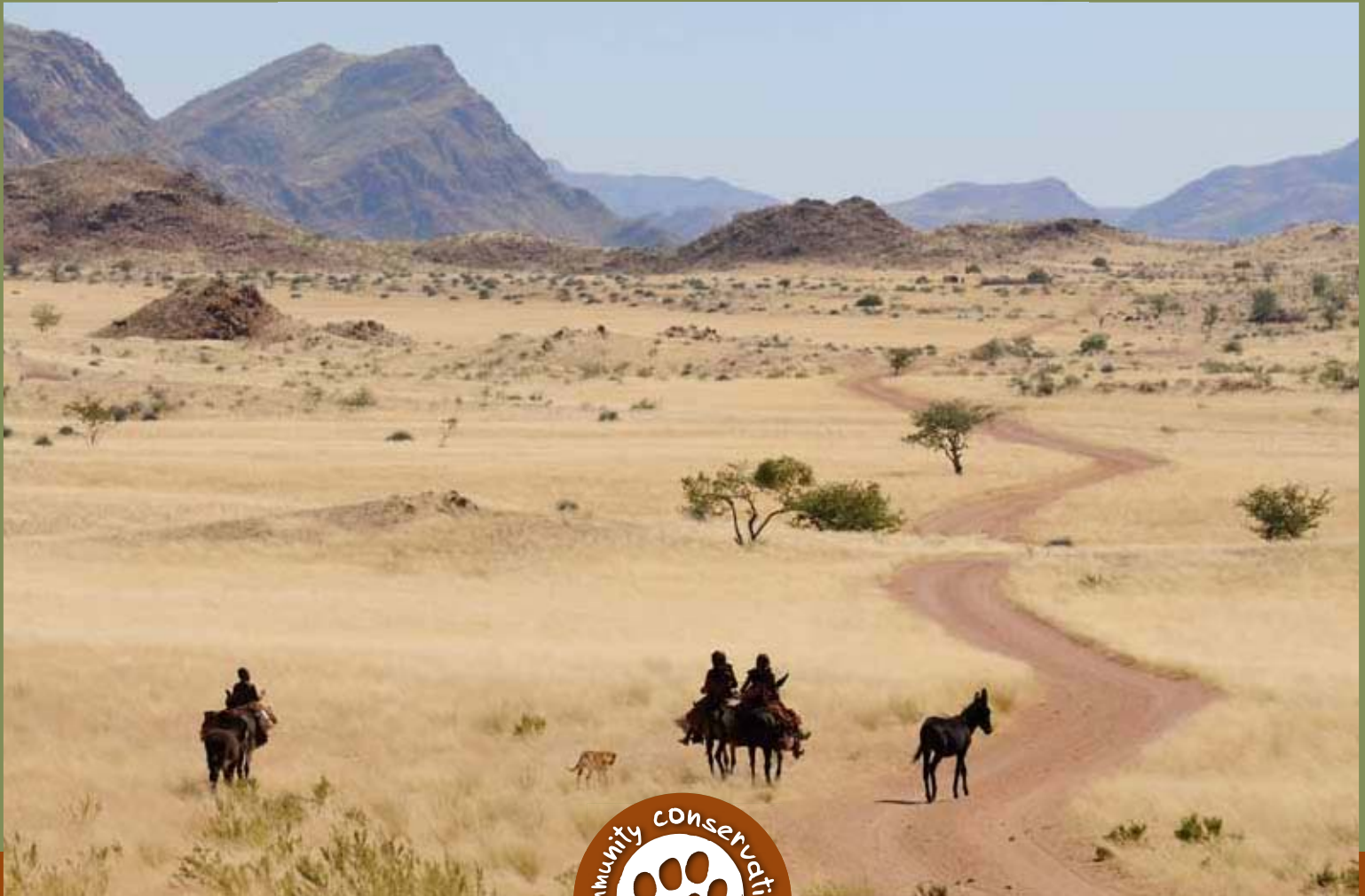


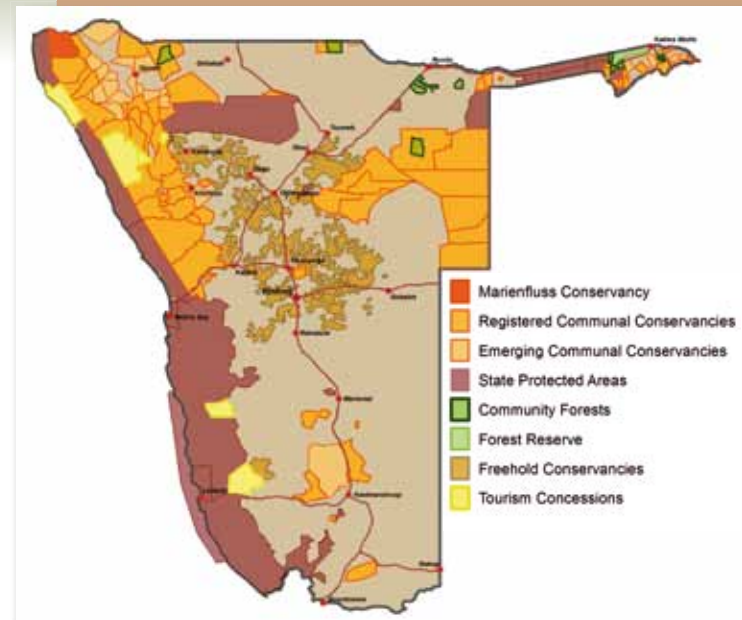
Living with wildlife –  
the story of **Marienfluss Conservancy**



Marienfluss – after the Marienfluss Valley



## Living with wildlife – the story of MARIENFLUSS CONSERVANCY



### 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

Conservancies enable development and conservation over large areas...

### MILESTONES AND SUCCESSES

- 1993** – the first community campsite is developed in the Marienfluss
- 1996** – policy changes allow communal area residents to benefit from wildlife and tourism by forming conservancies
- 1998** – the Marienfluss community begins the process to register as a conservancy
- 2001** – Marienfluss Conservancy is registered in January
- 2001** – Marienfluss Conservancy becomes part of the annual North-West Game Count
- 2003** – implementation of the Event Book monitoring system in Marienfluss Conservancy
- 2006** – harvesting of *Commiphora* resin for export to the international cosmetic industry begins in Marienfluss and three other conservancies
- 2007** – Marienfluss Conservancy becomes financially independent and is able to cover own operating expenses
- 2010** – registration as a community forest is initiated

### QUICK FACTS

**Region:** Kunene

**Size:** 3,034 square kilometres

**Approximate population:** 400

**Main language:** Otjihimba/Otjiherero

**Date of registration:** January 2001

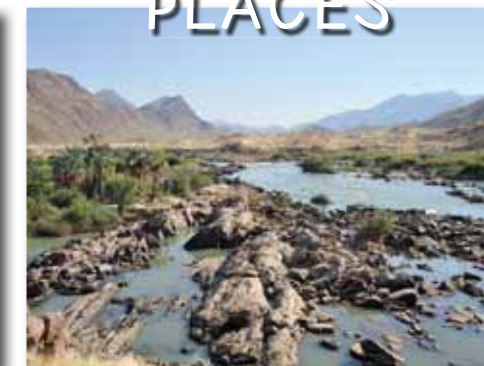
