Historically,

hand-dug wells supplied water to households, and wells are still common in the area. The bulk of water supplies is now channelled from the Kunene River as far as King Nehale via a pipeline network. Hospitals in Ondangwa and Tsumeb, and clinics in Omuthiya and other settlements make health facilities accessible to most residents of the conservancy.

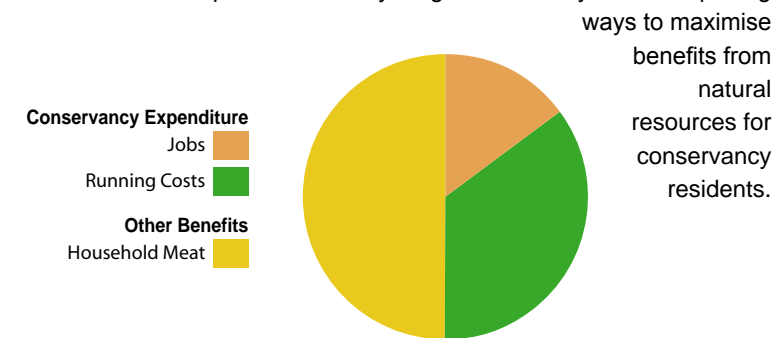


*Benefits to the conservancy and its members come from a variety of sources. Sources and amounts vary from year to year, depending on factors such as agreements with private sector partners, and market fluctuations. The pie chart shows the main benefit sources in 2010.*



*the conservancy can enable a range of new livelihood options for its residents, including tourism, hunting, indigenous plant products, craft production, and other sales and services based on the sustainable use of natural resources*

The diverse mixture of livelihoods in King Nehale retains a strong agricultural grounding. Stock herding and crop production, as well as the use of indigenous plants, are central components of many livelihoods. The historic trading culture has been channelled into a large variety of informal and formal trade and production, and a great number of small shops throughout Owambo. Many modern households receive income from businesses, employment in government service, remittances and pensions. The young conservancy is still exploring



*The conservancy spends money and provides community and individual benefits in various areas. Areas and amounts vary from year to year, depending on factors such as conservancy income and priorities. The pie chart shows the main expenditure and benefit areas in 2010.*

A variety of tourism development options are being investigated and have the potential to provide a range of benefits, including employment, cash income to cover conservancy running costs and the opening up of markets for crafts and other products and services. Crafts can become an important source of income, especially for women, who weave wonderful traditional baskets in a myriad of sizes and designs. Tulongeni Crafts was established in 2002, but is no longer active, needing marketing and distribution support. Currently, game meat distributed to needy households is the main benefit for residents, while trophy hunting provides cash income to the conservancy. Kalahari melon seed production provided some income between 2000 and 2008, but the project was shelved due to market difficulties. Other indigenous plant resources have potential that has not yet been tapped.

The main tar road between Tsumeb and Ondangwa via Oshivelo provides easy access for visitors to the conservancy. The tar road network continues north and west of Ondangwa, with routes to Angola via Oshikango, or to Ruacana and Kaoko via Oshakati. An excellent gravel road links King Nehale with the tourism routes of eastern Etosha. Tourism is underdeveloped north of Etosha, as the potential of cultural tourism is often overlooked by the Namibian industry. The cultural resources of King Nehale have great potential to provide benefits. There is currently no tourism accommodation in the conservancy, but a broad range of accommodation facilities are available in the Ondangwa-Oshakati area, as well as in and around Etosha.

Until tourism development starts providing direct benefits, trophy hunting will remain the biggest source of income to the conservancy. The area does not have a great variety of trophy species and potential is limited by the high settlement density, but King Nehale does offer a novel hunting experience for species such as springbok.





## MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES

Conservancies  
facilitate sustainability...

King Nehale Conservancy has always had a strong backing from the traditional authorities, the regional council and the majority of residents. The conservancy has a broad-based **management structure**, having a very large committee to ensure wide community representation. The conservancy committee consists of three representatives from each of ten 'centres' that unite the area's settlements. The representatives have specific portfolios such as natural resources, tourism and crafts. Two traditional authority representatives ensure a positive relationship with traditional leadership structures. Interestingly, more than half of the committee members are women,

