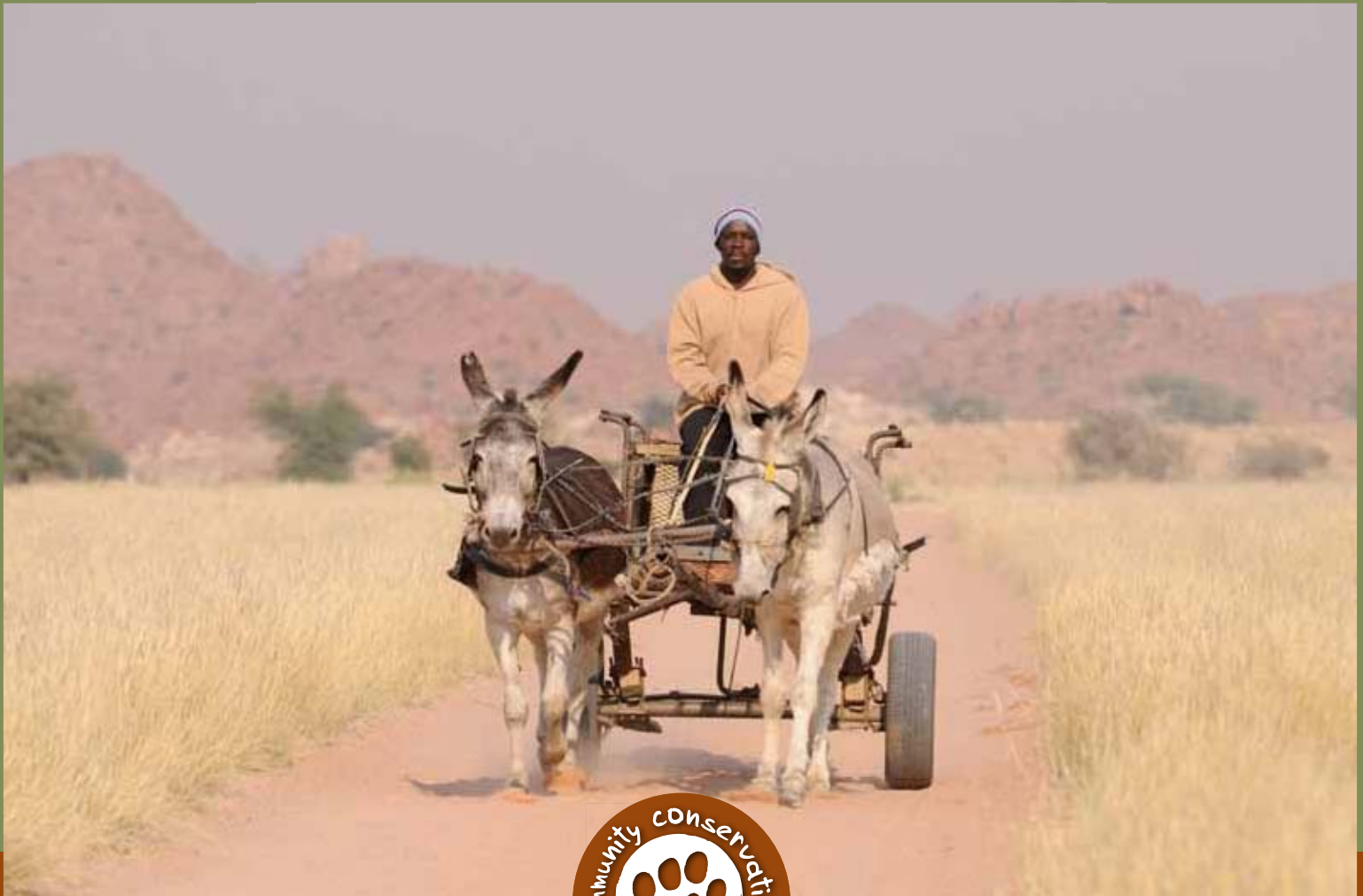


Living with wildlife –
the story of **Sorris Sorris Conservancy**



Sorris Sorris – Khoekhoegowab for 'an abundance of sunlight'