## MARIENFLUSS offers an enchanting mix of

### PEOPLE



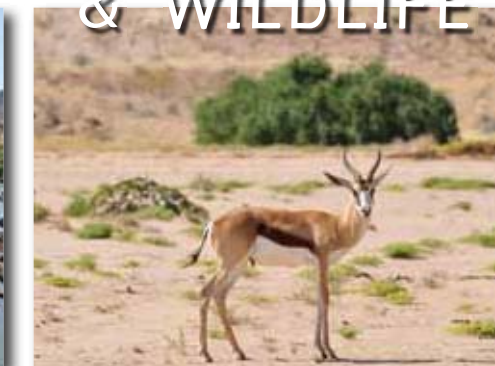
*interesting cultures and dynamic communities committed to sustainability - people living in Marienfluss share a common vision for managing their area and its resources*

### PLACES



*vast, diverse and spectacular landscapes – the Marienfluss and Hartmann Valleys, the Kunene... a healthy environment diversifies economic opportunities and drives economic growth*

### & WILDLIFE



*charismatic, free-roaming wildlife – herds of springbok and gemsbok, endemic birds... 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.

The **Marienfluss Conservancy** covers a large area but embraces a small population of around 400 people, most of whom speak Otjihimba.

Because of its arid environment, the Marienfluss has always been marginal for settlement, but has supported small groups of semi-nomadic Himba for generations. The Himba, who are part of the larger Herero language group, first settled in what is today the Kunene Region around five hundred years ago. While the main Herero community moved on to settle in central Namibia, some clans stayed in northern Kunene and in this remote tract retained a strong sense of cultural identity and traditions that are still present today.

