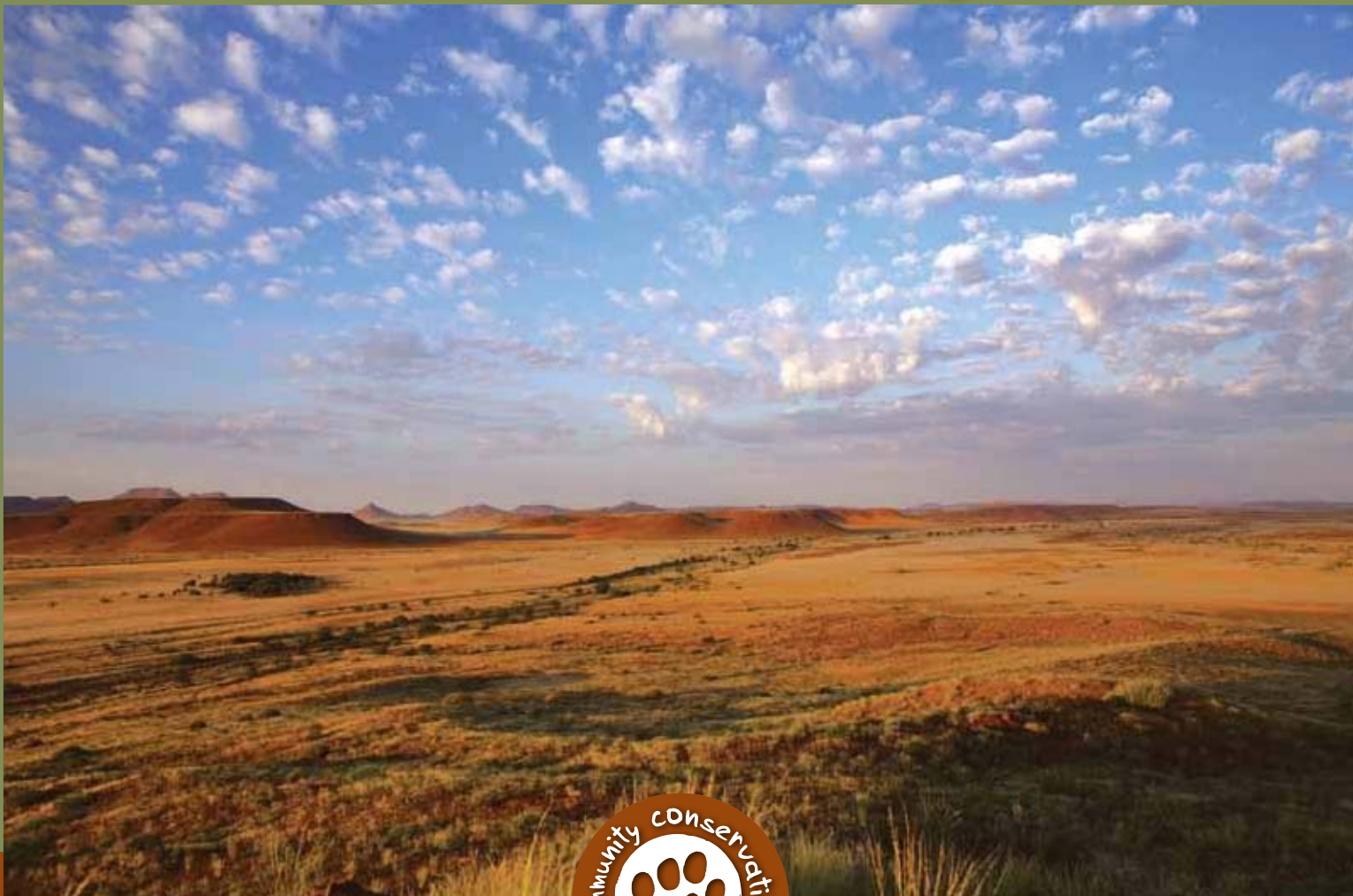


Living with wildlife –  
the story of **Torra Conservancy**



Kemp

Torra – after the red 'torra' rocks predominant in the area



## Living with wildlife – the story of TORRA CONSERVANCY

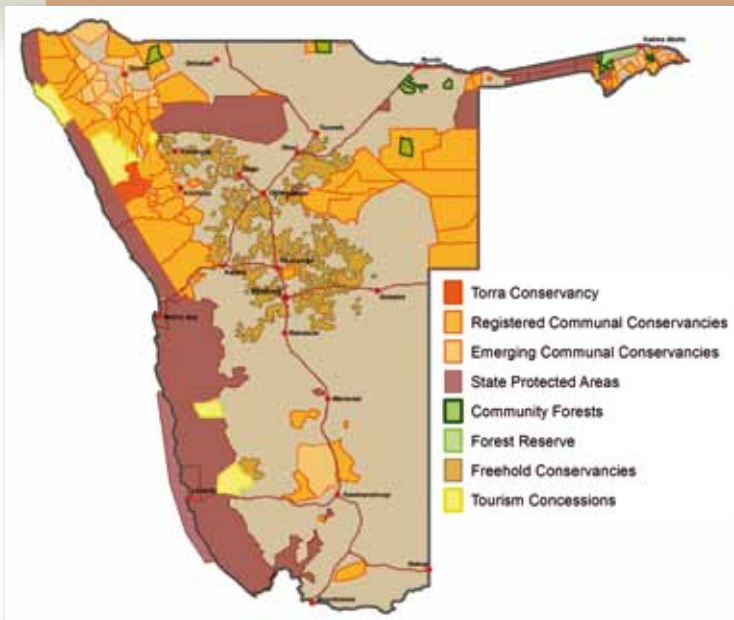
Conservancies  
enable development and conservation over large areas...

### MILESTONES AND SUCCESSES

- 1995** – Damaraland Camp opens and becomes the first joint venture tourism partnership between a community and the private sector (Wilderness Safaris) in Namibia
- 1996** – policy changes allow communal area residents to benefit from wildlife and tourism by forming conservancies
- 1998** – Torra Conservancy is registered in June
- 1998** – Damaraland Camp wins an international tourism award, the Silver Otter
- 2000** – Torra becomes part of the annual North-West Game Count
- 2001** – Torra Conservancy becomes financially independent and is able to cover own operating expenses
- 2001** – Benny Roman, Chairman of Torra Conservancy, wins the Namibian Professional Hunting Association ‘Conservationist of the Year’ Award
- 2001** – implementation of the Event Book monitoring system in Torra Conservancy