Living with wildlife – the story of SORRIS SORRIS CONSERVANCY

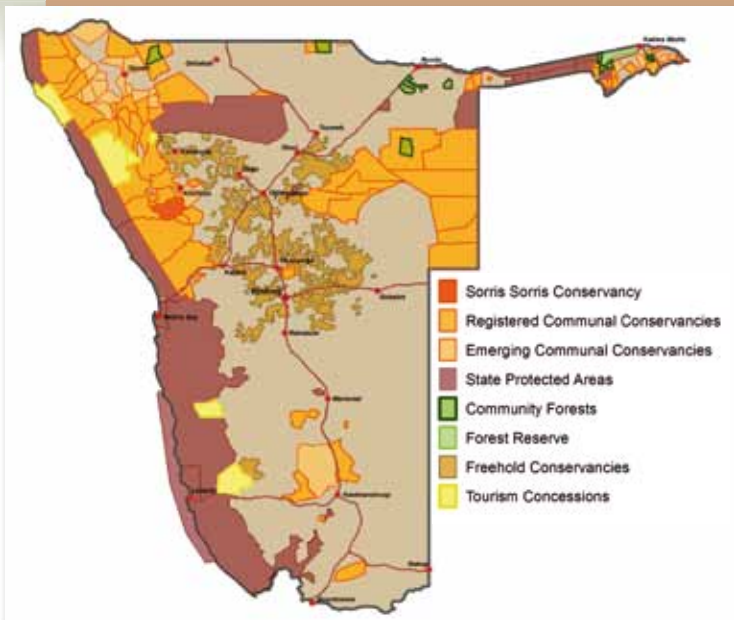
Conservancies
enable conservation and development over large areas...

MILESTONES AND SUCCESSES

- 1996** – policy changes allow communal area residents to benefit from wildlife and tourism by forming conservancies
- 1999** – the Sorris Sorris community begins the process to register as a conservancy
- 2001** – Sorris Sorris becomes part of the annual North-West Game Count
- 2001** – Sorris Sorris Conservancy is registered in October
- 2003** – implementation of the Event Book monitoring system in Sorris Sorris Conservancy
- 2006** – a grant is received for a feasibility study on establishing an environmental information centre in the conservancy
- 2006** – Hartmann's zebra are translocated into the conservancy to boost the existing population
- 08/09** – hartebeest are reintroduced into the conservancy
- 2010** – through a grant from the Danish International Development Agency, a project aimed at reducing elephant damage to infrastructure is initiated
- 2011** – the Sorris Sorris Information Centre is formally opened

QUICK FACTS

Region: Kunene
Size: 2,290 square kilometres
Approximate population: 1,300
Main language: Khoekhoegowab
Date of registration: October 2001



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

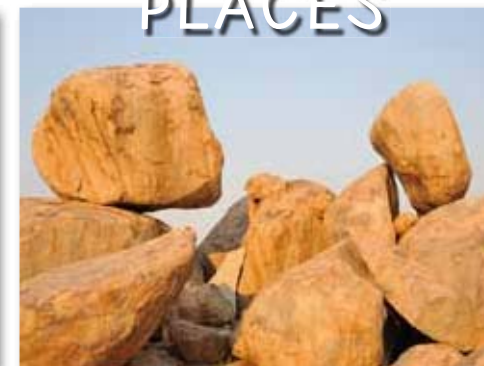
SORRIS SORRIS offers an enchanting mix of

PEOPLE



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

PLACES



vast, diverse and spectacular landscapes – desert plains, granite formations, the Ugab River... a healthy environment diversifies economic opportunities and drives economic growth

& WILDLIFE



charismatic, free-roaming wildlife – elephant, black rhino, giraffe, predators and plains game.. wildlife can generate 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.