The Marienfluss lies in the furthest reaches of an area formerly known as Kaokoveld. Wedged between the mountain ranges of the escarpment in the east and the Skeleton Coast Park in the west, the conservancy stretches north to the Kunene River, the border with Angola. To the south and east more conservancies cover most of the Kunene Region in a vast conservation landscape that also links Etosha with the coastal parks. With the support of a local tourism operator and a field-based NGO, the Marienfluss community registered their conservancy a little over a decade ago.



## RESOURCES AND ATTRACTIONS

Conservancies  
are living landscapes...

The landscapes of the Marienfluss Conservancy are epic. On the eastern side of the conservancy, the Marienfluss Valley, flanked by the towering ridges of the Otjihipa and Hartmann Mountains, creates a truly magical setting. Springbok, ostrich and herds of long-horned cattle graze in harmony on vast plains, which descend northward to the oasis of the Kunene River. In the west, the similarly spectacular Hartmann Valley is separated by picturesque granite outcrops from the northern Namib dune fields. Here, the Kunene flows through sand dunes interspersed with rocky ridges. This is a place of mystery, tranquillity, and great beauty.



*driving for hours along rough tracks through rugged mountains that suddenly open out onto the Marienfluss, that magical valley of red sand, yellow grass and blue mountains leading to the turquoise waters of the Kunene River... this must be one of the most memorable days on a trip through Kaoko*

Within such landscapes, the traditional Himba **culture** is iconic, an epitome of timeless Africa. Proud semi-nomadic cattle herders wander the vastness with their herds, women in traditional dress glow red, anointed with a mixture of butter fat, *Commiphora* perfume and ochre. The holy fire is the centre of the village. Around it, domed clay-and-dung huts encircle stock enclosures. Cattle are at the heart of Himba culture. Tradition dictates much of daily life and a complex system of patriarchal leadership and matriarchal inheritance ensures a balanced heritage. The Marienfluss offers wonderful images of cultural and environmental harmony.

The beautiful but harsh **environment** is dominated by the Namib Desert, which is perhaps the oldest desert in the world. The Namib stretches along the entire Namibian coastline, reaching slightly into south-western Angola. Average annual rainfall in the conservancy is extremely low at 100 to 150 millimetres and is highly variable, with much higher than average rain in some years and basically none in others. Frequent prolonged periods of drought require a high degree of adaptability. Lying along the eastern edge of the Namib fog belt, the

arid landscape is soothed by 20 or more of days of fog each year, generated by the cold Benguela Current of the Atlantic. The Otjihipa Mountains rise to almost 2,000 metres above sea level, while much of the Marienfluss Valley lies below 500 metres. The atmosphere of wilderness is enhanced by the remoteness, by the Himba culture and by wonderful environmental enigmas. Fairy circles pepper most plains – round depressions several metres in diameter where no grass grows, a phenomenon no scientist has been able to adequately explain.



*an athletic figure strides with casual confidence through the hot, rugged desert landscape, carrying nothing but a walking stick; many kilometres away at his village, women in traditional dress go about their daily tasks of churning milk and preparing food... the beauty of the Marienfluss is greatly enhanced by the iconic culture of the Himba*

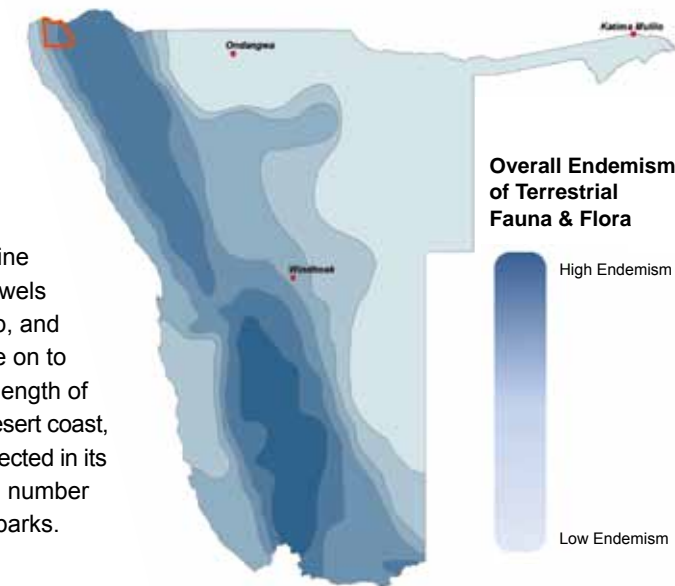
Since the establishment of conservancies, **wildlife** numbers in communal areas have rebounded from historic lows prior to independence. Springbok, gemsbok and ostrich are common in Marienfluss. Other mammals include giraffe, mountain zebra, kudu, klipspringer, duiker, steenbok and the diminutive dik-dik. Cheetah, leopard, spotted and brown hyaena, and jackal all prowl the vastness. The Kunene supports a large crocodile population, as well as the Cape clawless otter. There are around