- 2002** – Torra becomes the first communal area conservancy to sell live game
- 2004** – Torra wins the UNDP Equator Prize at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2005** – Damaraland Camp receives the World Travel & Tourism Council ‘Tourism for Tomorrow’ Conservation Award

### QUICK FACTS

**Region:** Kunene  
**Size:** 3,493 square kilometres  
**Approximate population:** 1,200  
**Main languages:** Khoekhoegowab, Otjiherero and Afrikaans  
**Date of registration:** June 1998



### 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

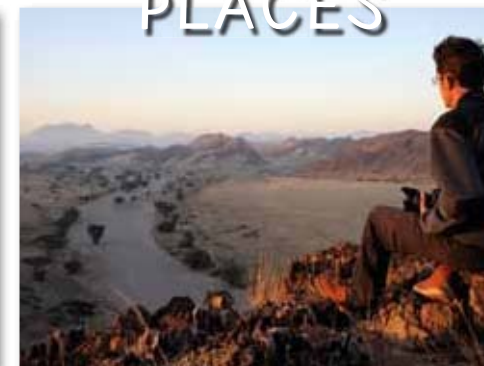
## TORRA offers an enchanting mix of

### PEOPLE



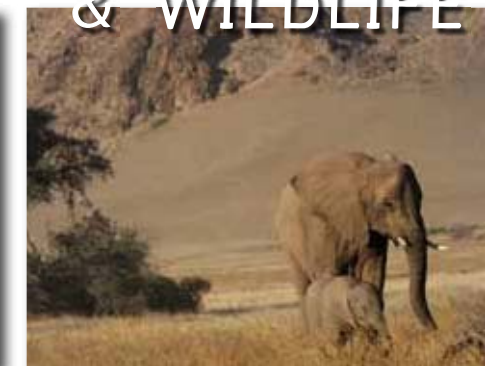
*interesting cultures and dynamic communities committed to sustainability - people living in Torra share a common vision for managing their area and its resources*

### PLACES



*vast, diverse and spectacular landscapes – the Huab River, mountains and desert plains... a healthy environment diversifies economic opportunities and drives economic growth*

### & WILDLIFE



*charismatic, free-roaming wildlife – elephant, black rhino, lion, leopard, diverse plains game, endemic birdlife... 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.