Sorris Sorris embraces a population of around 1,300 people, most of whom speak Khoekhoegowab. Because of its arid environment on

the edge of the Namib Desert, settlement in the area has always been limited. The Damara have occupied this region for a very long time, with a centre at Okombahe slightly south-east of Sorris Sorris. Damara origin prior to settling in Namibia centuries ago is uncertain. Settlement in the last century was heavily influenced by the German colonisation and later South African administration of Namibia. During the 1950s, the /Khomani Damara were forcibly moved from Windhoek to Sorris Sorris, and throughout the colonial period much land was divided up as white farmland, with some farms subsequently being reincorporated into the reshaped 'homelands' created by the Odendaal Commission's proposals of 1964.

Taking their cue from the first conservancies formed in the mid-nineties, local farmers saw the benefits of working together to manage resources and develop tourism. Starting the conservancy was not easy and the community at first had no supporting agency. With assistance from the Ministry of Environment & Tourism (MET), Sorris Sorris was registered in 2001.



RESOURCES AND ATTRACTIONS

Conservancies
are living landscapes...

The Damara were amongst the earliest residents of what is today Namibia. Their **culture** has undergone many changes, and was traditionally divided into a number of groups that included the Dãorén, or Brandberg Damara. The Damara have a shared language with the Nama, but the linguistic origin of Khoekhoegowab is uncertain. Historically, the Damara were a hunter-gatherer society, but stock farming started becoming a central livelihood activity at least a century ago.

The ephemeral Ugab River delineates the boundary between the Kunene and Erongo Regions. To the south, in Erongo, Namibia's highest mountain, the Brandberg, rises as an isolated massif out of the surrounding



wonderful granite formations tumbling across vast desert plains of yellow grass, where herds of springbok graze; the hazy blue silhouette of the Brandberg towering above the Ugab River, where elephants feed on fallen ana tree shoots ... Sorris Sorris is a magical forgotten corner where it is easy to spend a few quiet days exploring

desert plains. To the north lies Sorris Sorris, spread out under the Namibian sun. The tranquil landscape is interspersed with granite outcrops tumbling across the plains in wonderful bolder formations. Long before sheep were introduced to the region, people lived on these plains and left a record of their time, painted in red ochre on overhanging rocks of the area. Local guides know where rock paintings are to be found, some perhaps several thousand years old. They are a prelude to the nearby rock art of the Brandberg and Twyfelfontein, two of the richest rock art sites in the world.

Sorris Sorris stretches along the eastern fringes of the Namib Desert and its **environment** is heavily influenced by the Namib, which is said to be the oldest desert in the world. The cold Benguela Current flowing along the Namibian coast inhibits cloud formation and influences the climate of a large part of the country. Average annual rainfall in Sorris Sorris is low at between 150 and 200 millimetres. Rainfall is also highly variable, with much higher than average rain in some years and basically none in others. Evaporation is extremely high and frequent prolonged periods of drought require a high degree of adaptability, putting great

limitations on agriculture in the area. The Brandberg rises to over 2,500 metres above sea level while the surrounding plains in Sorris Sorris descend to around 500 metres at the Ugab River. The ephemeral river is an important lifeline in the desert, providing a variety of resources for wildlife, as well as people and their livestock.



faint red ochre lines depicting hunters and wildlife, painted millennia ago onto overhanging granite, herds of goats and sheep and the humble homesteads of Damara farmers dotting the landscape... this is a land steeped in culture

