

IUCN/SSC AFROTHERIA SPECIALIST GROUP

Review of *Afrotherian Conservation*, Newsletter of the IUCN/SSC Afrotheria Specialist Group

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Executive Summary

In July-August 2009 the IUCN/SSC Afrotherian Specialist Group conducted a review of its annual newsletter, *Afrotherian Conservation*, to determine how readers and group members felt the publication could be improved. Feedback from 40 respondents showed general approval of the aim, format, content and frequency of the newsletter, with the sections “Message from the Chair”, “Species Profiles”, and the “Bibliography” most appreciated.

The main conclusions included:

- Maintain the current format, layout and annual frequency of the newsletter, publishing electronically by email and online
- Publish in English and French, with any French material being accompanied by an English translation;
- Delineate between popular articles and scientific papers
- Increase the number of articles and species profiles and try to have more review articles and project reports
- Provide information on fund-raising opportunities
- Use more photos but reduce the frequency that membership details are published
- Increase the circulation to a wider audience and ask more people for contributions.

Introduction

Afrotherian Conservation is a newsletter published once a year by the IUCN Species Survival Commission Afrotheria Specialist Group (ASG). Its aim is to promote the exchange of news and information on the conservation of, and applied research into, golden moles, sengis, hyraxes, tenrecs and the armadillo. Six editions of the newsletter have been published since 2002:

- Number 1 - June 2002
- Number 2 - November 2003
- Number 3 - April 2005
- Number 4 - May 2006
- Number 5 - Dec 2007
- Number 6 - Dec 2008.

A seventh edition is planned for December 2009.

The newsletter is published online on the group’s website at:

<http://researcharchive.calacademy.org/research/bmammals/afrotheria/newsletter.html>

In addition, copies are sent by email to some members and other readers that request it. Some hard copies have also been distributed by post.

As a new quadrennial of IUCN began in 2009 the newsletter editor and ASG chair agreed it would be an appropriate time to conduct a survey of the ASG members, newsletter contributors and readers to gauge their opinion on the publication and identify its strengths and weaknesses. This survey therefore set out to review the aim, format and content of the publication and identify potential improvements.

Methods

The newsletter review was conducted using an internet-based questionnaire developed using Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). Twenty-four questions were posed (see Annex 1), grouped in 6 categories: aims and audience, use, format and frequency, content, contributions, and other feedback. Input was solicited by email from ASG members, ex-members, previous newsletter contributors, and other newsletter readers (biologists and conservationists) identified by the ASG Chair and the newsletter editor. In total 129 people were invited to participate in the survey during a seven-week period in July and August 2009.

Results

Forty people completed the survey, a response rate of 31%. These are referred to in the report as respondents, or people surveyed.

Respondents were from:

- Europe (20) - Belgium: 2, France: 1, Germany: 6, Italy: 1, Portugal: 1, Switzerland: 2, UK: 7
- North America (10) - USA: 10
- Africa (7) - DR Congo: 2, South Africa : 2, Tanzania: 3
- Madagascar (2)
- and Australia (1).

Aim and Audience

All but one respondent agreed that the existing aim of the newsletter was appropriate (*to promote the exchange of news and information on the conservation of, and applied research into, golden moles, sengis, hyraxes, tenrecs and the armadillo*).

No respondent disagreed with any of the stated audiences for the newsletter: *ASG members, Members of other specialist groups, Scientists working on Afrotheria, Conservationists working on Afrotheria, Students, Interested members of the public*. However, they agreed most strongly that the main audiences were 1. scientists working on Afrotheria; 2. conservationists working on Afrotheria, and 3. members of the ASG.

More than one respondent felt that additional audiences targeted should include conservation NGOs, donors, zoos and their associations, and government departments and agencies.

Use of the newsletter

The majority of people surveyed (64% of respondents) read most of the newsletter; 23% read all of it and 13% read a little or some of it. If readers forwarded the newsletter, 71% sent it to 1-5 people. Thirty-nine percent of people printed it. Most commonly people forwarded the newsletter to colleagues or students.

Conclusion 1: The editor to work with ASG members to produce a list of people (especially from conservation NGOs, zoos, donors and government agencies) who should receive the newsletter directly to increase circulation.