**Torra**, which lies in the south of the Kunene Region and covers close to 3,500 square kilometres, is home to approximately 1,200 people, who

speak a mix of Khoekhoegowab, Otjiherero and Afrikaans. While their origin prior to settling in Namibia centuries ago is uncertain, the Damara have occupied the general region for a very long time. Settlement in the last century was heavily influenced by the German colonisation and later South African administration of Namibia. Throughout this 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. Many Damara people are originally from the general area, while others were forcibly resettled there when Damaraland was created. Some residents of Torra were forcibly moved to Namibia from the Nama community of Riemvasmaak near Upington in South Africa in 1973-74. There are also many more recent immigrants from elsewhere in Namibia living in the conservancy today. Torra, which was amongst the first four conservancies registered in Namibia in 1998, has grown into one of the most successful conservancies in the country.



## RESOURCES AND ATTRACTIONS

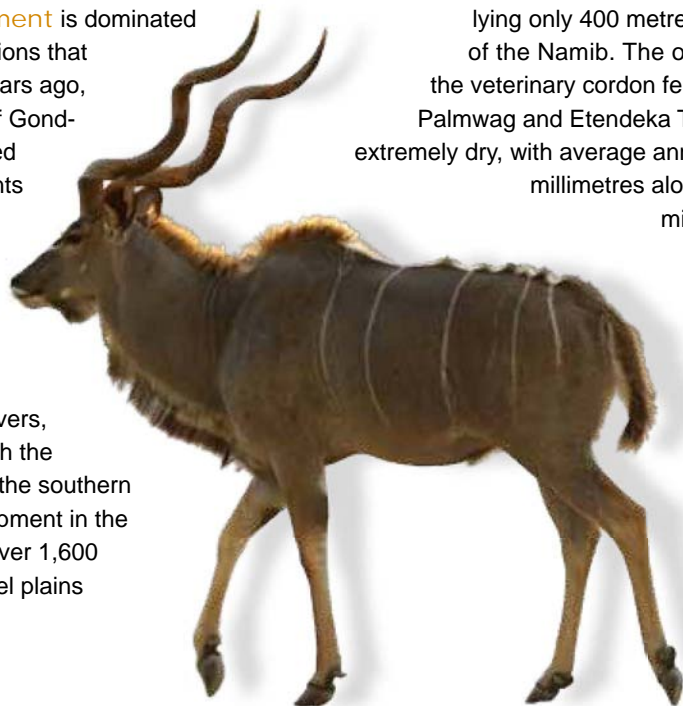
Conservancies  
are living landscapes...

The **culture** of the Torra community is a rich mixture of heritage influences. The Damara have utilised the region for centuries, yet share a common language with the Nama, who settled in parts of central and north-western Namibia during the 1800s. Namas also made up the majority of the original Riemvasmaaker community in South Africa. Although forcibly resettled to Torra during the Apartheid era, many Riemvasmaakers decided to stay when the first democratic government of South Africa returned the land around Riemvasmaak to the indigenous community in 1994. Hereros first settled in north-western Namibia around 500 years ago and also make up part of the vibrant culture of Torra.



*Damara, Riemvasmaaker, Herero - the residents of Torra can tell the stories of a turbulent history in a harsh yet stunningly beautiful environment... and the cultural heritage of Torra glows as rich as the red torra rocks*

Much of the spectacular Torra **environment** is dominated by the remnants of enormous volcanic eruptions that shaped this area some 125 to 132 million years ago, prior to the break up of the supercontinent of Gondwanaland. The volcanic fissures that precluded the continental shifts poured massive amounts of lava across the land, resulting in the hard basalt layers that cap the nearby Etendeka Mountains and litter the landscape with richly coloured red rocks, after which the conservancy is named – torra meaning red rock. The Huab River, one of Namibia's largest ephemeral rivers, creates a linear oasis winding its way through the dramatic, ancient erosion landscapes along the southern border of the conservancy. The basalt escarpment in the east of the conservancy rises to heights of over 1,600 metres above sea level, falling away to gravel plains



lying only 400 metres above sea level along the fringes of the Namib. The only long fence in the entire area is the veterinary cordon fence which separates Torra from the Palmwag and Etendeka Tourism Concessions. The region is extremely dry, with average annual rainfall ranging from about 150 millimetres along the hills in the east to a mere 50 millimetres along the Skeleton Coast.

