

activity

2014/2015

report



The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group

The Cat Specialist Group is responsible for the global assessment of the conservation status of all 37 wild living cat species. We coordinate and support the activities of currently 203 leading scientists, nature conservation officers and wild lifemanagers in currently 57 countries. The main tasks include:

- to maintain the network of cat experts and partners;
- to continuously assess the status and conservation needs of the 37 cat species;
- to support governments with strategic conservation planning and implementation of conservation action;
- to develop capacity in felid conservation;
- to provide services to members and partners and outreach;
- to assure the financial resources for the Cat Specialist Group.

For the activity reports we present some of our achievements against these main tasks.

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Co-chairs IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group

Cover photo: African leopard (Photo P. Meier)

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Reassessment of the status of the leopard in the Caucasus

Tbilisi, Georgia, 9-10 October 2014



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In 2007, conservation experts of the six countries sharing the Caucasus Ecoregion – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Russia, and Turkey – and representatives of international conservation organisations developed the Strategy for the Conservation of the Leopard in the Caucasus Ecoregion (Breitenmoser et al. 2007). The Strategy formed the basis for the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) and guided the international and inter-sectoral cooperation. The Strategy and the NAPs of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia need now to be revised and updated, Iran is prepared to develop a NAP for the leopard supporting the conservation of the species in

the Caucasus, Russia is ready to reintroduce leopards in the north-western regions of the Greater Caucasus, and Turkey needs to prepare the ground for the return of the leopard in the north-east of the country. In order to review the progress in restoring the Caucasian leopard population and to prepare the revision of the Strategy, a group of experts from all six range countries and international organisations met in October 2014 in Tbilisi, Georgia. The main objectives of the workshop were:

(1) *Discuss and agree on contemporary status of leopard and its prey species in the Caucasus and surroundings:* Review and discussion of leopard and prey species data available from the entire region, based on standardised national Status Reports. Templates have been provided by the workshop organisers.

(2) *Develop Expert Recommendations on monitoring and research:* Identify gaps within the existing monitoring systems, propose standards for the monitoring, and identification of research needs on regional and national scale, and make recommendations for improvement.

(3) *Review the implementation of the Caucasus Leopard Strategy and National Action Plans:* Discuss the effectiveness of the implementation and effectiveness of the Strategy for the Conservation of the Leopard in the Caucasus Ecoregion (2007).

(4) *Develop expert recommendations for the up-coming workshop on the revision of the regional strategy for leopard conservation in the Caucasus and further national action plans.*

The workshop was co-organised by WWF Caucasus Programme and IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group and supported by the Secretariat of the Bern Convention of the Council of Europe, WWF-Germany and IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group.





Balkan lynx teams from four range countries met in Skopje

Participants from partner NGOs representing all four Balkan lynx range countries and 4 members of the international coordination team met in Skopje for the second Balkan lynx range-wide meeting. Progresses in lynx and wildlife monitoring and management as well as protected area development were discussed. Detailed work plans for the camera-trapping session in winter and early spring 2014/15 were developed. Other important topics addressed during the meeting were the organisation of an international Balkan lynx symposium in autumn 2015 and the production of a Balkan lynx promotion film.

Confirmation of Balkan lynx in Bjeshkët e Nemuna, Kosovo

In March 2015, Environmentally Responsible Action ERA group confirmed the presence of the Balkan lynx in Bjeshkët e Nemuna, Kosovo, as part of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme BLRP.

The presence of the Balkan lynx in Kosovo was confirmed through three photos taken by a camera trap installed in the Rugova valley, Peja. The public reaction to these photos was sensational, as these were the first tangible facts from a study for the presence of the lynx in the region after nearly thirty years.

Fourth deterministic camera-trapping study in Mavrovo NP

From 15 March to 13 May 2015, the Macedonian Ecological Society MES in co-operation with Mavrovo NP conducted the fourth deterministic camera-trapping study within the Park. 60 camera traps were installed at 30 different locations in an area of 332 km². The study resulted with 37 photos of Balkan lynx from 11 different locations in the Park. Preliminary visual identification by comparison of the pictures reveals 8-9 independent (adult & subadult) lynx individuals.

