3. Parc National du "W"

Geographical Coordinates approx. 12°00'N 2°30'E **Area** 235,000ha

Location About 450km east-south-east of the city of Ouagadougou, easternmost Burkina Faso.

Date of Ramsar Designation 27 June 1990.

Other International Designations None. However, the site forms part of a large, trans-border protected area (shared by Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger) and is contiguous with the Ramsar site of the same name in Niger (see Niger site account number 1).

National Designations National Park.

Principal Features A floodplain region extending along the Mekrou river in the upper Niger basin. The region's vegetation is composed of shrubby and wooded savannah (e.g. *Balanites aegyptiaca*, *Entada africana*, *Vitellaria paradoxa* etc.), with gallery forest of *Ficus* spp. along the river. Human activities within the area include livestock rearing and agriculture. The site supports a rich mammal fauna, including ungulates such as *Alcelaphus buselaphus*, *Tragelaphus scriptus*, *Kobus* spp., *Gazelle* spp., *Loxodonta africana*, *Hippopotamus amphibius*, *Syncerus coffer*, *Hippotragus equinus* and *Damaliscus lunutas*, as well as carnviores e.g. *Panthera pardus*, *P. leo*, *Acinonyx jubatus*, *Hyaena hyaena*, *Crocuta crocuta* and *Lycaon pictus*. Birds include *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*, *Circus pygargus*, *Pluvianus aegyptius*, *Tringa glareola*, *Calidris minuta* and *Philomachus pugnax*. (1a,3b)

Conservation Issues There is some poaching and encroachment of agriculture into the National Park, which if uncontrolled, is likely to have serious impacts. A number of management measures have been proposed, including the establishment of a management body; *in situ* marking of the park boundaries; restoration of pools; acquisition of logistical support; repair of access tracks; and improved cooperation with the authorities in Niger and Benin.

INFORMATION SHEET

Name:	Parc National du W, by Decree No. 6009/S/ET, 4 August 1954
Area:	235,000 ha.
Location:	south-east between 11°-13° N and 02°-03° E
Biogeographical domain:	Sudanian
Topography:	In the upper Niger basin, an extensive plain bordering the River Mékrou which flows from south to north in a shallow gorge. In the south is the strange rock formation of the Koudou Falls. Mostly lying between 200-300 m above sea level, the plain reaches over 300 m in a few places and culminates at 344 m on the Atakora Hills along the southern edge of the Park. There are several accelerated erosion points along the Mékrou.
Geology and soils:	Very varied geology consisting of an Infracambrian (Voltaian system) and Precambrian mantle with sandstone, quartzites, schists and syntectonic granites, mostly covered by slightly evolved erosion soils on fine gravel; also tropical ferrimorphic soils, pseudogley mineral hydromorphs and raw mineral soils.
Flora:	Wooded grassland and forest savanna: *Balanites aegyptiaca, Entada africana, Vitellaria paradoxa, Parkia biglobosa, Burkea africana, Terminalia avicennoides, Pterocarpus erinaceus, Detarium mocrocarpum, Piliostoma reticulata, Sterculia tomentosa, Sclerocarya birrea, Afzelia africana, Maytenus senegalensis, Combretum spp*., with, on the bottomlands, *Anogeissus leiocarpus, Daniellia oliveri, Khaya senegalensis* and *Cassia sieberiana.* The river bank gallery forests (Ficus spp. et al) are never very thick. *Adansonia digitata* is a noteworthy species. The grass cover is mainly Andropogonae, with *Schoenefeldia gracilis, Loudetia simplex* and *L. togoensis* and *Hyparrhenia hirta.*
Fauna:	Porcupine, Senegal bushbaby, flying lemur, stork, Patas monkey, side-striped jackal, zorilla, honey badger, civet, common genet, forest genet, mongoose sp., spotted hyena, wildcat, serval, caracal, lion, leopard, cheetah(?), aardvark, elephant, warthog, bushbuck, sable antelope, defassa kob, waterbuck, reedbuck, hartebeest, blesbok, red-fronted gazelle, red-flanked duiker, common duiker, oribi, buffalo.
Birds:	Abyssinian roller, jabiru, marabou, wood sandpiper, Montagu's harrier, plover, little stint, grasshopper buzzard, gray heron, cattle egret, hammerhead stork, francolin, guineafowl, ruff, Egyptian plover, nightjar sp. and others.
Mean annual rainfall:	710·58 mm (calculated over 64 years: 1921-85). Note the extremely variable rainfall (450 mm in the north; 600-900 mm in the south).
Hydrology:	see map.