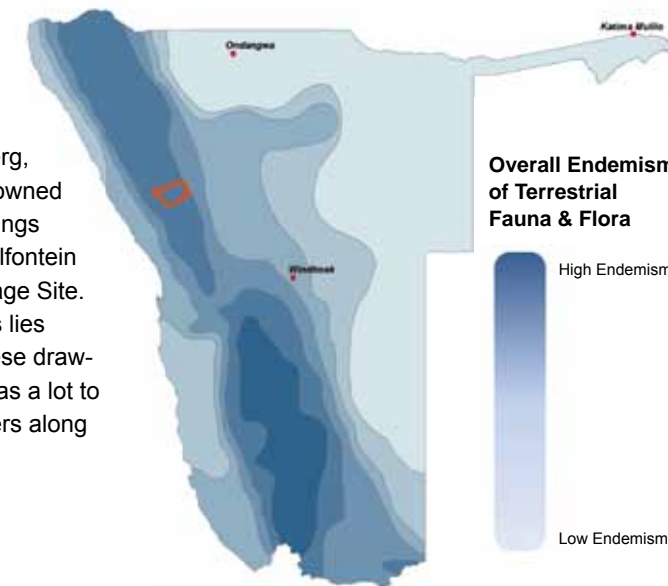
Since the establishment of conservancies, **wildlife** numbers in communal areas have rebounded from historic lows prior to independence. Sorris Sorris is home to a variety of charismatic game, including desert-adapted elephant, black rhino, giraffe, mountain zebra, kudu, gemsbok, springbok, duiker, steenbok, klipspringer, ostrich and baboon. Predators include leopard, cheetah, spotted and brown hyaena, jackal and caracal, as well as occasional nomadic lions.



The conservancy also provides habitat for many of the country's near-endemic birds, including bare-cheeked babbler, Carp's tit, rosy-faced lovebird, Rüppell's parrot, Hartlaub's francolin, violet wood-hoopoe, Rüppell's korhaan, Damara hornbill, Monteiro's hornbill, white-tailed shrike, Herero chat and rockrunner.

Large ana trees, camel thorn trees and mustard tree thickets fringe the Ugab. Mopane trees are dominant throughout much of the conservancy, giving way to open desert plains with a sparse grass cover. The famous *Welwitschia mirabilis*, an ancient and unique species with characteristics of both flowering and cone-bearing plants, grows along drainage lines in some areas. Shepherd's trees are conspicuous and *Commiphora* species grow in rocky areas. Mopane and camel thorn wood is hard and durable, and is harvested extensively for firewood.

Around Sorris Sorris... The conservancy is completely surrounded by other communal conservancies, which together create a vast contiguous conservation landscape. The area harbours great attractions, including the natural and cultural wonders of the Brandberg, and the renowned rock engravings at the Twyfelfontein World Heritage Site. Sorris Sorris lies between these draw-cards and has a lot to offer travellers along the way.





LIVELIHOODS AND DEVELOPMENT

Conservancies empower rural people...

The Damara today live in many parts of Namibia, but make up less than ten percent of the national population. At the turn of the 19th century, the Damara were marginalised and often impoverished by other language groups. Under the South African administration of Namibia, the implementation of the Odendaal Commission created what was then known as Damaraland. A number of formerly private farms were incorporated into the homeland, and some infrastructure from these farms still exists today. Yet the homelands caused considerable cultural and social upheaval and often had only very limited correlation to settlement patterns prior to the arrival of Europeans.



Sorris Sorris 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

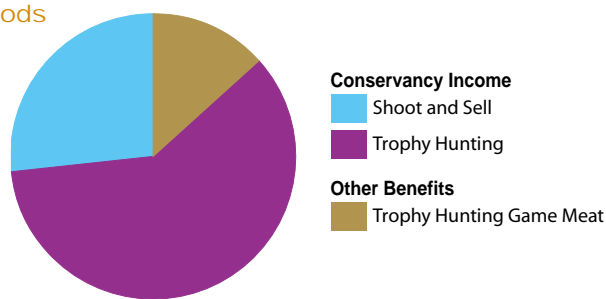
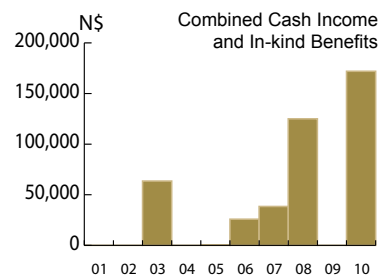
Development was sorely neglected in communal areas during the German colonial period and the South African administration of Namibia prior to independence. Even today, the arid zone on the fringes of the Namib has received less development attention than other areas.

