

IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group Annual Report 2005



The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group

The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group brings together 206 of the world's leading cat experts, including scientists, wildlife managers and conservationists from 50 countries who are dedicated to advancing the understanding and conservation of the world's 36 wild cat species. It is one of over 120 similar international specialist groups that together form the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). IUCN/SSC Specialist Groups produce species assessments for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, as well as species Action Plans and policy guidelines. These groups also provide data for the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, which is hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and advise governments that are Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The Cat Specialist Group is very active in many of its own initiatives as well, focusing on the development of communication tools to enhance the work of its members and promote dialogue among scientists and practitioners throughout the world. The Cat Specialist Group believes that cooperation and knowledge sharing are critical for the conservation of wild cat species. Such collaboration prevents the duplication of efforts and therefore avoids any waste of resources or time, both of which are extremely valuable and scarce.

The Co-chairs of the Cat Specialist Group work closely with 15 Core Group members to develop the strategies, priorities and tasks of the larger Cat Specialist Group. The following outlines the structure of the Cat Specialist Group and its many partners and Friends.

- Urs Breitenmoser and Christine Breitenmoser-Würsten, Co-chairs.
- Peter Jackson, Advisor to the Chair and Co-editor of Cat News.
- Kristin Nowell, Red List Authority.
- Manuela von Arx, Assistant to the Chair.
- Cat Specialist Group Members - 206 international cat experts that form the Cat Specialist Group.
- Cat Specialist Core Group - Strategic body of the Cat Specialist Group. Members in 2005 were Sarah Christie, Peter Crawshaw, Peter Jackson, A.J.T. Johnsingh, Ullas Karanth, Tom McCarthy, Laurie Marker, Gus Mills, Dale Miquelle, Kristin Nowell, Stephen O'Brien, James Sanderson, Melvin Sunquist and Alan Rabinowitz
- Working groups - Subunits made of Cat Specialist Group members
- Partner groups - Group of people working in a specific area in cat conservation, but not all people qualify for Cat SG membership.
- Friends of the Cat Group - Individual and institutional supporters of the Cat SG



Core group members during a meeting in Brazil in June 2005.

Highlights 2005...

The emotional highlight of the past year was probably the phone call from Astrid Vargas on March 28, when she announced that the first litter of Iberian lynx was born in the Acebucho breeding station. Although we all know that there is still a long, long way to go, we felt that this is an important break-through for the world's most endangered cat species.

Another peak was the cat meeting in Brazil. The organising committee had been working hard to make it happen, and even so we did our best to prepare the workshop, we were nervous about the ambitious goal to assess all neotropical cat species within three days. But what enthusiasm, dedication and professionalism from the participants!

This is the free skating that keeps you going for the compulsory figures. And there was quite enough of this kind of work, too. Like all specialist groups, the Cat SG had to be re-constituted, and this is not only a laborious, but also a tricky endeavour. The Group has almost the same size as at the end of the past term, but some faces have changed. We have new members from South America, Africa, and Asia, and we still want to recruit more colleagues from the range states. Other colleagues, who are no longer actively involved in cat conservation or research, have left the group. We were pleased that many of the old Members became new Friends and still want to remain in contact with the Cat SG.

Urs Breitenmoser and Christine Breitenmoser-Würsten
Co-chairs, IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group



Geoffroy's cat (Photo A. Sliwa)

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Cover photo: Oncilla (Photo A. Sliwa)

In-house Activities and Fundraising

Reconstitution of the Cat SG. November 2004 marked the end of the IUCN quadrennium, meaning that the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group had to be newly constituted in 2005. We got re-appointed as co-chairs in July. To prepare the re-constitution process we performed a membership evaluation with a questionnaire. This was a very helpful exercise as we got a lot of new information from our members, and some people thought lost reappeared. At the end of the year we were ready to invite the members for the quadrennium 2005-2008. The group size has not changed much, but there are many new faces, mainly from South America and Africa under-represented in the past.

Networking, administration and communication. Beyond communication with members and friends, we receive many questions concerning

wild cats and cat conservation from scientists, conservationists, NGOs, GOs, students and from the public. Reviewing project proposals for group members, giving advice on potential funding sources and writing letters of recommendation kept us busy also in 2005.