Format and frequency

Sixty-eight percent of respondents felt the overall newsletter format and layout is excellent or very good (Figure 1). Everyone felt it was at least good. Eighty-four percent of people surveyed felt that the best form of publishing the newsletter was by electronic copy circulated by email, though 73% felt it should still be posted on the ASG website (Figure 2). Thirteen and a half percent of people surveyed felt a printed version could be produced if a donor was found; but only one person felt it was worth while charging a subscription fee.

Figure 1: Feedback on the format and layout of the newsletter.

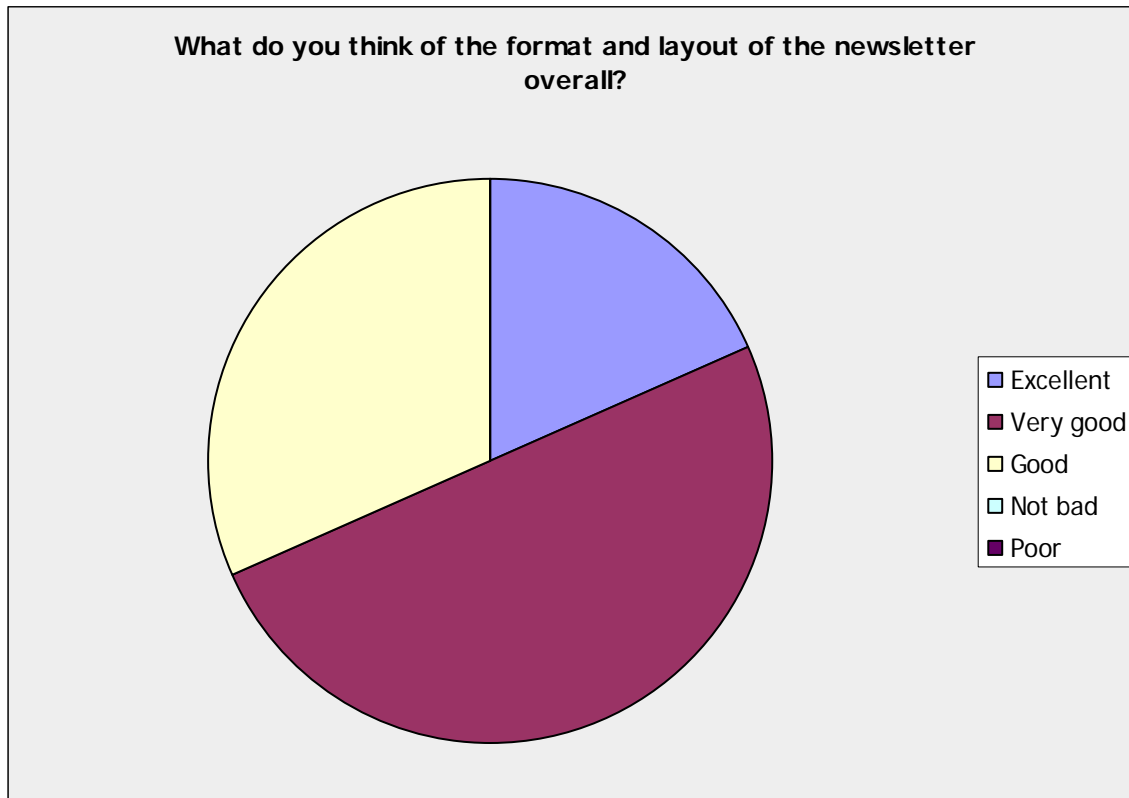
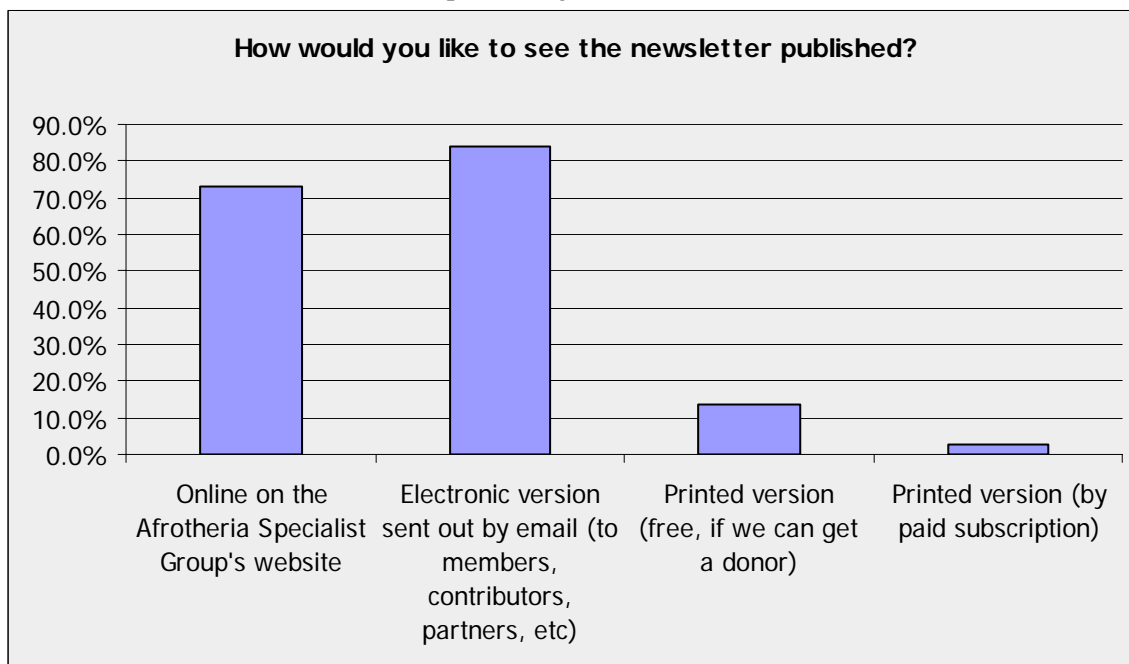