While Uis, around 30 kilometres to the south-east, is the closest town to the conservancy, the regional centre of Khorixas, around 50 kilometres to the north, offers the greatest range of facilities and services for conservancy residents. A primary school at Anixab, the largest settlement in Sorris Sorris, provides some access to education, but secondary school students leave the conservancy to study in Khorixas or further afield. A clinic at Anixab provides basic health care, and the nearest hospital is in Khorixas. Limited telecommunication infrastructure has been a problem for conservancy residents, but improved mobile coverage is alleviating this and the conservancy makes use of the internet and email through donated equipment.

Water supply is an inhibiting factor in the conservancy. Yields from boreholes tapping groundwater reserves are generally low and drilling

is expensive. There are some earth dams in the north of the conservancy, but these store water for only a limited time after good rains. Some permanent springs in the Ugab River provide localised water points for both wildlife and livestock.

Livelihoods in the area generally focus on farming, which is inhibited by low rainfall. Most farmers



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.

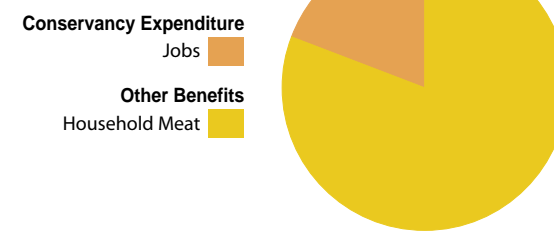


the conservancy can create a range of new livelihood options for its residents, including employment and income from tourism, guiding, craft production and other sales and services based on the sustainable use of natural resources

focus on a mix of cattle, goats and sheep, and small gardens are maintained by many households. Income from employment, pensions and remittances supplements the farming income for many residents.

The establishment of the conservancy is providing new livelihood choices by encouraging tourism, as well as enabling other natural resource use options. While the conservancy is currently not in a position to distribute cash payments to residents, it is generating a variety of benefits. The conservancy has created a number of jobs and is facilitating employment

in the tourism and trophy hunting industries. Game meat is distributed to residents, and trophy hunting and shoot and sell hunting generate



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.

important income for the conservancy to cover running costs. The conservancy has also used some of its income to fund hospitality training in order to boost employment prospects in the tourism industry.

Good access for visitors to the conservancy is provided by the C35 gravel road from Hentiesbaai on the coast or from Khorixas in the north. Coming from Omaruru in the east, visitors can travel along the C36 gravel road via Uis. Several four-wheel drive tracks within the conservancy provide options for exploring the area with the assistance of a local guide. The recently-opened Sorris Sorris Information Centre provides information on the area and creates a variety of opportunities for income generation and employment, such as improving the informal sale of crafts and semi-precious stones, which provide only sporadic

income at the moment. The only other tourism facilities in Sorris Sorris are currently offered by a privately-owned campsite around 20 kilometres from the information centre. Investors are exploring the possibility of developing a joint-venture lodge in Sorris Sorris, which would provide the conservancy with income from benefit-sharing agreements, and would create much needed employment. The Brandberg White Lady Lodge on the southern banks of the Ugab River in neighbouring Tsiseb Conservancy, as well as a number of lodges in the Twyfelfontein area offer further accommodation options that benefit neighbouring conservancies.