Most rain falls during sporadic thunderstorms between January and March, but is extremely variable. Evaporation rates are tremendously high, but the harshness is often soothed by cool winds and morning fog coming from the Atlantic Ocean. In the west, Torra receives up to 50 days of fog each year, providing essential moisture to many plants and animals.



*red rocks tumble down from basalt hills to spread the million-year-old story of the break up of Gondwanaland across the plains; wildlife stops to listen, but hearing nothing other than a ringing silence and the whisper of the wind, goes on about its business... in Torra we can almost feel the endless shaping of the earth*

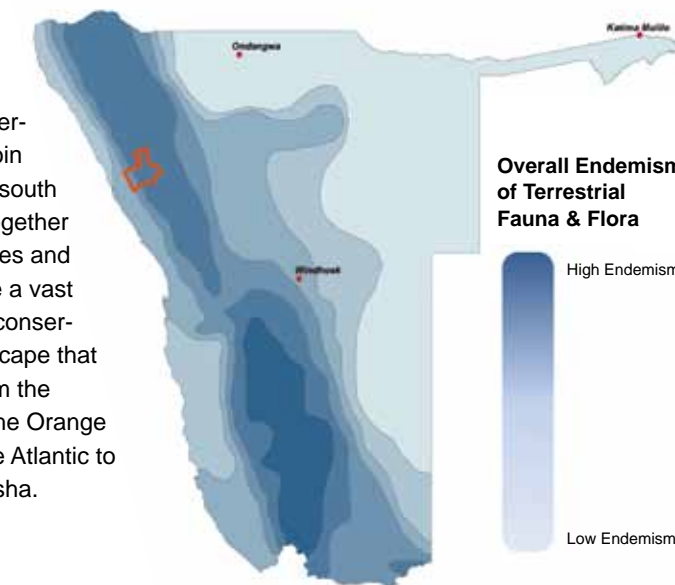
Since the establishment of conservancies, **wildlife** numbers in communal areas have rebounded from historic lows prior to independence. Torra is home to a wonderful diversity of indigenous fauna, including four of the Big Five – elephant, black rhino, lion and leopard. Giraffe, Hartmann's mountain zebra, kudu, gemsbok, springbok, duiker, steenbok, klipspringer, baboon, ostrich, warthog, cheetah, spotted and brown hyaena, caracal and jackal also occur.



Situated on the eastern fringes of the escarpment, Torra provides habitat for many of Namibia's endemic and near-endemic species. Numerous rodents, frogs and scorpions, as well as 40% of the snake species and 20% of the lizard species are Namibian endemics. Over 170 bird species have been recorded in Torra, including the near-endemic 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.

Plants have adapted to the harsh conditions in often extraordinary ways. Torra is home to the renowned welwitschia, a unique plant with no relatives anywhere else in the world. Ana, mopane and camel thorn trees are the most abundant of the taller trees found along the larger rivers, providing important sustenance for elephants and other animals.

**Around Torra...** The conservancy is located on the southern edge of the Palmwag Tourism Concession, an important refuge for wildlife in the north-west, and a popular tourism destination. The Skeleton Coast Park creates the western border of Torra, while further conservancies adjoin Torra to the south and east. Together conservancies and parks create a vast contiguous conservation landscape that reaches from the Kunene to the Orange and from the Atlantic to eastern Etosha.





## LIVELIHOODS AND DEVELOPMENT

Conservancies  
empower rural people...

Khoekhoegowab, the home language of the majority of people living in the Torra Conservancy, is spoken by a little over ten percent of the national population. Over 40 percent of people in the Kunene Region have Otjiherero as their home language, although southern Kunene was a part of Damaraland prior to independence and Damaras still make up the majority of residents in this area today.