At least 4 lynx present in northern Albania

Twenty-one photos of Balkan lynx of at least 4 different individuals was the result of the intensive camera-trapping survey conducted in Albania by Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania PPNEA during the winter 2014–2015. This survey came as a continuation of several extensive and semi-intensive monitoring surveys implemented across Albania during the past years. The study area was located in Puka, Mirdita and Kukës, respectively in the Munella, Thirra and Zeba mountains. The study area was 300 km², divided into 48 grid cells of 2.5 x 2.5 km. 44 camera traps were spread in 22 cells.





© Living with Carpathian Spritis

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In 2013, the Slovakian Wildlife Society, Zoo Bojnice, KORA and the Cat SG launched the project Living with Carpathian Spirits. The project was funded through a Swiss-Slovak cooperation programme. For the objectives of the project see Activity Report 2012/13. During the project, a total of 843 images of lynx were obtained using camera traps in two reference areas. Lynx abundance was estimated to be 9 individuals in the Štiavnica Mts. and 17 in Velká Fatra, revealing a low density. Genetic analysis of samples collected during the project indicated that the population has no significant inbreeding. An education programme was implemented for local target groups and the general public, reaching 12,500 people in 20 different

events. A teachers' manual, a mobile exhibition and information panels were prepared, as well as other publicity and education materials and fieldwork aids: a ruler with illustrations of animal footprints, a practical guide to animal tracks and signs (in English and Slovak), ink stamps of animal tracks for teaching, magnets and badges with lynx motifs.

In three courses, 103 field experts from Slovakia were trained. Methods for monitoring and the goals and results of the project were presented at initial and final seminars. In another workshop with practical training for experts and the Swiss monitoring scheme was explained and their adaptation for Slovakia discussed.

The results of the project – two years of monitoring lynx in Velká Fatra and Štiavnica Mts. – were presented at the final seminar "Monitoring and Status of Eurasian Lynx", which united more than 50 participants on 11 February 2015 at the Technical University in Zvolen. Wildlife biologists, foresters, hunters, conservationists, national park rangers, practitioners, professors and students from Slovakia were joined by colleagues from Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Germany to discuss the situation of the lynx in the region, best-practice monitoring and management, and need for research and conservation activities. The aim was to propose standards for monitoring, health and genetic surveillance, conservation and management for the lynx in Slovakia. The over-all aim of the project was to improve the status survey for lynx in Slovakia and the Carpathian Mts, which should again serve as a source population for future reintroductions and reinforcements.





In 2012, IUCN/SSC and EAZA signed a MoU with the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to cooperate in the reintroduction of the Persian leopard in the Caucasian Biosphere Reserve in the western Greater Caucasus east of Sochi. As wild-born Persian leopards are hardly available, the plan is to breed, train and release leopards in a special breeding facility. An international group of experts is advising the Russian project team and the partner institutions in the different aspects of the project. The group consists of Marianne Hartmann, an ethologist expert in cats in captivity, Alexander Sliwa, EAZA Felid TAG chair, José Dias Ferreira, EAZE Persian Leopard EEP coordinator, and Urs Breitenmoser, Cat SG co-chair. The group has, together with Natalia Dronova, species programme coordinator of WWF Russia, visited several times the Sochi Leopard Breeding Centre, and met with Umar Semenov, the director of the centre.

After the first leopards were born in the centre in 2013, the reintroduction project now enters into a decisive stage, and difficult decisions have to be taken. The discussions over the past months were complicated and sometimes agitated; no wonder considering the fact that nobody really knows how to establish a free-living population of leopards from captive-born animals. The basic requirements from an ethological, demographic and genetic point of view are clear: (1) a sufficient number of leopards must be released in the first years to allow for fast breeding and population growth, (2) the animals released should not be genetically related to prevent inbreeding, and (3) the animals released must be mentally and physically well-trained to live in the wild, and they should be old enough to reproduce. Although these principles are generally recognised, the challenge is how to fulfil the requirements considering the limited breeding and training space in the Sochi centre and the

rather narrow gene pool and low output of the EEP. The holding and breeding capacity at both ends need to be enhanced, and the proper training requires large enclosures with ample enrichment and a sufficient prey supply. The challenges are substantially, but the Sochi leopard project offers an unique chance for the cooperation between an EEP and a reintroduction programme, and the perspective that leopards may roam again in the Caucasian Biosphere reserve, an area of several thousand square kilometres of pristine mountain habitat, is worth the effort.