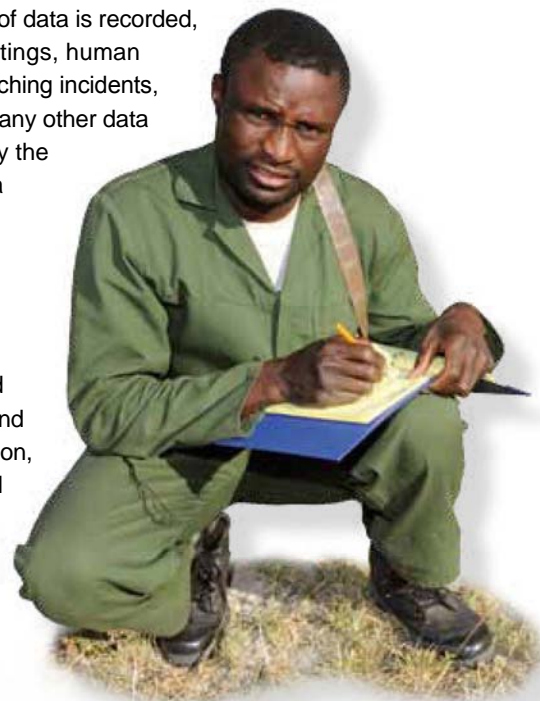


*the King Nehale Conservancy provides vital structures for managing the communal natural resources of the area in a way that enhances development and ensures sustainability*

reflecting the empowerment of previously marginalised groups that conservancies enable. The smaller executive committee consists of the chairman, treasurer and secretary, one person from each centre, as well as the traditional authority representatives. Employees include three game guards and two coordinators. The conservancy has an office at its Kalahari Melon Centre, but currently operates from the offices of the Namibia Development Trust (NDT) at Okashana. The conservancy does not yet generate enough income to cover all running costs and receives support from NDT, including the use of facilities.

**Activities...** The conservancy was zoned in 2007 into three areas for tourism, grazing, and settlement land uses. Stock and wildlife are integrated in the conservancy and there is no exclusive wildlife zone. An annual game count, carried out as a fixed route vehicle count, was started in 2010 in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment & Tourism (MET) and with the support of NGOs. Conservancy game guards and MET staff also conduct ad hoc joint patrols in the area. Ongoing active natural resource monitoring through the Event Book monitoring system is done by the game guards according to planned

schedules. A variety of data is recorded, including game sightings, human wildlife conflicts, poaching incidents, game utilisation and any other data deemed important by the conservancy. All data is aggregated into monthly and annual reporting charts that facilitate sustainable use and adaptive management. Based on the game count and Event Book information, the MET sets annual quotas for using wildlife.



*the conservancy uses a mix of modern technologies and traditional knowledge and skills to enable healthy wildlife populations, a productive environment, and the effective management of natural resources*

The conservancy strives to actively mitigate human wildlife conflicts and receives financial and logistical assistance from the MET to achieve this. Through the National Policy on Human Wildlife Conflict Management, a system of providing financial offsets for losses is being implemented. The conservancy receives a fixed lump sum from the MET and is responsible for paying out offsets to residents upon receipt of a claim. This must be accompanied by a report completed by game guards investigating the incident. All claims are reviewed by a panel consisting of conservancy, traditional authority, MET and NGO representatives. The conservancy also provides community education on the policy and creates awareness of mitigation measures such as keeping stock in predator proof enclosures at night.







# CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES...

Conservancies are full of opportunities...

The mixture of environmental and cultural resources provides largely untapped potential in King Nehale.

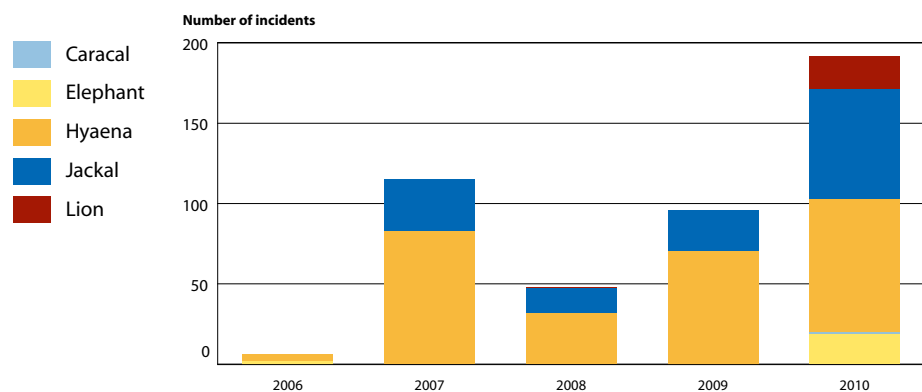
**Challenges...** King Nehale faces the challenge of balancing a high human population with limited wildlife and other natural resources. More than 50 people per square kilometre in many parts of the conservancy place high pressure on resources. Grazing, timber, indigenous fruit trees and of course wildlife are all under pressure. Limited income is an immediate challenge for the conservancy, restricting developments that would allow the conservancy to function more effectively and