The region received very little development attention prior to independence, as development in communal areas was sorely neglected during both German rule and the South African administration of Namibia after World War 1. Many of the settlements in Torra are located along the



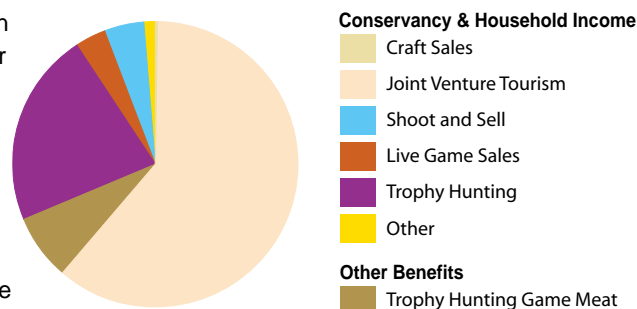
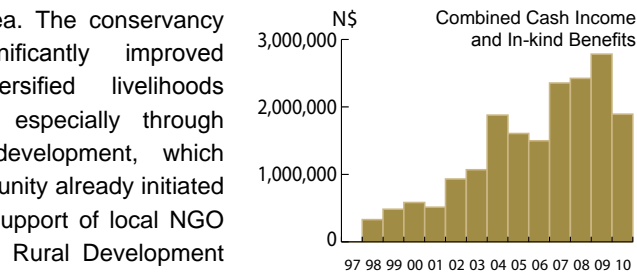
*Torra facilitates access to diverse training and capacity building, empowers individuals, especially women, to actively take part in decision-making, as well as instilling a renewed sense of pride in cultural heritage*

main road from Khorixas to Palmwag, as the rugged topography of the conservancy makes access to other areas difficult. Bergsig is the biggest settlement in the conservancy, but provides only limited facilities and services, including a few small shops, tyre-repair services, a clinic, the conservancy office, a kindergarten and a combined school providing education to grade 10. The regional centre of Khorixas lies about 120 kilometres east of the conservancy and has a public hospital, a number of schools and a variety of other facilities and services. Lack of water has always been an inhibiting factor in the conservancy, both for settlement and farming. While the residents of Torra now get their water from boreholes, these are expensive to drill and maintain, and often provide only limited supplies.

Livelihood activities for most residents of Torra have traditionally been centred around livestock, and people still farm with cattle, goats and sheep today. The Riemvasmaaker community started small scale fruit and vegetable gardening and many households continue to grow a variety of crops. Some income from employment, pensions and remittances supplements the livelihoods of most people

in the area. The conservancy has significantly improved and diversified livelihoods in Torra, especially through tourism development, which the community already initiated with the support of local NGO Integrated Rural Development & Nature Conservation

(IRDNC) in 1995, prior to the registration of the conservancy. By forming the

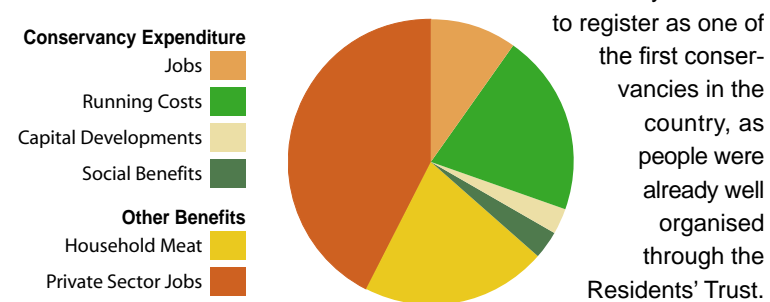


*Benefits to the conservancy and its members come from a variety of sources. Sources and amounts vary from year to year, depending on factors such as agreements with private sector partners, and market fluctuations. The pie chart shows the main benefit sources in 2010.*



*the conservancy enables 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*

Ward 11 Residents' Trust, the community was able to negotiate as a legal entity with potential tourism investors. This led to the development of Damaraland Camp, the first joint-venture lodge in Namibia. The far-sighted agreement with Wilderness Safaris guaranteed employment and training for locals, a percentage of income to the community, as well as the ability to gradually acquire full ownership of the lodge. This laid the foundations for future joint venture agreements in other parts of Namibia. Once the conservancy legislation was passed in 1996, the