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With the update of 23 June 2015, the IUCN Red List now includes 77,340 assessed species, of which 22,784 are threatened with extinction. The loss and degradation of habitat are identified as the main threat to 85% of all species described on the IUCN Red List, with illegal trade also being a key driver of population decline in cats.

Fourteen assessments of cats were included so far:

9 in the same category: Wildcat, Guignā, Serval, Eurasian lynx, Manul, Lion, Tiger, Flat-headed cat and jaguarundi;

3 uplisted: African golden cat to Vulnerable, West Africa Lion population and Malayan tiger to Critically Endangered;

2 downlisted: Iberian lynx (p. 10) and Geoffroy's cat to Least Concern.

The conservation community has pointed out for a long time that lions are disappearing from West Africa, mainly due to conflict with livestock. Human and livestock numbers have grown, and herders now often use protected areas and surroundings. Lions are often shot, speared or poisoned when they kill livestock. At the same time, increasing trade of bushmeat has depleted much of the lion's natural prey. In a recent survey, lions were only confirmed in four protected areas, the estimated range is down to 1.1% of the historical distribution area.

Lions have also rapidly declined in East Africa. Tanzania and Kenya were considered a stronghold of lion conservation. Lions used to be most abundant in East Africa. Today, southern Africa now holds half of the remaining estimated 19,000 - 32,000 lions.

The African golden cat is a forest-dependent species restricted to equatorial Africa, where high deforestation and bushmeat hunting levels are causing substantial reduction in its range. Prior to the year 2000, West and East Africa had already suffered an 88-92% reduction in rainforest, while Central Africa's rainforest extent was reduced by 40%. Intensive hunting for bushmeat (>1 million tonnes per year harvested in the Congo Basin, the species' main stronghold is leading to 'empty forest syndrome'. Golden cats are often not a primary target species, but are frequently killed by wire-snares, probably owing to similarities in body size and trail use to target species such as duikers. The Malayan Tiger qualifies for listing as Critically Endangered because the best available evidence indicates that the number of mature individuals is likely less than 250 animals and has declined >25% over the past generations. The estimated nationwide population continues to decline from roughly 3,000 in the 1950s to 500 between 1990 and 2003 to an estimate of 250-340 in 2013, which translates to an effective population size of only 80-120 mature individuals.



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In the June 2015 update of the Red List, the Iberian lynx was down-listed to Endangered. The Junta de Andalucía together with the IUCN/SSC Cat SG organised a press conference on 29 June 2015 in Sevilla to announce the downlisting to a wider audience.

You know that a species was really in deep trouble if listing it as Endangered is good news! As a matter of fact, in 2002, when the Iberian lynx as the first cat species ever had to be up-listed to Critically Endangered, the situation was extremely dangerous: Only 94 Iberian lynx (52 mature individuals) had survived in the last two nuclei in Doñana National Park and in the Andújar region in the Sierra Morena, and no conservation breeding programme for this threatened species had been established. As a matter of fact, the first Iberian lynx was born in captivity only 10 years ago, in 2005.

In 2014, 327 lynx (189 MI) roamed again in the two remnant and two reintroduced populations in Andalucía, and some additional animals lived in the newly founded populations in Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura and Portugal. The Andalucían lynx has become the Iberian lynx again! Five breeding centres with 79 enclosures in Spain and Portugal nowadays produce lynx for the reintroduction programme. 100 lynx born in captivity were already released, and an additional 25 were translocated from the Andújar population to support the newly founded populations.

The release areas are prepared by intensive work to improve the habitat, to enhance the rabbit density and to gain the support of local people. The *in situ* procedures were originally developed to stabilise the remnant populations. The main problems were epizootics diseases pushing the rabbit density below the threshold needed for lynx to reproduce, and the destruction of the traditional semi-open Mediterranean bushland habitat through overgrazing or timber plantations.