*strategic development that maximises the area's tourism potential while mitigating pressures on the environment can facilitate a bright future for King Nehale Conservancy*

provide a greater range of benefits. The conservancy does not own a vehicle and the mobility and field communication of game guards is limited. Human wildlife conflict is a major challenge in an area with such a large population coexisting with wild animals. Elephants and predators are the main conflict species. At least some conflicts can be mitigated by herding livestock and keeping it in secure enclosures at night. Predators and elephants can be of great value, both to the ecosystem and to tourism, yet it is almost impossible to combine a high human population with large predators. Clear zoning can separate wildlife from people and the grasslands along the Etosha border could act as a buffer zone, but currently support a very high livestock density all year round. Alternatively, the conservancy can shift emphasis away from wildlife to mitigating human pressures on the environment while promoting tourism and maximising other natural resource benefits such those from indigenous plants.

The tourism potential of King Nehale, as well as of the greater region, provides great opportunities. The proximity to Etosha, mixed with the vibrant Owambo culture and good road infrastructure provides a variety of development options. Excellent interpretation through qualified guiding and information materials can make the cultural attractions more easily accessible.



*Human wildlife conflicts are monitored using the Event Book. Hyaenas are generally responsible for the largest number of conflict incidents.*



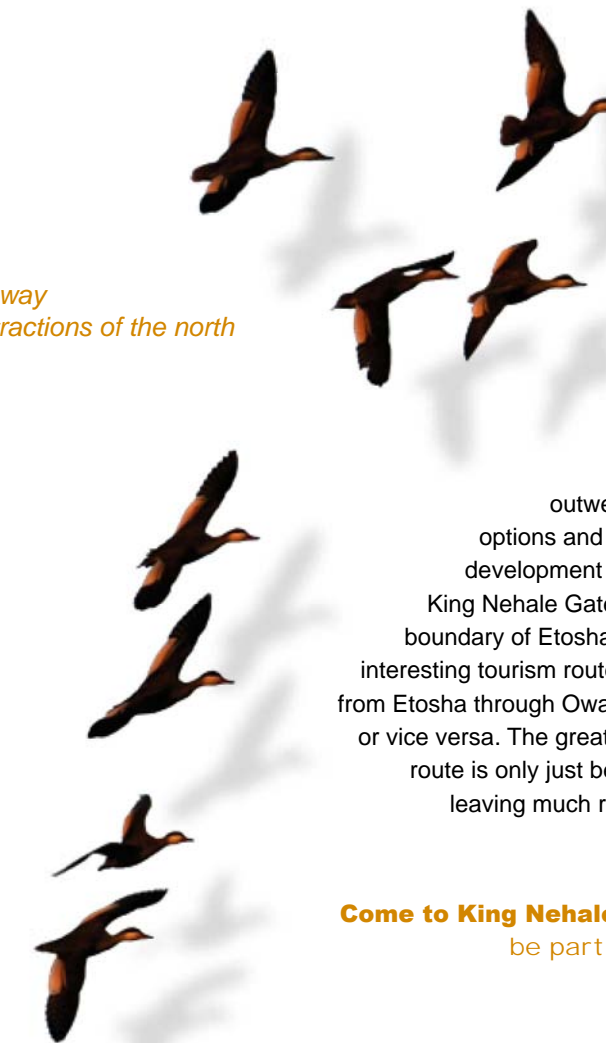
*King Nehale Conservancy has great potential as a tourism gateway between the abundance of wildlife in Etosha and the cultural attractions of the north*

King Nehale already has a variety of plans to facilitate tourism development in the conservancy, based on a tourism option plan. Joint-venture negotiations are being held and potential developments include a high-end lodge, a campsite and a restcamp with a variety of leisure facilities. A cultural interpretive centre is being established and the conservancy has entered into negotiations with the MET for a tourism concession in Etosha.



# ... AND THE FUTURE

Trophy hunting can continue to play a role for the conservancy until tourism developments generate enough income, but the limited hunting potential may not justify trying to balance both hunting and tourism in the small, densely populated area in the longer term.



The potential of tourism far outweighs most other options and should be given development preference. The King Nehale Gate in the northern boundary of Etosha has created an interesting tourism route option, circling from Etosha through Owambo into Kaoko or vice versa. The great potential of this route is only just being discovered, leaving much room for creative development.

**Come to King Nehale – be part of the future...**





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Norad

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