Figure 2: Feedback on the format for publishing the newsletter.



The most favoured language format was to publish the newsletter in English and French, with any French material being accompanied by an English translation (79% of respondents agreed with this system). Sixty-eight percent of people surveyed felt that the current publication rate of once per year was appropriate. The remainder felt we could try to publish twice per year.

If funds are to be sought for printing and distributing a limited number of hard copies, or for translating text into English from the French, suggestions for fund-raising sources included:

- Greetings card sales
- Grants from donors, perhaps linked to conservation field projects

- Zoos
- Selling hardcopies/Subscriptions
- Adding an option on the website for donations
- IUCN/SSC secretariat
- Members
- Private sector, especially companies using Afrotheria as an emblem or icon.

Seven people felt that funds should not be used to produce hard copies of the newsletter as either hard copies were not necessary or it would be an unwise use of very limited resources, which could be better spent on conservation projects.

One respondent kindly offered to help translate text between French and English.

Conclusion 2: Maintain the current format, layout and annual frequency of the newsletter.

Conclusion 3: Continue to publish the newsletter electronically, and distribute directly by email and post on the ASG website.

Conclusion 4: Publish the newsletter in English and French, with any French material being accompanied by an English translation.

Conclusion 5: Fund-raising efforts for the group should concentrate on supporting conservation projects rather than funding newsletter printing.

Content

All of the current sections of the newsletter were felt to be good or excellent in terms of quality, level of interest and relevance to the publication's aims. The most favoured sections were the Message from the Chair, Species Profiles and the Bibliography. For each section the majority of respondents agreed they should be left as they are. The sections with most interest in expansion or increase in frequency were the articles (31%) and species profiles (29%). The section most commonly proposed to be reduced in frequency or cut was the membership list (31%).

More than one respondent suggested we should add sections that deal with funding opportunities.

Other suggestions proposed by individuals for additional sections included:

- Book reviews
- An IUCN or an SSC page (perhaps as part of the noticeboard) with news beyond Afrotherians
- Conference reports (short articles reporting on recent afrotherian research presented at national and international meetings)
- Miscellaneous or novel notes
- News about the advancement of African students working on afrotherians and details on student theses dealing with these animals.
- Advertisements for possible afrotherian research projects for the interest of students
- Conservation status of target taxa, as a yearly update taken from the IUCN website
- A page of afrotherian photography
- In the noticeboard, a section with conferences and job offers (and perhaps follow up on who attended and who secured certain jobs)
- The status of the Afrotheria in zoos and museum collections
- Reports on conservation initiatives
- Advances in understanding of the Afrotheria through studies of Sirenia and Proboscidea.