Rabbit diseases remain the major threat to the lynx. The stronghold of the species, the Andújar population, has been decreasing again since 2011, when another outbreak of RHD hit the local rabbit population. Nevertheless, the future looks much brighter for the Iberian lynx than 13 years ago: We have the *in situ* instruments, we have a well-functioning conservation breeding programme, and we have a strong commitment of the Spanish, Portuguese, and European institutions to save this species. But the conservation actions need to continue. Endangered is by no means a satisfying listing, and we need to tackle the task to further downlist the Iberian lynx. Next step is Vulnerable!





Leopards have a wide distribution and broad ecological niche; they are resilient and adaptable. Still, leopards have been eradicated from vast tracts of Africa and Eurasia as a direct result of a rapidly expanding human population. The leopard was believed to be less vulnerable than other cats and has been neglected for a long time receiving much less attention and funding than other cats. Perhaps because of its vast distribution, very little range-wide conservation action has been taken to understand the level of threat to leopards. Some subspecies and populations of the leopard were known to be Endangered or even Critically Endangered. Habitat fragmentation and loss, prey depletion, conflicts because of predation on livestock

or on farmed game, unsustainable trophy hunting, illegal killing for wildlife trade and incidental snaring for bushmeat are the major threats. Wherever surveys were carried out in recent years, they revealed that the distribution range was considerably smaller and much more fragmented than generally believed. In many regions, leopards today only exist in small and isolated populations, many of them outside protected areas. But in large regions, the data deficiency does not allow for a thorough assessment of the status. Conservation challenges include, lack of awareness for the critical situation of the leopard, lack of law enforcement, and lack of capacity at different levels.

A first step to save the leopard is to bring it on the agenda of the conservation community. Independently, the Cat SG and Panthera developed concept notes on how to survey and improve the situation for leopards. The two organisations then joined to develop a more elaborated plan outlining a range-wide strategy and an initial, region-based and prioritised action plan, in order to start a global leopard conservation initiative. We met for one week in the Swiss mountains in February for a workshop. First, we reviewed information on status and distribution, ongoing leopard research and conservation efforts, conservation strategies and action plans, and threats ranked according to their importance across the different regions. We then identified gaps of knowledge and their geographic scope. After the compilation of basic information, we started planning a vision and a goal, 11 concrete objectives to address the threats identified, and 32 conservation actions to fulfil the objectives. Because of the large scale of the leopard range and the great challenges, a broad partnership with other conservation organisations and a global commitment of the range countries will be needed to launch the global leopard conservation initiative.





The conservation of cheetah and African wild dog represents a huge challenge. The distribution area of these species were previously extensive in Africa; however, in recent decades, the number and range have strongly decreased. Cheetahs and wild dogs roam over huge areas and need more living space than other terrestrial carnivores. Gradually, as people encroach the last habitat of the two species, cheetah and wild dog - particularly sensitive to destruction and fragmentation of their habitats - are often the first species to disappear.

Recognising this dire situation, the Cat Specialist Group and the Canid Specialist Group of IUCN/SSC in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society WCS and the Zoological Society of London ZSL, have launched in 2006 a conservation planning program at the range wide level for cheetah and wild dogs (see: <http://www.cheetahandwilddog.org>), for two species very similar in regard to their ecology and facing the same threats.

The first two regional workshops dedicated to East Africa and southern Africa were organised in 2007. The third workshop for North, West and Central Africa was held in 2012 in Niger. The Regional Conservation Strategy developed in Niger now needs to be translated into National Action Plans developed in national workshops.

In North, West and Central Africa the distribution range of cheetah has drastically declined over the past 100 years. Historically, their range covered 12 million km²; in 2012, the species roamed only over 9% of the historical range. Only 5 populations are known today, occurring in six of the 25 countries of the regions: Algeria, Mali, Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso and Chad. Two of these countries, Algeria and Chad, include 88% of the distribution range. The total population of cheetahs, is estimated at less than 250 mature individuals.