65 species of fish in the river. A high degree of endemism has developed along the Namibian escarpment, and the conservancy provides habitat to numerous endemic scorpions and reptiles, as well as many of the country's near-endemic birds. These include Benguela long-billed lark, Gray's lark, Carp's tit, rosy-faced lovebird, Rüppell's korhaan, Monteiro's hornbill, white-tailed shrike, Herero chat and rockrunner. The riverine habitat of the Kunene attracts a variety of birds, including goliath heron, darter, African fish eagle and osprey. Well over 100 bird species have been recorded in the conservancy. Makalani palms, huge ana trees and mustard tree thickets line parts of the Kunene, while mopane trees are dominant throughout the eastern parts of the conservancy, giving way in the west to open desert plains. Mopane wood grows slow and hard, and is used extensively to build huts and animal kraals, as well as for firewood.

**Around Marienfluss...** To the south and east, most of Kaoko is covered by adjacent conservancies that offer a variety of environmental and cultural attractions. To the west, the Marienfluss Conservancy borders onto the

Skeleton Coast Park, an epitome of remote wilderness travel. Fly-in safaris can easily combine these two jewels of the Namib, and can continue on to explore the length of Namibia's desert coast, which is protected in its entirety by a number of adjacent parks.





# LIVELIHOODS AND DEVELOPMENT

## Conservancies empower rural people...

The Himba living in Kaoko make up less than one percent of Namibia's national **population** and the residents of Marienfluss live in the most geographically remote and physically inaccessible part of the region. This has allowed traditional Himba society to remain largely intact here. Himba culture has always been centred around herds of cattle and goats, and as pastoralists they lead migratory lifestyles following the sparse grazing of north-western Namibia. The liberation war further isolated the region prior to independence and the South African military presence had profound effects on the local environment and culture.

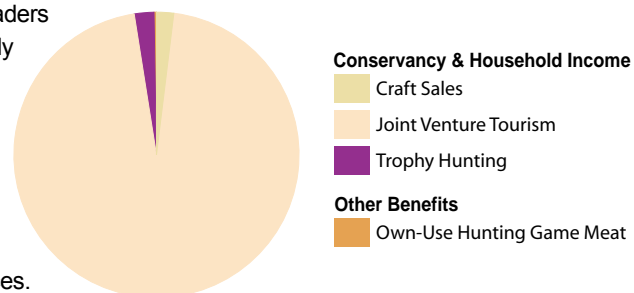
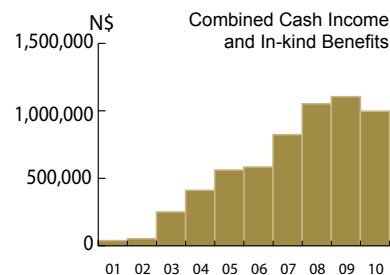


*Marienfluss can facilitate access to diverse training and capacity building, can empower individuals, especially women, to actively take part in decision-making, as well as instilling a renewed sense of pride in cultural heritage*

**Development** of the area has been extremely limited, with only a basic road network and minimal water supply in place. Lack of water in a harsh environment is the biggest constraint to agriculture and settlement in the conservancy. The Kunene River and a few natural springs have been the only water sources for generations. Two boreholes with pumps have been developed in the conservancy, but are by no means sufficient. Pumping water from the river is inhibited by the distances to be covered by pipelines.

There are two small primary schools in the conservancy. Finding teachers who are prepared to work in this remote area has proven difficult, and the three teachers at the schools are secondary school leavers completing their diplomas via distance learning. There is no school hostel and children sleep in the classroom. The government school feeding programme provides maize flour for a daily meal, while the conservancy supplies additional food. When food runs out, children are sent home. Literacy rates are very low and only one member of the current conservancy committee can read. Many youngsters choose to leave school and remain in the conservancy to begin farming with inherited livestock.

Nearly 300 kilometres away, the regional capital of Opuwo is the closest town, providing a variety of **facilities and services**. There is a hospital in Opuwo, while a clinic at Onjuva settlement can offer basic health care, 130 kilometres or three hours drive away. Informal traders occasionally pass through the area, offering basic goods at high prices.