Fundraising. The Specialist Groups must secure their own operational and project funding. Over the years, the Cat SG has received support from many organizations and individuals who share its mission to conserve wild cats. With the help of Tammy Baldwin, a Canadian intern, we have reviewed and reorganised our fundraising activities. In 2005, we have been looking for funds for core activities and for specific projects like the cat meeting in Brazil, certain elements of the website, or the Cheetah conservation compendium.

Outreach

Cat News

Issues No 42 and 43 were released in 2005 with 25 original contributions and many items covering news from around the world. Additionally, reviews of six books have been presented.



Cat News has now its own **mini-website** within the Cat Specialist Group homepage. This allows announcing each new issue with editorial, index and a short description of the original contributions.

In spring 2005, we have released a **Cat News Archive CD** with Cat News issues 1-41 together with an index. This allows now easy searching and finding any article published in Cat News in the past 20 years.



Website

June 2005 saw the new Cat Specialist Group Web Portal go online! The new website integrates the species information from the old site, designed by Nancy Sipos in the 1990s, the Digital Cat Library (which can still be directly accessed under www.catsglib.org), and many new features such as a Bulletin Board for news, Events and Activities, Red List assessment for cats, CITES information, Conservation Compendia, Cat News and the Project of the Month.

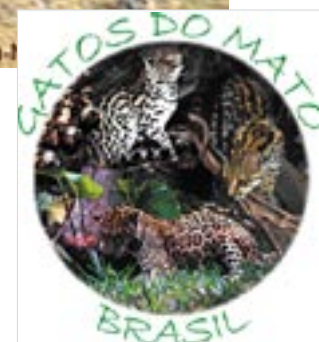
The website is kept functional and lean. First, we think that this is an attribute of our group, and second, we want to make the website as fast as possible also for people who are accessing the internet through a relatively slow phone line.

We do not yet have the capacity to maintain a huge website, but we keep going and the Portal will grow.



Project of the Month - The front-page feature of the website is the 'Project of the Month', a promotional window that gives recognition to the exemplary cat conservation projects. The 'Project of the Month' connects the background work of the Cat Specialist Group to the more attractive on-the-ground work that is carried out by our members and partners.

From June to December, we have presented six Projects of the Month from South America, Europe and Africa.



Digital Cat Library.

The Cat Specialist Group with its worldwide network of members, friends, and partners is the appropriate institution to maintain a comprehensive collection of documents relevant for the conservation of the 36 wild living cat species. The collection includes presently some 6,000 documents and is likely to grow by several hundred documents for the years to come, depending on our capacity to integrate old documents. New releases sum up to several hundreds each year. The Digital Cat Library is a service to the members of the Cat Specialist Group and to the *Friends of the Cat Group* and is hosted under

an own domain, www.catsglib.org, but also accessible through the Cat Specialist Group's web portal www.catsg.org. The Digital Cat Library is widely used, and we have received encouraging feedback from members and *Friends of the Cat Group*.

In 2005, we have performed uploads in March, August and December with a total of 360 new documents. In early summer, we have introduced a personal password and username for members and the *Friends of the Cat Group* for copyright reasons. The access information will change every year.

Library Highlights

With each upload we highlight a selection of publications on a specific topic. In 2005 these papers were related to the **Critically Endangered** Iberian lynx, the conservation of Neotropical cats, and the severely threatened and little known Balkan lynx.

The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group organized together with its partners in South America a workshop in Brazil in June 2005 to assess the status and conservation needs of the 10 Neotropical cat species. The Digital Cat Library contains some 700 reports and publications on these partly not very well known cat species covering a wide range of topics.



The Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) is the only cat species worldwide listed Critically Endangered in the IUCN/SSC Red List. Not more than about 150 lynx remain in the wild and successful captive breeding only started in 2005. The Cat Specialist Group assists its Spanish and Portuguese partners in their struggle for the survival of this superb cat species.