In March 2015, the Rangewide Conservation Program for Cheetah and African Wild Dog with support of the Cat SG organised a two day workshop in Zakouma National Park, Chad, to develop a National Action Plan for the two species for Chad using the Regional Conservation Strategy as a blueprint. The support of the organisation and logistics by the National Park was fantastic. Participants represented a.o. the *Direction de la Conservation de la Biodiversité, des Parcs Nationaux et de la chasse* DCBPNC, several protected areas (Sena Oura, NP Ouadi Rime Ouadi Achim WR, Manda NP, Zakouma NP), the University of Sarh, IUCN, Convention of Migratory Species CMS, the NGOs African Parks and GIRAFE. The NAP is currently reviewed by the participants.



Revision of the Regional Conservation Strategy for cheetah and African wild dog for southern Africa

10-13 August 2015, Honeydew, South Africa



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The development of the Regional Conservation Strategy (RCS) for the Cheetah and African Wild Dog in Southern Africa in 2007 was an important step forward in the conservation of these two wide-ranging species. It set out a coordinated framework for the conservation of these species across the southern African region, and inspired National Conservation Action Plans as the national interpretations of the Strategy in all cheetah range states in the region with exception of Angola. The focus on two species with similar ecological needs allowed drawing on the synergies and hence to increase the efficiency. It has been eight years since the Strategy was first developed, and now was an opportune time to evaluate progress on the listed activities and towards its overall goal to 'Improve the status of cheetahs and wild dogs and secure additional viable populations across their range in southern Africa'. The workshop to revise the Strategy was held in South Africa and aimed to:

- (1) Bring together partners involved in conserving cheetahs and wild dogs to report progress made and challenges encountered since the last meeting.

- (2) Review activities and progress made towards the strategic targets and objectives identified in the RCS.

- (3) Review and update information on wild dog and cheetah distribution and abundance.

- (4) Identify gaps and lessons learned to improve future delivery on strategic objectives.

- (5) Revise and update the Regional Conservation Strategy for the Cheetah and African Wild Dog in Southern Africa.

- (6) Identify and prioritise areas of urgent conservation need.

Participants of the three and a half day workshop represented the wildlife authorities of the range countries and many NGOs working across southern Africa to conserve cheetah and African wild dog. It was very exciting to also have Angola on board, represented by both, the wildlife authority and the NGO community.

The workshop was organised by the Rangewide Conservation Program for Cheetah and African Wild Dogs RWCP, supported by the Cat SG and sponsored by AZA SAFE (Saving Animals From Extinction; www.aza.org/safe). The cheetah has been selected as a pilot species for SAFE and as a result, the costs of this workshop were covered by AZA SAFE. The support provided by AZA SAFE will bring in a new opportunity for supporting the implementation of the strategy. AZA will use the information from the workshop to develop an AZA SAFE Cheetah Conservation Action Plan (CAP). This plan will form a framework for AZA to best support the implementation of the RCS for cheetahs. It will serve as a tool to help channel resources to where they are needed, strengthen existing efforts, fill gaps, and facilitate the Strategy implementation.



Monitoring of large carnivores - training session in Chad

18 -19 March 2015, Zakouma National Park, Chad



Taking advantage of the National Action Plan workshop on 16–17 March 2015 (see p.11), the delegates were offered a training session on survey and monitoring of large carnivores on 18 and 19 March 2015 in Zakouma National Park, funded by AZA. Most workshop participants never experienced any training on this before.

Topics included background presentations and practical work in the National Park:

- Research and monitoring: spoor counts, citizen science, radio collaring, tourist photos, detection dogs, camera traps, etc.
- Conflict management: social science, verification of depredation events, coexistence strategies.
- Introduction to Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the work of the IUCN/SSC Cat SG.

After each lecture, participants were invited to discuss whether the methodology presented could be useful in their particular environment. A questionnaire was distributed to delegates in order to gather their opinion on this training session for improvement and adaptations for future training sessions.

Practical training started with a spoor transect from the edge of Tinga Camp along the dirt road. The set-up of the transect was explained, and how to identify and capture information on each carnivore spoor encountered. Back to Tinga Camp, participants listened to a presentation on spoor survey methodology, based on practical case studies from the Serengeti NP, Tanzania, and from the WAP complex (Burkina Faso, Benin and Niger).