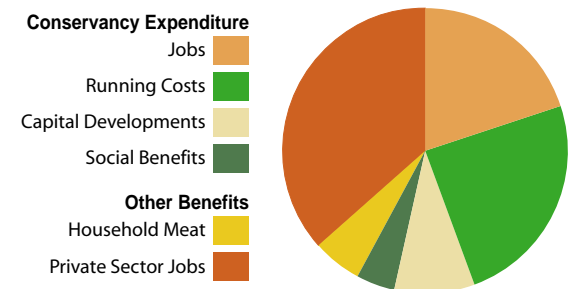


*Benefits to the conservancy and its members come from a variety of sources. Sources and amounts vary from year to year, depending on factors such as agreements with private sector partners, and market fluctuations. The pie chart shows the main benefit sources in 2010.*



*the conservancy can enhance a range of livelihood options for its residents, including tourism income, guiding, craft production and indigenous plant harvesting, enabling the Himba to utilise much of their traditional knowledge and skills*

The **livelihoods** of conservancy residents are based on livestock, supplemented by small scale gardening. Maize, pumpkins, sweet peppers and tobacco are grown in gardens along the Kunene. Small scale mining for semi-precious stones is carried out at two sites in the conservancy, but does not provide much employment. Some residents receive support from family members who have jobs elsewhere. The conservancy has created new jobs in the area, and generates a variety of other of benefits for residents, including transport for school children and people needing medical



attention. The conservancy has also developed water points for livestock and distributes game meat to households and the schools.

Harvesting *Commiphora* resin for the perfume industry has provided an important source of income for Himba women. The *Burseraceae* plant family is the source of the biblical myrrh and frankincense, and the small, shrub-like *Commiphora* exudes a similar resin. Himba women collect the resin and use it to make scent. Field-based NGO Integrated Rural Development & Nature Conservation (IRDNC) buys the harvest and processes it into an essential oil at its natural product facility in Opuwo. The oil is exported to France where it is used as a perfume ingredient. The harvesting of the resin is nondestructive and provides a much needed new source of income. Crafts have also been an important source of income for women, who create exquisite small baskets woven from the fronds of makalani palms. The production and sale of the baskets has been supported by Kaokohimba Safaris.

Adventurous **access for visitors** is provided by four wheel drive tracks that reach the conservancy from Opuwo via the infamous van Zyl's Pass, or from Sesfontein via Orupembe and Red Drum. Direct vehicle access to the Skeleton Coast Park is not possible from the conservancy. Several joint-venture lodges offer **tourism** accommodation and generate significant conservancy income, as well as providing employment. Around half of the staff at the lodges are from the conservancy. Camp Syncro was the first lodge in the Marienfluss, but much of its infrastructure was destroyed in a fire and the site now offers only camping facilities. Wilderness Safaris Serra Cafema Camp, Skeleton Coast Safaris Kunene Camp and Okahirongo River Camp all provide up-market accommodation, mostly for fly-in visitors. Okarohombo Community Campsite provides direct income and employment. The campsite has a wonderful location but is prone to flooding and has often been forced to close for long periods.

Trophy hunting brings some cash income to the conservancy, but as there are few valuable trophy species on the conservancy quota, this has been limited.

*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. Private sector jobs are created through agreements with private sector partners. The pie chart shows the main expenditure and benefit areas in 2010.*



# MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES

## Conservancies facilitate sustainability...

The **management structure** of the conservancy consists of a management committee of 16 members including traditional authority representatives, as well as an executive committee of six members. Employees include four community game guards, two field officers and two community activators, as well as two campsite staff. Technical support is provided to the conservancy by IRDNC. The conservancy receives strong support from the traditional authority and representation on the committee ensures good communication.

Committee meetings are held monthly and the annual general meeting is attended by a large part of the community. The conservancy



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

does not have an office and meetings are held under a tree. The conservancy owns two vehicles, which are used for monitoring and other conservancy activities, as well as to assist community members with transport.

