



The African Carnivore Initiative

According to the most recent Red List Assessments of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), populations of African lion, cheetah, leopard and African wild dog are in constant and sometimes severe decline across the African continent.



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African lion, cheetah, leopard and wild dog conservation was the subject of a meeting of delegates from 31 range states (see box below) in Bonn, Germany in November 2018. The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) had requested their Secretariat along with the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to establish the African Carnivore Initiative (ACI).

Expert opinion was that, across Africa, the historic ranges of lions has declined by 17 percent, cheetah by 9 percent, leopard by 51 percent and wild dog by 6 percent.

The meeting recommended priority measures and activities for the ACI Programme of Work. Conservation strategies for each of the species were essential. A national coordination structure should be developed to provide technical support, training and mentoring to regional coordinators and be a platform for regular meetings, including a three-yearly Range States meeting, coordinated by a joint CMS-CITES Programme Officer.

Due to lack of data, the CITES-CMS Secretariats were tasked with undertaking a comparative study of African lion population trends and conservation and management

THE RANGE STATES

The Range States attending the first meeting of the ACI were - Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

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SOME DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS LEAD TO HABITAT LOSS AND FRAGMENTATION RESULTING IN NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR PREY SPECIES.

practices within and between countries, including the role, if any, of international trade.

For future approaches to conservation, two documents were tabled – *Guidelines for the Conservation of Lions in Africa* and *the Roadmap for the Conservation of the Leopard in Africa*, compiled by the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group.

Basic threats and challenges, as well as conservation actions, were reported to be very similar for the four large carnivore species and in different regions.

THREATS

The main threats to large African carnivores are habitat loss due to agriculture and livestock, habitat degradation and fragmentation especially outside of protected areas, prey base reduction due to overhunting and overgrazing by livestock, persecution from conflicts with humans, trophy hunting, poor protection leading to poaching and snaring and disease.

Some carnivore populations crucially range on human-dominated community land, particularly

TOP LEFT: Wild dogs gather in packs of around ten individuals, but some packs number more than 40.

BELOW LEFT: Leopards are solitary creatures that only spend time with others when mating or raising young.

TOP RIGHT: As populations rise and become urbanized, bush meat trade is becoming increasingly unsustainable, causing profound wildlife population decline and eco-system collapse.

AFRICAN WILD DOG IN NUMBERS

6,600

Approximate number of wild dogs that remain in the world

30

The number of kilometres a pack of wild dogs range can cover in a day

20

Number in years the wild dog has been endangered

Source: AWF





LION IN NUMBERS

1996

The year lions were declared
'vulnerable' by IUCN

43%

Percentage in population decrease
of lions in the last 21 years

15

Number of countries in Africa where
the lion is regionally extinct

Source: AWF

around protected areas, which often leads to conflict, especially where livestock are present. Wildlife poisoning is an emerging threat across Africa and is very difficult to prevent.

Some development projects lead to habitat loss and fragmentation resulting in negative consequences for prey species.

The illegal trade in live animals and body parts – skins, bones, skeletons and so on -- to satisfy demand in Asian countries is depleting carnivore populations while trophy hunting can also have negative impacts on individual lion populations, especially where harvest rates are high and unsustainable.

Wild dogs are particularly susceptible to poachers, to diseases such as canine distemper virus and rabies transmitted by poachers' dogs and to the snares laid for small antelopes for bushmeat.

TOP: Habitat loss and the reduction of lions' wild prey by the bush meat trade are forcing them into dangerous contact with humans and their livestock. Lions that prey on cattle become the targets of retaliatory killings. And now, increasingly, poaching for lions' body parts is compounding these problems.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS

The conservation and management of all four species requires collaboration between countries in order to benefit from the harmonization of efforts between the relevant Range States.

Successful conservation is based on good information. Surveys and assessments of the conservation status of the species and their prey, threats, human attitudes and enabling conditions need to be undertaken and long-term monitoring established. The relative importance of the different threats, such as poaching for the wildlife trade, retaliatory killing, and bushmeat hunting requires more investigation.

Many Range States do not have accurate or up-to-date carnivore population data. Counting or surveying each species can vary from being relatively easily monitored, (even to the level of individual recognition), to rough estimates of indices of relative abundance or probability of occupancy.