To introduce camera trapping methodology, Mahamat Hassan HATCHA, coordinator of Ouadi Rime Ouadi Achim Wildlife Reserve (Chad) explained how camera traps allowed him to identify different species in order to explore wildlife diversity in a rather unknown area. After they had been explained some methodological and tech-

nical basics, the participants went out to the Machtour area to set camera traps. Four groups were composed, each one in charge of setting up one station. The competition for the best camera trap picture of the night was launched... First thing next morning, the teams picked up the camera traps along the Machtour River. Back at the camp, advantages and difficulties of camera trapping were discussed using the pictures and practical experiences from that exercise. After the presentation of further methodologies to survey and monitor cheetah and African wild dogs, the participants were instructed on the criteria to be taken into account for selecting the appropriate method.



Training of the lynx network of the Palatinate forest

21-25 October 2013, Col du Marchairuz, Switzerland



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In the frame of an EU LIFE project, Eurasian lynx will be reintroduced in the Palatinate Forest. The area is part of the transboundary biosphere reserve Palatinate Forest/Vosges du Nord between Germany and France. Lynx was reintroduced in the Vosges Mts in the 1980s, but the population is not doing well. The release of an additional 20 lynx in the Palatinate Forest will not only create a nucleus there, but also foster the population in the Northern Vosges, and the connectivity to the Southern Vosges, the Jura and eventually the Alps population. Thus the Palatinate Forest could eventually become part of a larger lynx meta-population along the Rhine River, especially if the Black Forest in southern Germany could be settled, too.

Many secondary mountain ranges in Western Europe offer good quality habitat and ample prey for lynx, and are part of the Natura 2000 protected area network. But the single sites are too small to host a long-term genetic viable population; hence a managed metapopulation is the solution at hand.

The Palatinate Forest LIFE project will be implemented over a period of six years and includes the following activities:

- build a project partnership with local stakeholders, regional and national key players, and international allies;
- create information and environmental education material for the various interest groups and launch an information campaign;
- training of a professional project team and a network of volunteers for the monitoring;
- establish a system for preventing and compensating eventual damage on livestock;
- construct a rehabilitation enclosure and veterinary care and quarantine centre;
- release 20 lynx caught in the Swiss Jura Mts and in the Carpathian Mountains of Slovakia;
- survey the success of the reintroduction through intensive monitoring (telemetry, camera traps) of the lynx released and the prey population (foremost roe deer);
- develop guideline for to improve habitat connectivity;

The Cat SG has taken a favourable position with regard to the project, and we are now helping with the training of the project team and the network of volunteers. In a two day workshop in the Swiss Jura Mts, we gave presentations on the biology of the lynx, genetic management of carnivore populations, predation, lynx diet, and on survey and monitoring methods. A full day was dedicated to practical training, including the examination of kills and setting up of camera traps.



© KORA



The Small Cat Action Fund (SCAF) is a grants programme established by Panthera with the intention to support research and in situ conservation of the smaller cat species. The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (MBZ) is another significant supporter of smaller cat species conservation projects. Both programmes cooperate closely with the Cat SG and James Sanderson, funder of the Small Cat Conservation Alliance. In June 2014, Panthera and MBZ have signed an agreement on institutional cooperation in cat conservation. In May 2015, the two organisations joined with the Cat SG for a workshop with the aim to operationalise the cooperation in small cat conservation and to streamline the approach.

The focus of the cat conservation community is mainly on the Panthera and other large species. Smaller cats receive less attention and funding, and they are also less known. There are e.g. no robust data on the population trend, an important parameter for the Red List assessment. Many grant opportunities are focussing on threatened species, making it difficult to fund projects on unknown small cat species.

Panthera and MBZ recognise that unknown species must receive more attention, and that basic biological and ecological research is needed to develop a sensible conservation approaches for these species. But it is also obvious that small cat projects will remain small grant projects for the time being. We will hence need to compose the big picture from many single tesserae. We are aiming for (1) a better understanding of the biology and ecology of the neglected cats, and (2) a more robust, science-based surveillance of the conservation status of these species. This requires more capacity for studying and monitoring the small cats across their range. At the workshop in Crozet near Geneva, the four organisations decided to work together towards these goals in several ways:

- Ask a few small cat experts to identify research and conservation priorities;
- Review data and results from MBZ and Panthera small cat projects so far and compare the outcomes with the preliminary priority list;
- Inform each other on projects granted and work together in the evaluation of projects. Strive for co-funding projects to increase the effectivity;
- Standardised reporting and archiving data. Make findings available in Cat News and/or integrate final reports of projects into the Digital Cat Library;
- Work together in capacity development (training of young researchers and conservationists) and facilitate networking among grantees.