Iberian lynx (Photo A. Sliwa)



Oncilla (Photo A. Sliwa)



Balkan lynx (Photo U. Breitenmoser)

The isolated population of lynx in the southwestern Balkans is the most threatened autochthonous population of *Lynx lynx* in its entire Euro-Asiatic range. The population is estimated to consist of less than 100 mature individuals. Its conservation was long impeded by the political unrest and lacking capacity in the region, but a conservation project is also a chance to build mutual trust and partnership. Together with local and international partners we work to increase the knowledge about the biology and the status of the Balkan lynx to take the necessary steps towards its conservation.

Online Species Compendia

Sharing knowledge is one of the fundamentals for successful conservation. The Cat Specialist Group compiles specific information for the conservation of a certain species or subspecies in Knowledge and Information Management Systems (KIMS) which are published online.

The Iberian Lynx Compendium was created in preparation for the International Seminar on the Conservation of the Iberian Lynx, an event at the end of 2004 that focused on the only felid species currently designated as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List. With all the information from the workshop it was finalized and went online with a trilingual menu structure in August 2005.

The subjects presented in each compendium includes scientific baseline data, organisational information, official statements, and popular material such as magazine articles, news releases, educational publications and outreach material.



The Balkan Lynx Compendium

English | Македонски | Шќипќари
standard language is English

The Balkan lynx population is the most endangered of all autochthonous Lynx lynx populations. This is the more alarming as it most probably concerns even an own subspecies Lynx lynx macedoni.

The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, together with Euronatur and national as well as international partner institutions, maintains a network to support the preservation of the Balkan Lynx.

One important precondition for successful and efficient conservation work is sharing knowledge and experience.

The Balkan Lynx Compendium aims at providing all relevant information available. Contributions and comments are welcome! Please contact us under the e-mail address catgib@kora.ch

The Balkan Lynx Compendium is a partnership project.



Similarly, the Balkan Lynx Compendium was developed for a series of workshops that took place in Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2005, with the overall goal to develop a partnership and conservation strategy for the Balkan lynx. The menu structure was translated into Macedonian and Albanian, and the finalised version went online in early fall 2005.

We are currently working on a Cheetah Conservation Compendium, which follows a seminar on the status and conservation of the cheetah that took place in Paris in February 2005, and in preparation for a follow-up meeting in Algeria in 2006. The concept and project proposal was developed in cooperation with CCF Namibia, OGRAN, France (p. 16), and the Tanzania Carnivore Program. The Compendium will go online in summer 2006.



Species Assessments and Conservation Activities

Global Mammal Assessment

Since half a century, IUCN/SSC has been assessing the status of animals and plants on a global scale and identified threatened species, in order to promote their conservation. The Biodiversity Assessment Initiative was established as a collaborative effort between IUCN/SSC and the Center for Applied Biodiversity Science (CABS) at Conservation International. The initiative wants to provide an effective method for gathering and disseminating the most accurate scientific data available relating to biodiversity conservation. After the Global Amphibian Assessment as part of the Biodiversity Assessment Initiative was completed in 2004, the Global Mammal Assessment (GMA) has been launched. IUCN's mammal specialist groups were asked to provide species data and to update the existing distribution maps. As a starting point for the 36 cat species served the distribution maps produced for Wild Cats – Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan, edited by K. Nowell and P. Jackson and published in 1996. Since then, new data has been available, and new tools allow for a more sophisticated management, analysis and presentation of the information.