**Activities...** The conservancy has been zoned for a variety of land uses, including an exclusive wildlife area, a rhino sanctuary shared with neighbouring Orupembe Conservancy, a tourism area, a livestock farming area and a multiple use zone. Conservancy game guards undertake active natural resource monitoring throughout the conservancy, including monthly fixed route patrols done on foot across the rugged and largely waterless terrain. The field officers assist with entering the gathered data into the Event Book monitoring system, recording a variety of data such as game sightings, human wildlife conflict, poaching incidents, game utilisation and any other data deemed important by the conservancy. The data is aggregated into monthly and annual reporting charts that facilitate adaptive management. The conservancy is part of the annual North-West Game Count, carried out by the Ministry of Environment & Tourism

(MET) in collaboration with the conservancies and with the support of NGOs. The census is the largest annual road-based game count in the world, covering over 7,000 kilometres of road transects in an area of around 70,000 square kilometres. Based on the game count and Event Book information, the MET sets annual quotas for using wildlife. This allows the conservancy to carry out own-use hunting to supply residents with meat, as well as entering into trophy hunting concession agreements with hunting operators. Donations of the meat obtained through hunting are also made to the schools and to local functions.

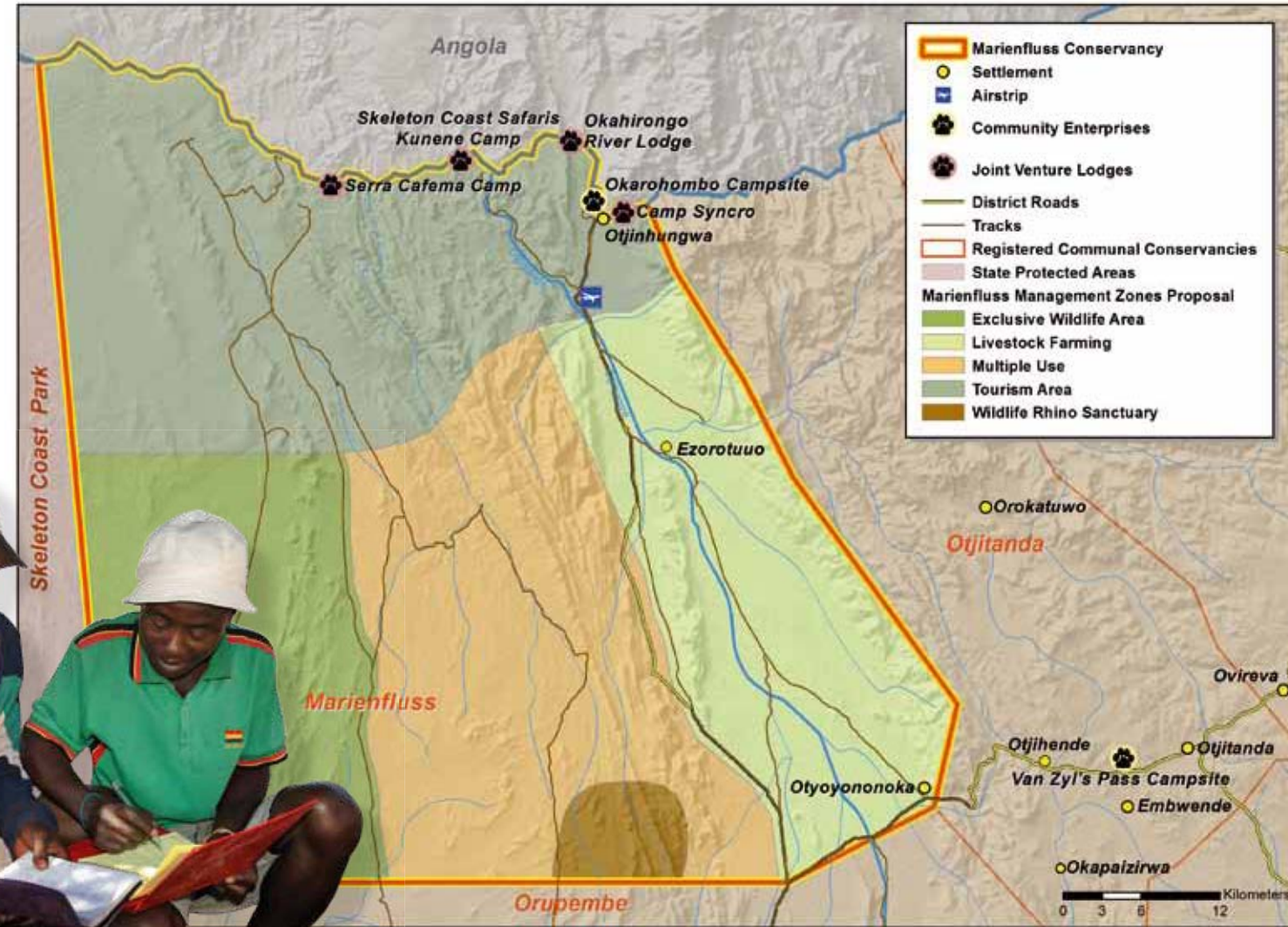
The conservancy strives to mitigate human wildlife conflict. Since the conservancy was created, ten people have been killed by crocodiles, and an estimate of people who were attacked but survived is five times that number. Cattle and goats are often lost to crocodiles, and leopard, cheetah, hyaena and jackal also prey on livestock. 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 offsets to residents. Claims must be accompanied

*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*

by a report from game guards investigating the incident, and all claims are reviewed by a panel before any payments can be made.