*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.*

After registration, the conservancy was soon able to add other areas of income and community benefits, including trophy hunting and shoot and sell hunting, which generate important cash income to cover conservancy running costs. Trophy hunting and own-use hunting also allow the conservancy to distribute game meat to residents. The conservancy continues to invest in a variety of capital developments as well as providing a range of social benefits. Cash payments have been distributed to residents, and the conservancy has funded a number of social projects, including the development of a community hall and kindergarten, the provision of equipment to the school and support of various community celebrations.

The C39 gravel road from Khorixas to the Skeleton Coast provides excellent access for visitors. The C43 continues on to Palmwag and

other destinations in the north-west, and the C40 offers a spectacular route option to Torra from Kamanjab via the Grootberg Pass. A number of small four-wheel drive tracks traverse the conservancy, but should only be explored in the company of qualified guides. Damaraland Camp and Damaraland Adventure Camp, both run by Wilderness Safaris, offer great tourism accommodation in Torra and provide a range of community benefits. The example of Pascolena Florry, who was herding goats before being employed at Damaraland Camp, and who worked her way up to become the first black woman lodge manager in Namibia, and later area manager for a number of Wilderness Safaris lodges in the region, epitomises the capacity building that joint ventures can facilitate. After recently acquiring full ownership of Damaraland Camp, Torra sold 60% back to Wilderness and are now operating as equity partners. The Palmwag Tourism Concession generates further income for Torra and neighbouring Anabeb and Sesfontein Conservancies through another benefit sharing agreement with Wilderness Safaris. Kuidas Camp provides accommodation for guests of Skeleton Coast Safaris and also generates important benefits through a joint venture agreement.



# MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES

Conservancies facilitate sustainability...

The management structure of Torra consists of an eight member management committee. Employees include five community game guards, a field officer, a community activist and a receptionist. The conservancy has its own office at Bergsig and owns a four-wheel drive vehicle to carry out its activities. From the early days of the Ward 11 Residents' Trust, Torra has received a variety of support from field-based NGO, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC).

Activities... The conservancy has been zoned for different land uses, including a large core wildlife and tourism area in the west, two mixed use zones that combine a variety of uses but also act as buffer

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

zones, and a wildlife area reserved for hunting. The zoning facilitates effective land use and minimises conflicts between different activities.

Conservancy game guards undertake a variety of natural resource monitoring activities throughout the conservancy, including monthly fixed route patrols, done on foot across the rugged terrain. Through the patrols, a wealth of data is recorded as part of the Event Book monitoring system, including 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. 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, as well as on an evaluation of



the previous year's utilisation. This enables the conservancy to carry out own-use hunting to supply residents with meat, as well as entering into trophy hunting concession agreements. Torra was the first communal conservancy in Namibia to capture and sell live game, which was translocated to boost game populations into other regions.