Because income from tourism is limited at the moment, hunting revenues are very important to the conservancy. Sorris Sorris has a concession agreement with a professional hunter, with a guaranteed income from trophy hunting based on the minimum number of trophies taken. In 2010 the overall income from trophy hunting was almost double the guaranteed amount. In addition, the conservancy is allowed to shoot game for its own use and for meat sales. This is carried out by the professional hunter, in order to ensure that the right animals are culled, and high quality trophies are preserved for paying hunters.



MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES

Conservancies
facilitate sustainability...

The **management structure** of the conservancy consists of a management committee of nine members, about half of whom are women, reflecting the empowerment of previously marginalised groups that conservancies enable. Employees include four community game guards, a coordinator and an administrative assistant. The beginnings of conservancy management were not easy, with staff working out of a caravan donated by the MET. In 2007, Sorris Sorris was one of 16 conservancies to receive support from the Integrated Community-Based Ecosystem Management (ICEMA) project of the MET, funded by the Global Environment Facility through the World Bank. The small



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

management team was able to move into a purpose built office, and training was provided in financial management and governance. With a grant from the Spanish Cooperation, the Sorris Sorris Information Centre was built opposite the office in 2011.

Activities... Sorris Sorris is divided into four zones in order to reduce conflicts between wildlife and farming activities. There is a buffer zone between the farming area and the exclusive wildlife zone. As the conservancy is not fenced, farmers may graze their livestock in the buffer zone in times of drought, and wildlife can wander throughout the conservancy. No new settlement is allowed in the exclusive wildlife zone and the few farmers dispersed throughout this area pose little threat to wildlife, while suffering considerable losses from elephants and predators. A rhino sanctuary adjacent to the exclusive wildlife zone adjoins the rhino sanctuary of Doro Inawas Conservancy. Sorris Sorris owns a four-wheel drive vehicle, yet game guards often patrol the conservancy with donkey carts, as the limited conservancy budget results in some transport challenges and donkey carts offer an environmentally friendly alternative. The game guards use the Event Book monitoring system to record a