Two-thirds of people felt material was evenly balanced between the five target taxa. Many people commented that a completely even balance was not necessarily required or possible, and an imbalance is hard to avoid given the varying numbers of species in each taxon and the varying numbers of researchers working on them.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (81%) felt that the mix of articles published to date - reviews, new scientific results and more popular awareness-raising pieces on the 5 target taxa - was "about right". Fourteen percent of respondents felt the mix was excellent and no-one felt it was in need of revision. One respondent noted that "*If we want the newsletter to have an international impact, we might want to separate more clearly the scientific from the more popular articles*".

Examples of articles people enjoyed reading in the first six editions were the papers on:

- Afrotherian monophyly (Seiffert 2002, No. 1) – this paper "*has been quoted by a couple of articles in well known journals*".
- Ecology and behaviour of shrew tenrecs (Hilgartner 2005, No. 3)
- Biodiversity of the Tubilidentia (Lehmann 2006, No. 4)
- Description of sengi skull anatomy (Ihlau et al 2006, No. 4)
- Radio-tracking Namib golden moles (Rathbun & Rathbun 2006, No. 4)
- Observations of black-and-rufous sengis Diani Forest, Kenya (Moutou & Besnard 2006, No. 4)
- Streaked tenrecs species profile (Stephenson 2007, No. 5)
- Does the bush hyrax occur in North Africa? (Hoffman et al 2008, No. 6)
- The black and rufous sengi in Zanzibar (Siex & Delgado 2008, No. 6)
- A golden mole in Gabon (Kitchener et al. 2008, No. 6)
- Tales of sengi tails (Rathbun 2008, No. 6)

Lehmann 2006 and Rathbun 2008 were the most popular articles, both commended by 3 respondents each.

Twelve people gave ideas of what they would like to see more of in future editions. The most popular suggestion (three respondents) was to have more review articles. The second most popular proposals (two people each) were to have more material that focuses on genetics, evolution and species distributions, more progress reports on conservation or research projects, and more photographs.

Other suggestions included:

- More field stories and conservation issues
- Articles on anatomy, taxonomy, ecology.
- Local awareness of Afrotheria, and local people's involvement in research and conservation.
- Conservation work and how readers can help and/or contribute (e.g. TRAFFIC, ZSL Edge)
- Good news!

Conclusion 6: Maintain current newsletter sections but expand articles and species profiles as possible, use more photographs, and reduce the frequency of publishing membership details.

Conclusion 7: Add news items or noticeboard entries relating to fund-raising opportunities.

Conclusion 8: Make a clearer delineation between popular articles and scientific papers.

Conclusion 9: Encourage more review articles and papers on a broad range of technical issues (especially genetics, evolutionary studies and species distributions) as well as project progress reports.

Contributions

Fourteen respondents had contributed material to the newsletter, four of them more than once. Most (11) had contributed articles. Twenty-six people said they would be willing and able to contribute to future editions and most provided an outline of the sort of material they could produce. (The editor will follow up with them directly).

The reasons most commonly given by people who were not able to contribute revolved around two issues:

- a) their work focused on other taxa (e.g. *busy with rodents; main focus on other animals; my lack of direct involvement in Afrotheria.*)

b) they had no new or recent material on the Afrotheria (e.g. *I'm not working on aardvarks at the moment, so it would be difficult to contribute anything new; at present I do not have projects on Afrotherians directly; I am not working actively on sengis any longer; At my age I like to know what's going on but have little new information to contribute*).

One person noted that “*in the current climate of tenure decisions and impact factors it's not an ideal journal for early-career investigators. Hence increasing content of a practical nature (biblio, grad schools, conservation activities) would be a good thing*”.

The editor was encouraged to continue to put out calls for contributions, and reminders. Other suggestions for how he could encourage people to contribute more in future included mentions of arm-twisting, nudging, harassing, paying and finding people more time!

Ideas for the best way of soliciting articles from non-members included:

- Direct contact and calls for material, especially to authors of other papers or relevant experts.
- Distribute the newsletter more widely (including getting each member to distribute the newsletter and call for submissions as wide as possible)
- Collaborate with a refereed journal, for example Journal of Mammalogy
- Make the newsletter appealing to a broader audience.
- Publicize the newsletter (e.g. promoting it in the different international/national mammalian and zoological Societies, zoos, universities and at conferences)
- Post a permanent call for submissions on the website.
- Ask the IUCN Species Programme to include a general call for submissions to Specialist Group newsletters in the monthly SSC e-bulletin that goes to all SSC members.