Community game guards actively investigate poaching incidents, which has led to the arrest of a number of poachers. Poachers often

cross the Kunene River from Angola to kill antelopes for meat. Game guards have no legal powers to arrest poachers and need to call in the police or MET for assistance, which greatly reduces success rates due to the time needed to reach the conservancy.





# CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES...

Conservancies  
**are full of opportunities...**

The wonderful mixture of environmental and cultural resources in the Marienfluss Conservancy provides untapped potential.

**Challenges...** The remote location and difficult access limits development in the conservancy. One of the challenges is to maximise benefits from tourism. Tourist traffic has remained relatively low outside the luxury fly-in safari sector, which is well utilised by the current lodges. The Okarohombo Community Campsite has been rebuilt several times but is prone to flood damage and requires improved facilities and management expertise. There has been limited

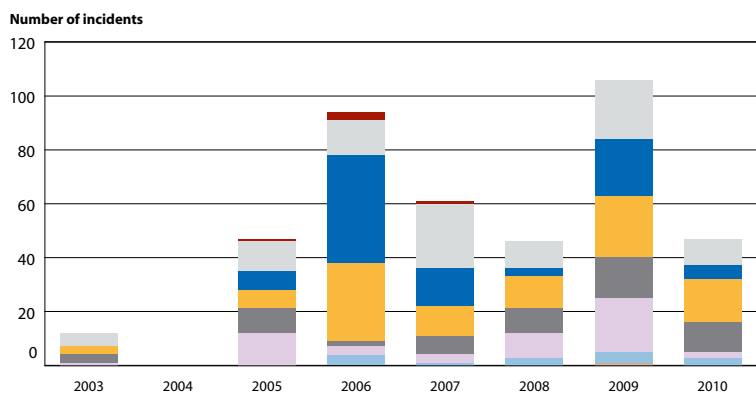


*the Marienfluss harbours great potential to overcome some of the development challenges that the area faces – and the conservancy is the ideal structure to coordinate many of the developments*

engagement from the mobile tourism sector, with both self-drive and organised tours often taking liberties with 'wild camping', without any benefits going to the conservancy. The conservancy faces a variety of capacity challenges, needing further training in both tourism and natural resource management to optimise conservancy activities and income. Limited availability of funds has inhibited the development and maintenance of conservancy facilities and equipment.

Human wildlife conflict is a challenge where ever people coexist with wild animals, especially if these include large predators. Crocodiles are a huge challenge for the conservancy, especially because of the loss of human life they cause. This can be mitigated through safe access to water for both people and livestock. A variety of other predators are also a challenge, including occasional nomadic lions. Yet predators are of great value, both to the ecosystem and tourism, and in the long run benefits gained from them should outweigh the costs of living with them.

- Baboon
- Caracal
- Cheetah
- Crocodile
- Hyaena
- Jackal
- Leopard
- Lion



*Human wildlife conflicts are monitored using the Event Book and clearly indicate the main conflict species.*

# ... AND THE FUTURE



*strategic development, sensitive to cultural dynamics as well as the environment, can ensure that the residents of the conservancy benefit from their communal resources without compromising their heritage*

and expanded camping facilities, both in the Marienfluss and in other parts of the conservancy, can facilitate increased benefits from this sector. Benefits from cultural tourism are currently limited, even though the Himba culture is one of the main attractions for most visitors to the area. Improved benefit sharing through controlled access to settlements, and the possible development of a dedicated traditional

village, could ensure fair benefits from the cultural resources of the Himba. Craft development has significant potential as part of tourism development, as there is certainly a market for the high quality baskets produced by Himba women, as well as for a great variety of Himba artefacts. Culture is always susceptible to negative tourism influences and developments should safeguard against a loss of cultural heritage through the indiscriminate sale of valuable items or insensitive developments.