Leopard symposium at the University of Berne

12 June 2015, University of Berne, Switzerland



16

The leopard is the most widespread, but also most persecuted large cat of the world. Our latest findings from the 2015 IUCN Red List assessment show that the leopard has disappeared from large parts of its distribution range in Asia, and populations are decreasing fast in Africa: Leopards have lost 40% of their historical range in Africa (95% in the Sahara region), 50% in Eurasia, 70% on the Arabian Peninsula, 70-80% in India. The situation in South-east Asia and China is likely very similar, where the range has become very fragmented and the leopard has disappeared even from protected areas. The species has already vanished from countries like Laos PDR or Vietnam.

The leopard is a species not only ignored by many important range countries, but also neglected by the conservation community. Compared to other large cats, leopards receive less attention and funding, and hence there is a notorious lack of reliable information. The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group is not only the network leading the global assessment for the leopard, it is also advocating leopard conservation across the range and helps developing and implementing conservation programmes in important areas and build the local capacity needed.

To present and review our leopard activities, we organised a leopard event at the University of Berne. The purpose of the one-day symposium was to

- Inform our partner organisations from Switzerland that have supported our leopard activities on the conservation status of leopards;
- Present a selection of young colleagues working on leopard conservation projects;
- Report on the progress of our own leopard activities in the Caucasus and on the Arabian Peninsula;
- Present a new global leopard conservation initiative we are presently preparing (see p.10).

The presentations included the IUCN Red List assessment for leopards, mapping the conservation status, human-leopard conflicts in Namibia, impact of trophy hunting in Zambia, the dire situation of the leopard in North, West and Central Africa, conservation of the Arabian leopard, conserving the last Arabian leopard population in Oman, a masterplan for the recovery of the leopard in the Caucasus eco-region, training leopards for living wild (the Sochi project), and the framework for global conservation of leopards.

The idea of this symposium was well received, and a number of important foundations attended, and the feedback was very positive.





The Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) Implementation Plan is a significant step for Tiger Conservation of the Tiger Range Countries (TRCs). The leaders of the governments of 13 TRCs met in November 2010 at the "International Tiger Forum" in St. Petersburg, Russia and declared their collective political will to take all necessary actions to prevent the extinction of wild tigers.

Following the St. Petersburg Declaration, a "Second Asian Ministerial Conference" was held in Thimphu, Bhutan, in 2012 where "Affirmative Nine-Point Action Agenda on Tiger Conservation" was adopted.

The GTRP Implementation Plan includes about 200 different national actions which strengthen the frontlines in Protected Areas, protecting habitats, engaging and supporting communities that live in tiger landscapes, trans-boundary collaboration and restoring tigers where they have been extirpated, increasing domestic and international funding, building greater public awareness of tiger conservation; monitoring tigers, prey & habitat as well.

The Implementation of GTRP is gaining solid momentum and already making an impact on the ground and the activities were outlined for the year 2013-14 on the 29 July - 2 August, 2013 "Kunming International Workshop" in China. Considering the present situation of GTRP Implementation Progress, GTI partners, Global Tiger Forum (GTF) and Bangladesh Forest Department were collaborating to organise the Second GTRP Stocktaking Conference for TRCs to review the implementation plan on September 14-16, 2014 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Dhaka Conference did sensitise the TRCs actors and partners for more dedication in tiger conservation.

The primary objective of the Conference were to take stock of progress made in implementation of the Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) toward Tx2 by the Tiger Range Countries (TRCs) and their partners as directed by the Thimphu Affirmative Nine-Point

Action Agenda on Tiger Conservation and the GTRP Implementation Plan 2013-14, including:

- Review current status of the GTRP Implementation Plan 2013-14;
 - Discuss findings of the first reporting of the GTRP's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs);
 - Review the status of frontline capacity, resources, and gaps;
 - Recognize good practices and build on success to develop the way forward on all dimensions of the Thimphu Agenda;
 - Energize and better coordinate the flow of funds toward the GTRP;
 - Enhance global support for the GTRP, based on updated TRC needs.
- Urs participated at the meeting as part of the IUCN Species Office delegation.