Conclusion 10: Try to put out a wider call for contributions, by using fora such as the IUCN Species e-bulletin and by asking ASG members to help search for potential contributors.

Other Feedback

Ten respondents gave additional feedback. Samples include:

“Considering that we do this with virtually no financial support - it is hard to think how we can improve significantly. Well done, PJ!”

“I wish you well”.

“Don't give up!”

“I think it's very well done altogether”

“Let us know the results of the survey....I would appreciate knowing what fellow members think”

The feedback included suggestions for how to improve the newsletter such as:

- Include brief biographies of the authors
- Have more illustrations - cartoons, photos
- Ask someone in the IUCN programme to help us get the newsletter indexed
- Give the newsletter a more visible position on the home page.
- Invite renowned mammal specialists (non members) or curators of major collections to discuss their experience with afrotherians.
- Engage associations of small mammal enthusiasts.

Conclusions for Future Editions of the Newsletter

The survey produced generally positive feedback on the newsletter, and some concrete suggestions for how to improve its content and distribution in future.

In summary, the conclusions of the review are:

Conclusion 1: The editor to work with ASG members to produce a list of people (especially from conservation NGOs, zoos, donors and government agencies) who should receive the newsletter directly to increase circulation.

Conclusion 2: Maintain the current format, layout and annual frequency of the newsletter.

Conclusion 3: Continue to publish the newsletter electronically, and distribute directly by email and post on the ASG website.

Conclusion 4: Publish the newsletter in English and French, with any French material being accompanied by an English translation.

Conclusion 5: Fund-raising efforts for the group should concentrate on supporting conservation projects rather than funding newsletter printing.

Conclusion 6: Maintain current newsletter sections but expand articles and species profiles as possible, use more photographs, and reduce the frequency of publishing membership details.

Conclusion 7: Add news items or noticeboard entries relating to fund-raising opportunities.

Conclusion 8: Make a clearer delineation between popular articles and scientific papers.

Conclusion 9: Encourage more review articles and papers on a broad range of technical issues (especially genetics, evolutionary studies and species distributions) as well as project progress reports.

Conclusion 10: Try to put out a wider call for contributions, by using fora such as the IUCN Species e-bulletin and by asking ASG members to help search for potential contributors.

In addition to taking account of the survey conclusions, for future editions of the newsletter the editor will also review regularly the suggestions made throughout the survey to identify new ideas and material to keep the publication fresh and varied.

Acknowledgements

The editor is very grateful to everyone who completed the survey.

Annex 1 : Questions posed in the survey

1. Please provide your name and contact details.

Name:

Country:

Email Address:

Aim and audience

2. The aim of Afrotherian Conservation is to promote the exchange of news and information on the conservation of, and applied research into, golden moles, sengis, hyraxes, tenrecs and the aardvark. Do you think this aim is

suitable for the newsletter

in need of revision

If you think it is in need of revision, what would you change?

3. What do you think should be the target audience(s) of Afrotherian Conservation?

ASG members	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
Members of other specialist groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
Scientists working on Afrotheria	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
Conservationists working on Afrotheria	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
Students	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
Interested members of the public	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree
Other audiences (please specify)					

Use

4. When you receive Afrotherian Conservation do you usually read:

all of it

most of it

some of it

very little or none of it

Do you have any comments? For example, are there sections you always read or never read?

5. When you receive Afrotherian Conservation do you usually:

forward it to 1 or 2 people

- forward it to 3-5 people
 - forward it to more than 5 people
 - print it
- Other (please specify)

6. If you forward the newsletter, who do you send it to? (e.g. colleagues, students, friends?)

Format and frequency

7. What do you think of the format and layout of the newsletter overall?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Not bad
- Poor

Do you have any comments on the format and layout?