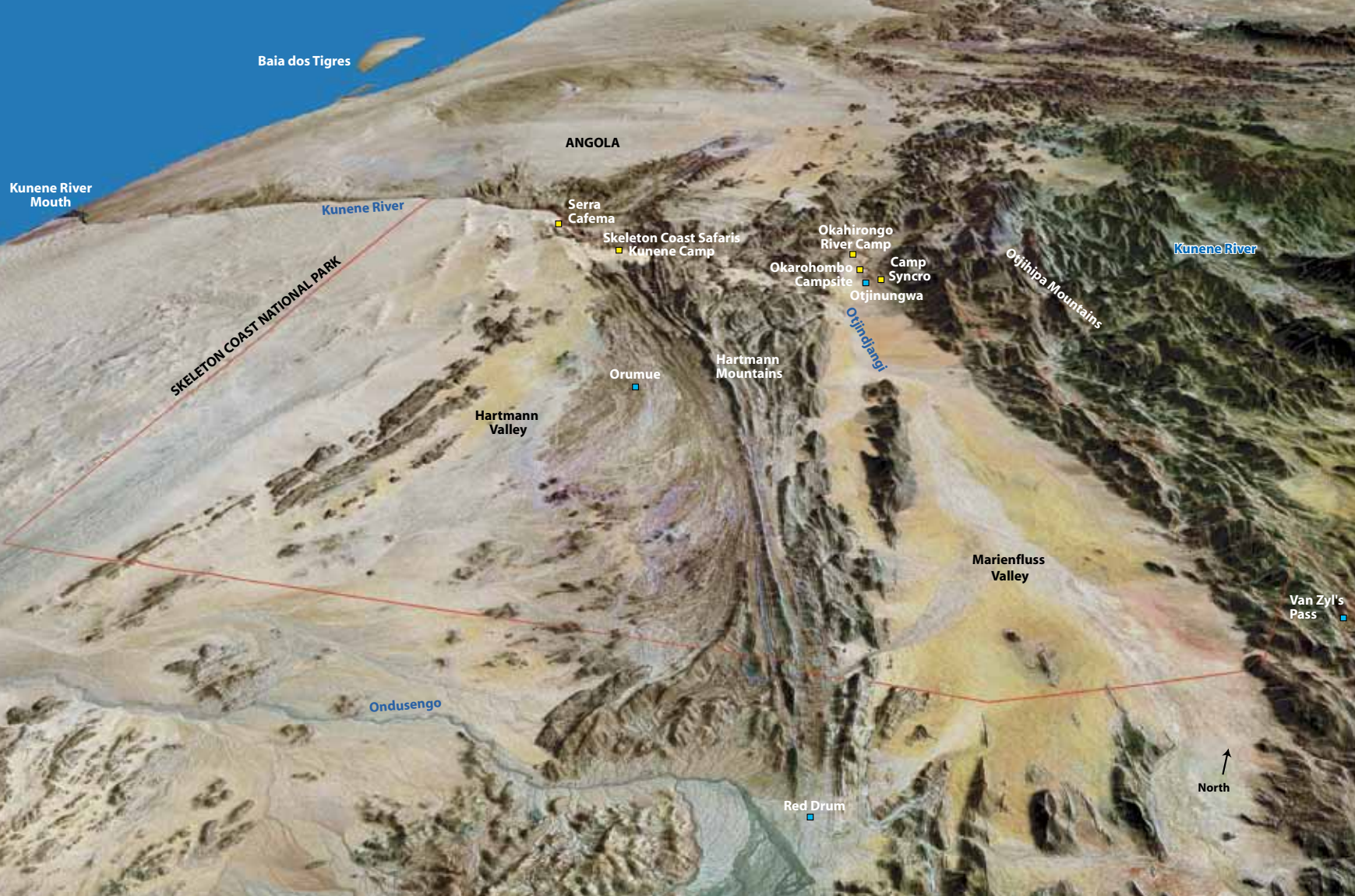
Conservancy **plans** include building an office near the current 'meeting tree' to enable more efficient management activities, and tourism operators are providing support to achieve this. The Ministry of

Agriculture is considering the development of an irrigation scheme near the river, which would provide employment, but would require a better access road to be built. The distances to markets and high costs for such a scheme limit its feasibility. The immense value of the area as a wilderness destination outweighs the potential benefits of agricultural development in a remote and harsh environment. The magic of Marienfluss lies in its isolation, its tranquillity, its sense of tradition, and in its awe-inspiring natural and cultural heritage. This is where the greatest potential for a bright future for the conservancy may lie.



**Come to Marienfluss – be part of the future...**





The production of this brochure was jointly funded by MCA-Namibia, Norad and WWF



For more information and updates:

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