

Corridors of the *future*

Text **Ginger Mauney**
Photographs **NACSO / WWF in Namibia**

“How many people have had a dangerous encounter with an elephant?” I asked. Of the fourteen Sobbe Conservancy members in the room, six people raised their hands. “How many of you know someone who has been killed by an elephant?” All 14 people raised their hands. Turns out, they all knew the same person, a Sobbe Conservancy member, who had met some friends at a local village. After sunset, on his way home, he ran into a herd of elephants. He shouted at them but he was alone, and in the darkness he was trampled to death. There must have been several frightened creatures in the bush that night. Elephant and human, but the one that weighs two thousand kilograms more will always win. This is a terrifying fact of life for rural Namibians. But when I asked if they are committed to living with elephants, every hand went up. This is why there is a future for wildlife in Namibia.





Members of the Sobbe Conservancy meet to discuss the protection of a vital elephant corridor that cuts through their conservancy.



As you drive down the main artery that loops through the Zambezi Region you cross the Sobbe Conservancy. It is beautiful land, but unremarkable. In an area known for flowing rivers and lush vegetation, the Sobbe Conservancy is land-locked. Yet, despite this, it is part of a critically important wildlife corridor that allows elephants and other species to move freely across their traditional range in southern Africa.

Before and since the Sobbe Conservancy was established in 2006, the 1 027 people living there have protected this corridor for wildlife. They have not planted fields or erected *kraals* or built homes that would block the path. The corridor has been respected and protected as a place of unlimited access for wildlife, even when using it brings them into close proximity with humans.

Now the Sobbe Conservancy's selfless protection of this critical wildlife corridor is being rewarded.

Amarula, the liquor that is synonymous with the African elephant, has joined forces with Wildlife Credits, an innovative conservation initiative, to pay the Sobbe Conservancy for its proactive protection of this wildlife corridor.

This is cutting edge conservation where funding, channelled through Wildlife Credits, is paid directly to communities for measurable conservation results. Using camera traps and GPS tracking devices, the conservancy game guards are

revealing the true worth of this corridor, not only to elephant, but also to roan and sable antelope, lions, leopards, side-striped jackals and more than two dozen other species.

This is the first partnership of its kind in Namibia to engage with a local corporate entity, Distell Namibia, and an example of *payment for ecosystem services*. The concept's premise is that as ecosystems come under increasing pressure from industry and development, there is real, global value in conserving their integrity by maintaining healthy land, water bodies and wildlife populations, and this value should be transferred to the people who are at the frontline of protecting ecosystems, such as the Sobbe Conservancy.

Namibia is one of the few countries in the world where wildlife is increasing in range and numbers, including a growing population of elephant. Conservancies, such as Sobbe, are playing a critical role in providing space for elephants and other wildlife to roam free.

Lydiah Muyambango, the Sobbe Conservancy's Chairperson, said, "If you live with elephants it is hard because they destroy our crops, but it is good that the next generation will know elephants."

Creative conservation, smart partnerships and dedicated individuals – this is the future for wildlife, and Namibia is leading the way. **TNN**

To learn more about Wildlife Credits, please visit www.wildlifecredits.com and/or follow them on Facebook: www.facebook.com/amarulanamibia



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