For lions, call-up surveys (where recordings of injured prey species are played to entice individuals into the open), are the preferred



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**LEOPARD
IN NUMBERS**

1,986

The year leopards were Listed as 'vulnerable' by IUCN

35

The number of African countries with leopard populations

9

Number of leopard recognized subspecies

Source: AWF

method for surveying in areas where they occur in moderate to high densities and readily approach vehicles. Spoor surveys are favoured in low-density areas and at sites where lions are known to be wary of people.

Individual identification can be carried out using photographs with the main identifier being whisker spots for lions, coat patterns for leopards and cheetahs, and tail patterns for wild dogs.

It will be important to conserve the appropriate habitat and secure the large landscapes necessary. In some areas, the species roam widely, cyclically and predictably cross international borders even in conflict zones with limited access. Effective conservation may require identifying and protecting the habitats that link protected areas to allow long-term gene flow. Scientific research may be necessary to identify specific migration routes.

TOP & INSERT: Leopards are found much less in the wild than they were even just 100 years ago. These big cats have long been hunted for their soft fur – used to make coats and ceremonial robes – as well as for their claws, whiskers, and tails, which are popular as fetishes.

Reintroductions may be the only way to speed up population recovery in an area.

Restoring the prey base would reduce livestock depredation. Population recovery (of both prey and carnivores) cannot occur without first achieving effective protection with law enforcement patrols, management, intelligence, and investigations. Work may be needed to establish formal protection of migration routes.

Persistent livestock raiding individuals must be controlled but preferably using measures that stop short of killing the animal. Where there are none, precisely targeted lethal Problem Animal Control (PAC) is preferred. Translocation is possible into habitats with no or very few resident competitors and where humans will no longer kill them, such as newly-created reserves.

TROPHY HUNTING

The 10 countries where trophy hunting has most recently occurred collectively represent around 70 percent of the remaining wild African lion range and around 75 percent of the wild population. Trophy hunting can maintain carnivore range

**CHEETAH
IN NUMBERS**

6,674

The approximate number of cheetah adults remaining in the wild

2.26%

The percentage of cheetah's habitat range that is being depleted annually

5%

Percentage of cubs that survive to adulthood in the wild

BELOW: The world's fastest land mammal is racing towards extinction. Like other large carnivores, cheetahs face habitat loss driven by conversion of wilderness areas into managed land dedicated to agriculture or livestock. People will then sometimes kill cheetahs if they perceive the animals as a threat to their livestock, even though cheetahs rarely take domesticated animals.

under wildlife-based land-use and generate substantial economic revenue when well managed, but it can also have negative impacts on individual populations, especially where harvest rates are high. Trophy hunting must be sustainable.

As it is not considered commercial trade, trophy hunting in South Africa is still permitted from wild and captive lions. In recent times, there has been an increase in trophies from captive-bred lions while those from wild lions have decreased.

Harvest rates should not be set at a level that is detrimental to the survival of the species and a report called *Non-Detrimental Findings* (NDF) may be required as evidence to ensure sustainability. For lion populations that are data-deficient, a far more cautious and restrictive approach to harvesting must be applied.

Quotas for leopard hunting trophies and skins for personal use were: Botswana 130, Central African Republic 40, Ethiopia 500, Mozambique 120, Namibia 250, South Africa 150, Uganda 28, Tanzania 500, Zambia 300, Zimbabwe 500.

Quotas for leopards for Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe were considered set at levels non-