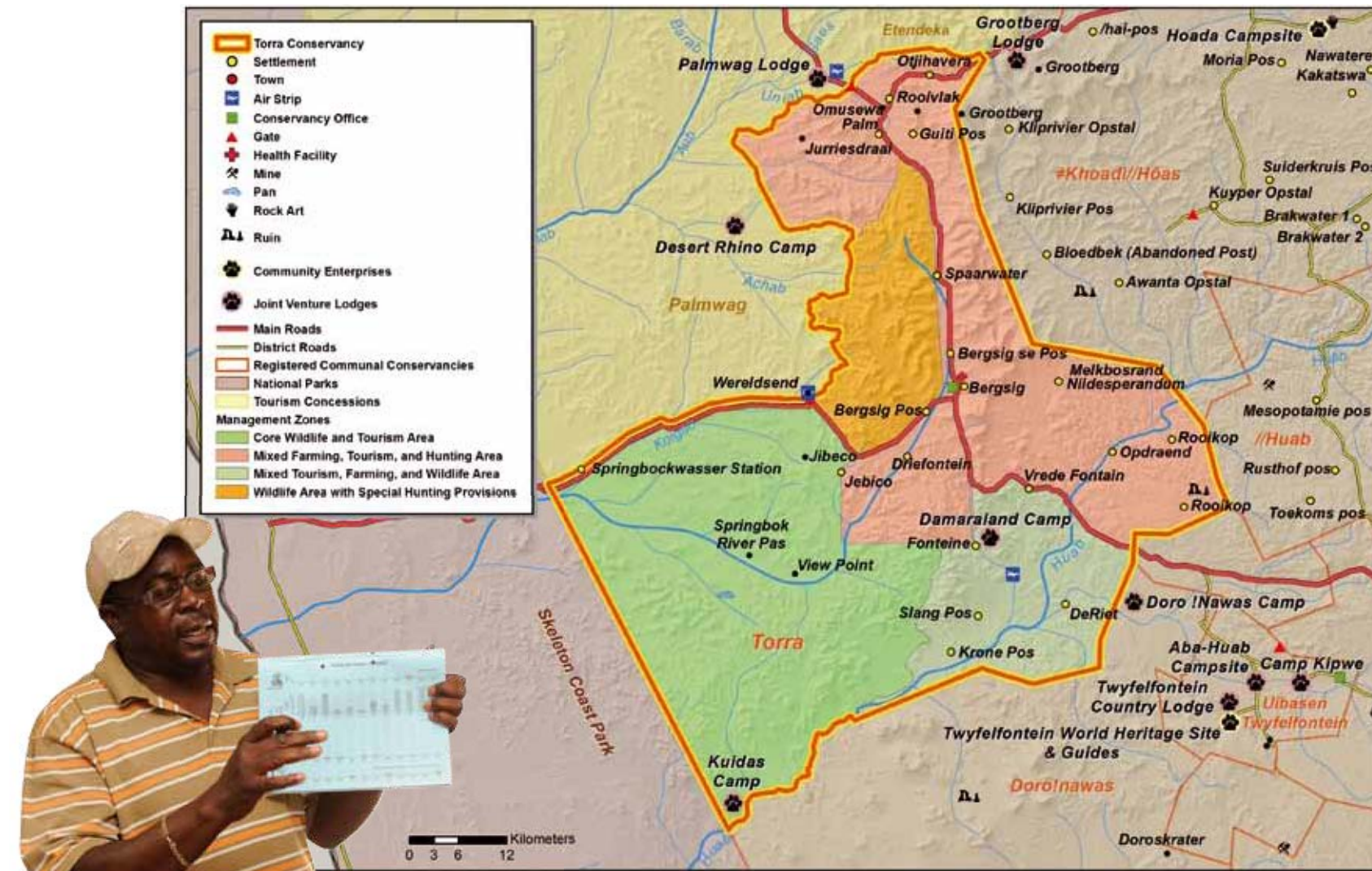
The conservancy strives to actively mitigate human wildlife conflicts and receives financial and logistical assistance from the MET to achieve this. Through the National Policy on Human Wildlife Conflict Management, a system of providing financial offsets for losses is now being implemented in collaboration with government. 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 before payments can be made.

The strategic use of wildlife and other resources has allowed the conservancy to generate a suite of direct benefits to the local community, and thus find a balance between agricultural land uses and those based on natural resources. This positive natural resource management has

*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*

created a variety of conservation successes and has also enabled a strong framework for tourism development. This has earned Torra Conservancy a number of national and international awards, including the prestigious Conservation Award, one of the 'Tourism for Tomorrow

Awards' of the World Travel & Tourism Council, as well as the UNDP Equator Prize at the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, and the 'Silver Otter' tourism award.





# CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES...

Conservancies are full of opportunities...

The wealth of natural resources in Torra, complemented by an interesting cultural heritage, provides largely untapped potential.