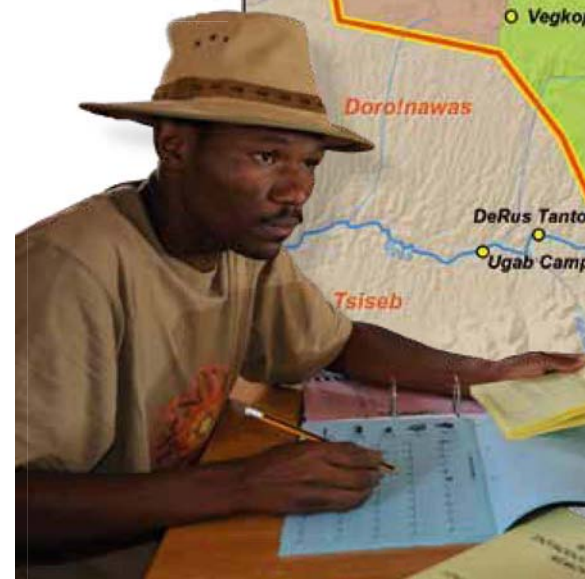
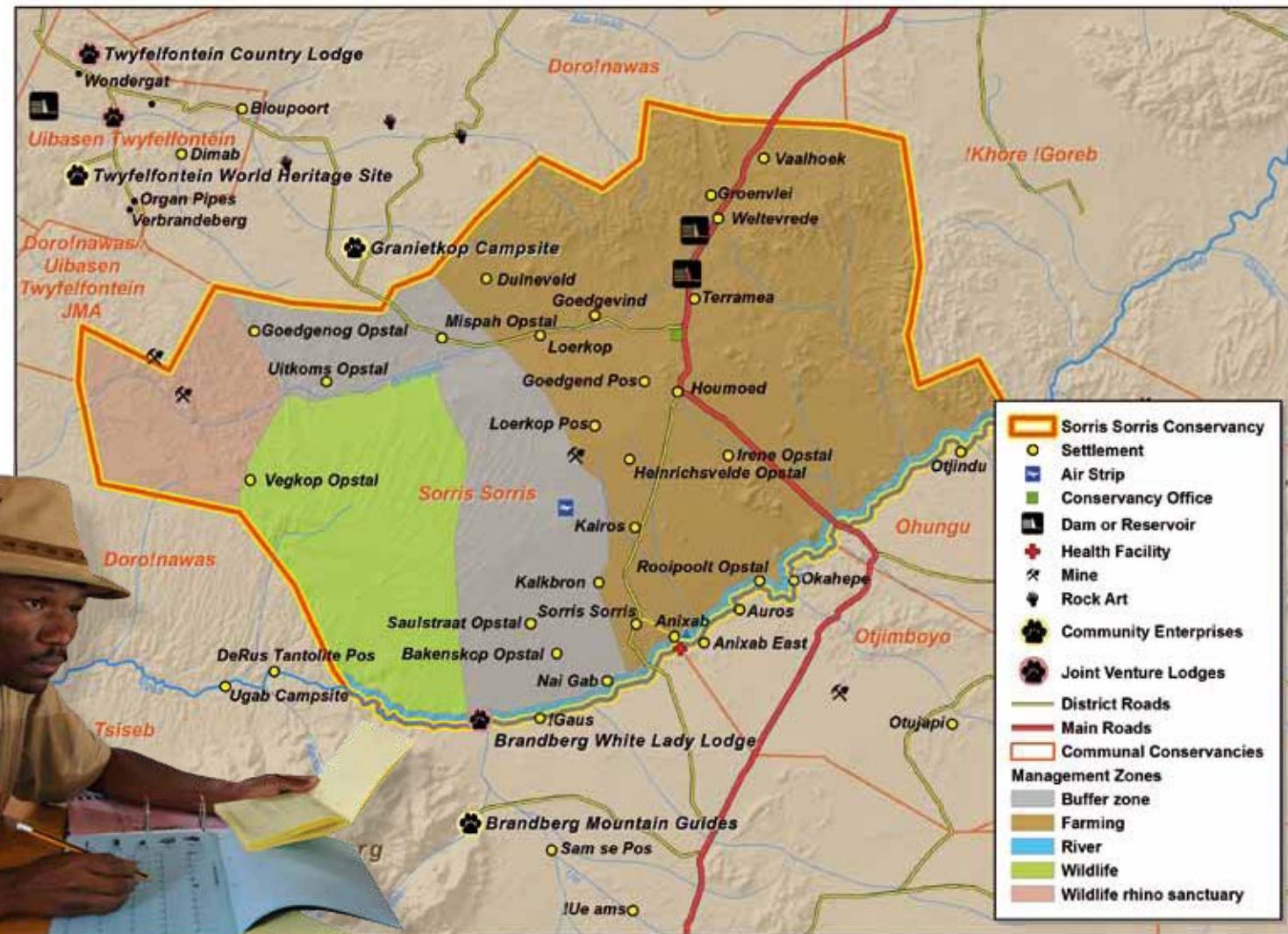
variety of data such as game sightings, human wildlife conflict, poaching incidents, game utilisation and any other data deemed important by the conservancy. The data is aggregated into monthly and annual reporting charts that facilitate adaptive management. The conservancy is part of the annual North-West Game Count, carried out by the 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. The MET works with the conservancy and other stakeholders to set annual quotas for using wildlife, based on information from the game counts and the Event Book. 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.

The conservancy strives to mitigate human wildlife conflict and works with farmers on a variety of mitigation measures. Predators are a big problem for farmers with livestock and elephants cause damage to gardens and water infrastructure. Through the National Policy on

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

Human Wildlife Conflict Management, a system of providing financial offsets for such 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 by a report from the game

guards investigating the incident, and a system for reviewing claims and ensuring financial management must be in place.





CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES...

Conservancies
are full of opportunities...