8. How would you like to see the newsletter published?

- Online on the Afrotheria Specialist Group's website
- Electronic version sent out by email (to members, contributors, partners, etc)
- Printed version (free, if we can get a donor)
- Printed version (by paid subscription)

9. The newsletter publishes material mostly in English, though some content has been in French. In future, would you like to see the newsletter published with:

all material only in English	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> agree	<input type="checkbox"/> no opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree
all material in both English and French	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> agree	<input type="checkbox"/> no opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree
some articles in French	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> agree	<input type="checkbox"/> no opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree
some articles in French, but only if accompanied by an English translation	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> agree	<input type="checkbox"/> no opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree
some news and noticeboard items in French	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> agree	<input type="checkbox"/> no opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree
some news and noticeboard items in French, but only if accompanied by an English translation	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> agree	<input type="checkbox"/> no opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree
content written in whichever language (English or French) is preferred by the author	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> agree	<input type="checkbox"/> no opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree
content written in whichever language (English or French) is preferred by the author, but all French material	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> agree	<input type="checkbox"/> no opinion	<input type="checkbox"/> disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree

accompanied by an English translation
Other views or ideas (please specify)

10, How often would you like to see Afrotherian Conservation published?

- Every year (as now)
- Every 2 years
- Every 18 months
- Every 6 months
- Every 4 months

11. Printing and mailing hard copies of the newsletter, and translating text, are potentially costly. Do you have any ideas on how we might sponsor publication of the newsletter?

Content

12. How would you rate the existing sections of the newsletter in terms of quality, level of interest and relevance to the publication's aims?

Message from the Chair (update of issues and activities from Galen)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not so good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor
Species Profile (review of the biology of one of our target animals)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not so good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor
Articles (papers on new findings or reviews)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not so good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor
Afrotheria News (news items on issues of relevance to members and our species)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not so good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor
Afrotheria Noticeboard (a place for people to post notices)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not so good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor
Abstracts (some abstracts from recent Afrotheria papers)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not so good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor
Bibliography (a list of recent publications on the Afrotheria)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not so good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor
Membership List	<input type="checkbox"/>	Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not so good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor

Do you have any comments?

13. What would you suggest we do with each of the current sections?

Message from the Chair	<input type="checkbox"/>	Increase its size or frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep it as it is	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep it but reduce its size or frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cut it out
Species Profile	<input type="checkbox"/>	Increase its size or frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep it as it is	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep it but reduce its size or frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cut it out
Articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	Increase its size or frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep it as it is	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep it but reduce its size or frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cut it out
Afrotheria News	<input type="checkbox"/>	Increase its size or frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep it as it is	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep it but reduce its size or frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cut it out

- | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|------------|
| Afrotheria Noticeboard | <input type="checkbox"/> | Increase its size or frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it as it is | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it but reduce its size or frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cut it out |
| Abstracts | <input type="checkbox"/> | Increase its size or frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it as it is | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it but reduce its size or frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cut it out |
| Bibliography | <input type="checkbox"/> | Increase its size or frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it as it is | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it but reduce its size or frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cut it out |
| Membership List | <input type="checkbox"/> | Increase its size or frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it as it is | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep it but reduce its size or frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cut it out |
- Do you have any comments?

14. Are there any new sections you would propose to add to the newsletter? Please specify.

15. In your opinion the material in the newsletter

- is evenly balanced across the 5 target taxa (aardvarks, golden moles, hyraxes, sengis, tenrecs)
- is unevenly balanced, with more articles and information on some taxa than others
- Which taxa do you feel are under-represented in the newsletter material (if any)?

16. Articles published to date have been a mix of reviews, new scientific results and more popular awareness-raising pieces on the 5 target taxa. Is the current mix of content of articles:

- Excellent
- About right
- Not too bad
- In need of revision

Do you have any comments (especially about what needs to be revised)?

17. Can you give one or two examples of articles published in Afrotherian Conservation that you have enjoyed reading and/or found very useful? Please specify.

18. What would you like to see more of in future articles?

Contributions

19. Have you contributed material to the newsletter?

- Yes, once
- Yes, more than once
- No

20. If you answered "yes" to the previous question, which section(s) of the newsletter have you contributed towards

- Species Profile
- Articles
- Afrotheria News

- Afrotheria Noticeboard
- Abstracts
- Bibliography

21. Would you be willing and able to contribute to a future edition of Afrotherian Conservation?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what sort of contribution could you make? If no, what is the main reason you couldn't contribute? (Please be as specific as possible)

22. Is there anything the editor could do that would encourage you to contribute more to the newsletter in future? Please specify.

23. What is the best way of seeking newsletter contributions from non-members?

Other feedback

24. Do you have any other suggestions for how we could improve the newsletter in future?