African Wildlife Initiative

The Wyss Foundation invited to a one day workshop in Harvard to evaluate whether there is a role for the Foundation in conserving wildlife in Africa and helping to stem the tide of unprecedented poaching and wildlife trafficking. To help the Foundation evaluate how philanthropic resources could be best targeted to have significant impact, it hosted a small gathering of experts for a discussion about the current status of conservation efforts and the range of intervention strategies that can be taken to stop poaching, trafficking and demand for wildlife species. The following organisations were invited: African Parks Network, Gonarezouh National Park Conservation Program, Tsavo Trust, Frankfurt Zoological Society, Jane Goodall Institute, Wildlife Conservation Society, President's Council on Wildlife Trafficking, Center for Advanced Defense, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Wild Aid, The Wildcat Foundation and the Cat SG. The day was organised in three panels: (1) Anti-poaching and on-the-ground efforts to protect wildlife, (2) Habitat conservation and species specific efforts, and (3) Anti-trafficking and Demand Reduction. Participants were assigned to one of the panels and were asked to give a short presentation answering a set of given questions. The day ended with a wrap-up session.

Cat News

In 2014 and 2015 (until mid-year) we have published the regular issues Cat News 61 (48 pages) and 62 (48 pages) with 36 peer-reviewed articles, and have Cat News Special Issue 9 in press on "How to save the Cat - A practical guideline for strategic and project planning in cat conservation".

Digital Cat Library

We have newly integrated 745 publications into the Digital Cat Library DCL in 6 uploads during the past year. These frequent updates

are possible thanks to the support by Panthera. DCL hosts currently 10,029 reports and publications relevant to cat conservation and is constantly growing.

Cat SG website

The new website went online last October. We would like to say a big thank you to everybody who has contributed!

The Cat SG is now on facebook

With launching the new Cat SG website, we also established a facebook page for the group, where we cover relevant cat conservation news from within, but also from the outside the group. We have already reached 2,000 likes with only a few months.

Work in progress

Cat Classification Task Force

All remaining taxa went out for review. All species accounts have now been collated into one single document that went out to the entire group for one more round of comments. The recently published update of the tiger taxonomy has been considered in the revision. We will not be able to settle all disagreements, but will clearly mark them in the report. In a final chapter on research priorities, we will identify the most obvious gaps and the most urgent fields for research.

Global Mammal Assessment update

As not all species made it into the June update of the IUCN Red List (see p.8), we are still busy with reviewing assessments and texts and with supporting the assessors with information and recommendations. A next batch of species is getting finalized for the inclusion in the next update in November 2015.

Staff and ...

We wish to thank all the dedicated colleagues and members of the Cat Specialist Group for their hard work during the reporting period 2014/2015. Working very closely with the Cat Specialist Group Co-chairs were Manuela von Arx (Assistant to the Chair, Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme), Tabea Lanz (Assistant to the Chair, new website, Red List Assessments), Malini Pittet and Roland Bürki (support to the Chair), Anna Huber (book keeping), Kristin Nowell (Cat SG Red List Authority Coordinator): a great thank you to all of them. We would like to thank the many dedicated people who helped develop and run the various projects in 2014/2015: Fridolin Zimmermann and Andreas Ryser (Balkan lynx project, Carpathian Spirits), Alex Sliwa (Sochi leopard reintroduction, Cats in Iran), Marianne Hartmann (Sochi leopard reintroduction), Keith Richmond, Sultana Bashir, Brian Bertram and Javier Pereira (associate editors Cat News), Barbara Surber and Dieter Lehmann (renewal of the website). We would also like to thank the many colleagues who have contributed to the website, Cat News and the Digital Cat Library. Alex Sliwa, Patrick Meier and Sebastian Kennerknecht have generously made available their superb cat pictures for Cat SG purposes, also for this report. Many thanks!

... Sponsors

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