Source: AWF

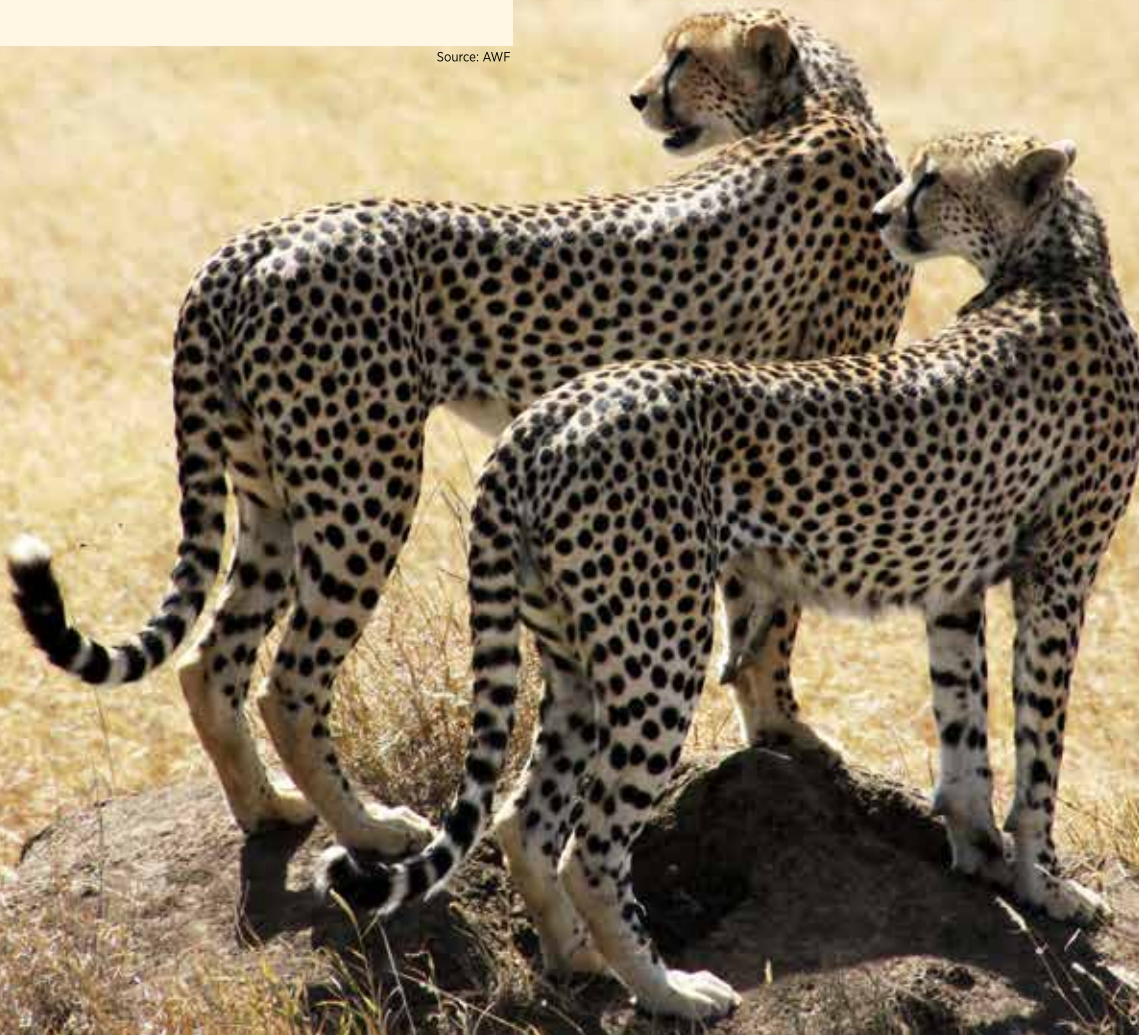




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detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild. However, insufficient relevant information had been submitted to the CITES Animals Committee by Botswana, Central African Republic, and Ethiopia to determine if their quotas are at a level non-detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild. Namibia also allows cheetah hunting at around 100 individuals a year.

While it is important to control legal trade, it is important to stop illegal trade at national and international levels, including trade in captive bred specimens.

To resolve human-wildlife conflicts, steps that can be taken to move from conflict to coexistence

TOP, BELOW LEFT & BELOW RIGHT: The thirst for pet cheetahs in the Arabian Gulf has helped drive poaching in the Horn of Africa to what conservationists have called "epidemic" levels.

include: (i) reduce direct threats posed by the species (ii) offset remaining costs using financial mechanisms (iii) increase community engagement with conservation, (iv) address cultural and other underlying causes of conflict, (v) empower communities, reduce vulnerabilities and secure natural resources and (vi) develop wildlife-based income-generating opportunities.

There are other conservation actions that could be taken against perceived threats. They include reducing disease transmission by managing infectious diseases; ensuring that all large-scale infrastructure development allows wildlife to pass through safely; ensuring legislation that protects the four species is in place and that penalties for transgression are sufficiently high as a deterrent.

No doubt, the African Carnivore Initiative, if successfully administered, could make an important contribution to global efforts to conserve each of the four species. However, a lack of finance is the primary limitation. ●