

Elephants on Game Farms

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More and more game farmers on large game farms and reserves are making enquiries regarding keeping elephants on their farms and the possibility of elephant-back safaris.

The relocation of elephants to private game farms and nature reserves is an opportunity to manage and control the growing elephant population in South Africa, without reducing their numbers. The relocation of elephants to game farms places enormous responsibility on the owner. The reasons for relocating elephants need to be carefully considered and there are definite requirements that need to be in place before, during and after their relocation. The following factors are of particular importance:-

- A thorough knowledge and understanding of elephants and their management must be developed before their relocation.
- A management plan based on a flexible management policy must be in place.
- The financial implications must be thoroughly investigated.
- An ecological impact study, together with an evaluation of the carrying capacity of the area must be compiled.
- Permit requirements and insurance policies must be in place.
- A suitable area for the building of the holding facilities must be carefully chosen and these facilities must be constructed to strict safety requirements and specifications.
- Special attention must be given to the erection, function and effectiveness of the electric perimeter fences and controlled release (grazing?) area. The elephants' introduction to the controlled release (grazing?) area is critically important to the success of the entire project. This is when they will experience the electric fences for the first time and it is important that at this time, the elephants develop a lasting respect for the fences.
- Long term planning must be in place, in respect of problem animals, habitat destruction and overpopulation.
- It is important to be aware of possible future problems and make provision for the handling thereof.

The implementation of elephant-back safaris is an option that must be considered. It is extremely unlikely that South Africa will be swamped by

elephant-back safaris due to the various limitations and problems that can arise, such as the purchasing of elephants, the availability of experienced handlers, and the high costs involved.

The most promising way to begin elephant-back safaris in South Africa is to purchase already tame elephants from another elephant-back safari operator. Elephants are not merely a type of 4x 4 vehicle that can be taken to a professional for repairs when something goes wrong. The purchase of tame elephants from other countries must therefore only be considered under the condition that the previous owner/manager, remains responsible for the elephants for a few years and that the previous handlers will remain with the elephants until such time as the local handlers have gained enough experience. It is also important that the elephants' new owner obtain practical experience with them, as well as experience in their proper management.

Many of the requirements critical to the management of elephants, such as insurance, permits, a management plan and the correct construction of holding facilities, also apply to the correct management of tame elephants. More important still, is that tame elephants receive correct care and handling, and that both the financial means, as well as provisional plans, are in place to care for the elephants in the event of problem animals and the bankruptcy or death of the owner.