The variety of environmental assets and cultural resources in the Sorris Sorris Conservancy provides untapped potential.

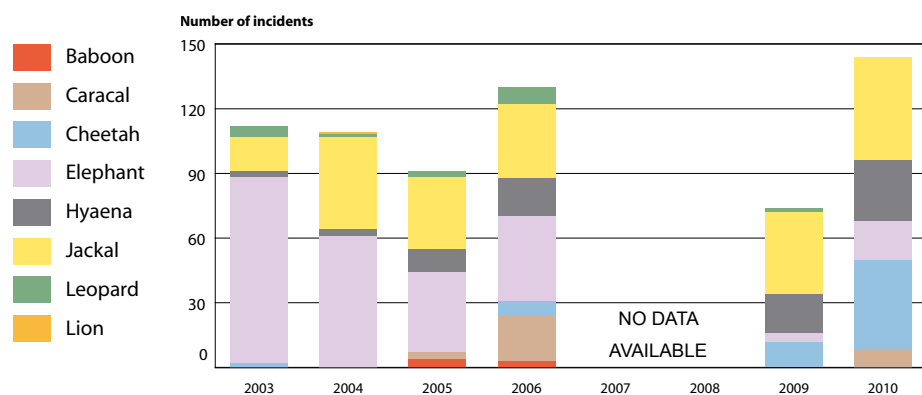
Challenges... Sorris Sorris has an abundance of sunlight, as well as a variety of resources and attractions, yet income from tourism has been low, as the area has been used as little more than a transit route. The conservancy has thus not been able to distribute many benefits and faces high community expectations. The conservancy has first endeavoured to get a variety of management systems in place, initially with limited external assistance, and can now begin to capitalise on its



Sorris Sorris 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

excellent location. An issue that needs to be addressed is the illegal cutting of firewood. Acacia and mopane trees have excellent wood, used for firewood, and in the case of mopane also as a building material. But the trees grow slowly due to the aridity of the area. An informal industry that has grown up around the supply of firewood to towns and the tourism industry needs to be strictly controlled through the existing permit system to avoid the over-utilisation.

Human wildlife conflict is a challenge where ever people coexist with wild animals, especially if these include elephants and large predators. Elephant conflicts have been reduced in the conservancy through dedicated waterholes for wildlife and the protection of water infrastructure. Predator problems can be reduced through zoning and keeping livestock in enclosures at night. Importantly, these species 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.



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

... AND THE FUTURE

luxury lodge. The conservancy plans to turn a site called Decca Station, currently used as a base for game counts, into a training centre. Another idea is to develop a breeding stud for quality bulls and rams, which could bring income as well as better quality livestock to the area.

The conservancy stands at a crossroads in more ways than one. For a rural community that has relied on agriculture in an arid environment for generations, new sources of income such as hunting and tourism offer exciting opportunities. Through strategic developments, these sectors can generate widespread benefits, ensuring long-term conservancy success and the sustainable use of resources. By balancing the costs of living with wildlife with the suite of benefits that can be gained from natural resource use, and by enabling new income streams, the conservancy



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

natural stop-over for visitors. There is space at the information centre to expand the small craft market and to develop other enterprises.

Conservancy plans include the development of a café at the information centre, as well as offering guiding services to attractions such as rock art sites. The conservancy would also like to operate its own campsite, and could benefit significantly from plans to develop a

can revitalize the community. Hunting already provides a steady stream of income to Sorris Sorris. The proposed lodge and the prospects of increased employment and craft sales, as well as potentially stronger markets for livestock, can allow the conservancy to provide a better standard of living for its inhabitants.

And the sunshine? That will always be there in abundance.

Come to Sorris Sorris –
be part of the future...





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For more information and updates:

Sorris Sorris Conservancy

P.O. Box 84

Khorixas

Telephone: +264 (0)60 8068361

www.namibiawildlifesafaris.com | www.nacso.org.na