HERDING

Although the population of Tapoa is considered to be mainly made up of farmers with a few herders, the former can easily be assimilated with the latter, since all farmers in Tapoa own a few head of livestock. Herding of both cattle and other stock is a year-round activity.
Thus, whether they involve herding conducted alone or associated with farming, the activities of the population living next to the protected areas are not negligible and in some cases can present management problems.

FARMING:

Apart from the local population's need for farmland, the W National Park has been coming under strong pressure from migrants in recent years. Patrols sometimes, even frequently, discover newly ploughed fields on the fringes of the Park, these fields can be expected to creep inside the perimeter, if they have not already done so.
Since migratory flows are continuing, the overall problem of protected areas being taken over for use, with the authorities powerless to act, is a daily concern.

POACHING

Historically, people have always depended on the forest for survival (food, clothes, habitat). Not so long ago, the Tapoa population, particularly the people living near the forest, had to poach to survive. This was especially because of the anarchic way in which fields were cultivated. In the search for fine soil, people started to till the land on the edge of the Park, and to encroach on the perimeter. Subsistence hunting is far too entrenched as a means of finding food between harvests for the people to just stop, despite what the legislation relating to W may say.
Now hunting is endangering the physical aspect of the Park with the use of various methods (snares, traps, bows and spears, sophisticated firearms) and is coming dangerously close to commercial hunting for trophies and meat.
Unless care is taken, poaching will put paid to our heritage and that of future generations. All such activities taken together, and exacerbated by climatic disturbances, have as their consequence the silting and drying up of waterholes, and the destruction of vegetation and shelter by uncontrolled brushfires, which in turn leads to degradation of flora, regression of fauna populations, concentration around scarce waterholes and the extermination of some species by poachers.

PROTECTION

For want of resources, W National Park, which has an ecological, economic, scientific, cultural and recreational function, has not benefited from the necessary action on the part of the authorities which would have allowed it to flourish. Protective action undertaken is limited to the dedicated supervisory work which three forest rangers, three temporarily employed trackers and a handful of hypothetical volunteers try to do with the paltry means available (motorcycles, bicycles and, of course, foot patrols).

This, it must be admitted, is very little indeed, however devoted to their enormous task these heroic people may be.

MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS FOR W NATIONAL PARK

Management action in W since its creation has been confined to the opening of 255 km of track for inspections and patrols, with a modicum of resurfacing being carried out from time to time.

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT PROTECTION

Management in W will require wildlife and habitat protection to better revitalise the ecosystem. Given the reality of the various ways in which human activity affects the Park, the local populations will have to be involved if such aims are to be achieved successfully.

It might be possible to reach a compromise between the authorities and the people whereby, in exchange for support for protective activity, certain work might be done for the local people's benefit (drilling for water, installing troughs, primary health care centre with equipment and funding, etc.…). It would then be possible to:

mark out the Park boundaries (surveying);
open firebreaks to ensure better control of early outbreaks of fire which do most damage to the local population;
erect signs and implant milestones;
develop regional cooperation to establish agreements according to the terms of the convention between Benin and Burkina Faso.

PHYSICAL MANAGEMENT

Whilst awaiting the establishment of a Outline Plan which will provide guidance for all future projects, here are some examples of actions which already seem essential:

- the establishment of a management unit (building additional premises);
- the creation and rehabilitation of waterholes (scouring ponds: Goalimbou, Koloanga, Guimpoagou, Soanda, Sapiaga, Tamalé, Bembado, Sindéloumbou);
- the creation of salt pans throughout the Park;
- procurement of logistic equipment;
- repairing access tracks to guard posts; and, finally
- creation in agreement with Niger and Benin of a regionwide area with biosphere reserve status, thus fostering international cooperation for conservation.