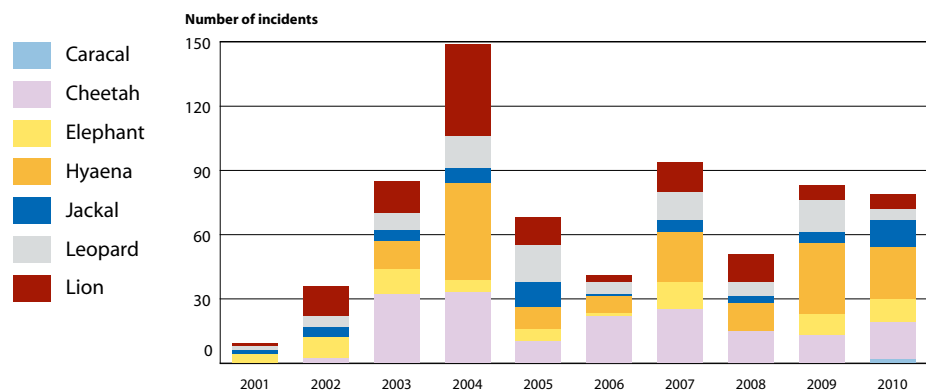
**Challenges...** Torra continues to face the challenge of finding a balance between farming and natural resource management activities in an arid environment. Increasing wildlife populations, and especially the significant recovery of large predators across much of the north-west, have considerably increased human wildlife conflicts. This is a challenge where ever people coexist with wild animals, but is especially prevalent when large predators and elephants are present. Predators are



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

not easily compatible with livestock farming and cause considerable losses. The neighbouring Palmwag Tourism Concession is a stronghold for the free-roaming lion population of the north-west, which has recovered from a low of around 25 individuals in the mid-nineties to well over a hundred today. Torra has to deal with livestock losses caused by lions each year, and hyaena, cheetah, leopard, caracal and jackal also cause significant losses, especially amongst small stock. Elephants raid fields and gardens, and damage water infrastructure in an attempt to access drinking water. Mitigation measures such as keeping livestock in secure enclosures at night, protecting gardens and water installations against elephants, as well as creating dedicated water points for wildlife, have effectively reduced incidents. Importantly, predators and elephants are of great value, both to the ecosystem and tourism, but need to generate direct benefits for local communities, if people are going to tolerate living with them in the long run.

Torra has diverse opportunities to expand benefits from natural resources, which can also lead to further conservation successes. The arid environment might make farming difficult, but the spectacular desert landscapes create a wonderful tourism attraction. And while conflicts with wildlife are perhaps the conservancy's biggest current challenge, the wildlife provides a range of opportunities to generate



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

# ... AND THE FUTURE



*strategic development that optimises benefits from natural resources while mitigating pressures on the environment can continue to facilitate a bright future for Torra Conservancy*

significant benefits that can surpass income from farming activities. Torra is already benefiting from tourism in the conservancy, as well as the neighbouring Palmwag Concession, and a variety of plans exist to expand development in this area. The concessions policy of the Ministry of Environment & Tourism has created new opportunities for park or concession neighbours to benefit directly from resources

to which they had historical access, which was denied by changes in land status. Torra, Anabeb and Sesfontein all border onto the Palmwag Concession, and the three conservancies are working together to maximise benefits from the concession for the local communities.

The attractions that local cultures offer are often overlooked by the Namibian tourism industry. This sector can be further developed in Torra by making the cultural heritage of the area accessible to visitors, while at the same time enhancing a pride in traditions amongst the local community. Cultural resources can be difficult to access, and excellent interpretation through guiding and information materials can facilitate the development of this sector.

Trophy hunting has been an important source of income for the

conservancy for many years. Hunting is an integral part of African heritage, and trophy hunting can always remain an important activity that complements other sources of income. In the end it is the combination of numerous sectors, including tourism and related products and services, hunting and other consumptive wildlife uses, as well as the use of indigenous plants and other indigenous resources,

that allows communities to significantly enhance and diversify livelihoods beyond agriculture to create a bright future for the local community.

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





[www.namibiawildlifesafaris.com](http://www.namibiawildlifesafaris.com) | [www.nacso.org.na](http://www.nacso.org.na)

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



**For more information and updates:**  
**Torra Conservancy**  
P.O. Box 462  
Khorixas  
Telephone: +264 (0)67 697063

Copyright © NACSO 2012; All photos taken in Torra & Palmwag TC by Helge Denker, Frans Lanting & Lucy Kemp; Layout: H Denker; Charts: Alice Jarvis; Information compiled by Lucy Kemp, John Mendelsohn & Brian Jones, revised by H Denker; Maps: Sylvia Thompson; Back cover map: RAISON; Printing: John Meinert Printing