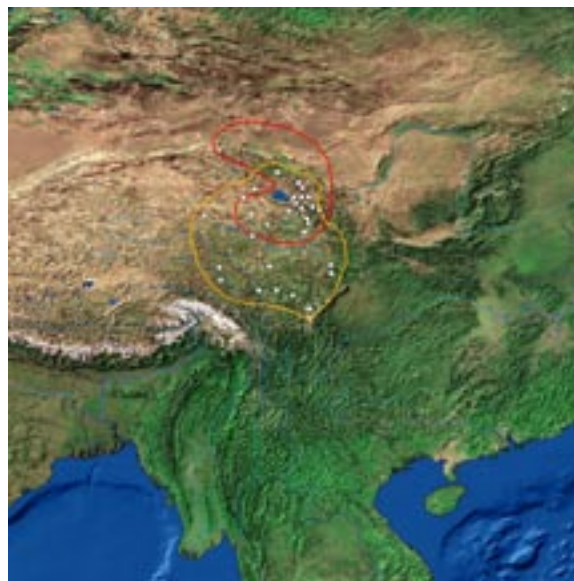
Distribution maps are often presented as outline polygon with no differentiation within the area occupied. The input data is normally a rather wild mix of published information, covering often several decades, expert knowledge and best guesses. To assess the status of a species and to identify conservation needs, we need precise up-to-date maps allowing to see changes in the distribution and abundance of a species over time. In other words, we should be able to compare the present abundance and distribution with the original distribution and – in order to consider the perspectives for recovery – the potential range. We also need to combine and compare data of different kind and quality and from various sources, so to assess the reliability of the data sets through cross-validation. The tool to do this is a geographic information system (GIS). Patrik Olsson and Pietro Perisico, two GIS specialists and interns with the Cat Specialist Group, started to integrate available data into a GIS in 2004. Within a GIS project, the different sources of information

The IUCN Red List for Threatened Species™ provides a worldwide review of the status of extant animals and plants using a standardised approach. It is the only globally recognised assessment of the conservation status of species and forms the basis of many international treaties and uncoun-
ted national legislations. The specialist groups of the Species Survival Commission SSC are responsible for the update of the Red List for their taxonomic group. All 36 living cat species and numerous subspecies are listed (www.redlist.org), and the Cat Specialist Group, under the lead of Kristin Nowell, the Group's red list authority, regularly reviews the assessment of the individual species. Priorities are often set according to new research or topical events. In big talks of 2005 was the re-assessment of the African lion.

can be kept separated and analysed in various combinations, allowing comparing their validity and revealing changes over time. The GIS uses a series of databases allowing compiling and continuously updating new information. In a first step, we digitised "all" available information on presence/absence of the 36 cat species throughout their entire ranges, using the Digital Cat Library as the main source. Each geo-referenced observation or area of presence (such as a national park) goes into the GIS, together with information about the data source, the type of observation, the method used, etc. New references are also included into the Digital Cat Library. The distribution maps and species status information resulting from this work were provided to the Global Mammal Assessment project of IUCN/SSC and CI/CABS. But beyond the GMA, the GIS project now forms the basis for a Species Information Service for the Cats – the SISCat (see insert).

As an example, the map shows the distribution of the Chinese mountain cat, *Felis bieti*. The red polygon is the digitised distribution from the 1996 Cat Action Plan, white dots represent the point distribution data collected since from published sources, and the adjusted distribution polygon in yellow.

By the end of 2005, we had integrated more than 20,000 distribution data points into the GIS system, based on several hundred reports and publications. The next steps are now to integrate the expert knowledge into the SISCat and then to compare the two data sets with each other and with the historic and potential distribution range by means of a habitat modelling exercise. The Cat Specialist Group did this in 2005 for the ten Neotropical cats.



How can we know what we know?

Some cats like the majestic lion or the charismatic tiger get a lot of attention, of some other species, like the elusive Chinese mountain cat, we hardly know they exist. But for all of them we have, from a scientist's point of view, never enough data to make a comprehensive assessment. Even the well-known and – compared to many other cat species – relatively conspicuous lion, we have considerable gaps in our knowledge about their distribution and numbers, as the lion conservation workshops recently held in Cameroon and South Africa have revealed. We nevertheless need to make a judgment using the best information available at any time. But what is the best information, and how can we gather it? Obviously, the “hard facts”, so the information from research of surveys published in scientific papers covers only a small fraction of the cats and their distribution range. Much more information is stored in the researchers' and conservationists' brains, and one purpose of the Cat Specialist Group's network is to compile this wealth of knowledge into a continuously updated pool of information. IUCN/SSC is working on an ambitious project, the Species Information Service (SIS), and the Cat Specialist Group wants to contribute to this with its own information service for the cats. The principle idea is that we want to base the assessment of the status and conservation needs of a cat species on three different sets of information: (1) on “hard facts”, so the scientifically confirmed information, (2) on expert estimates, that is the compiled knowledge of the cat specialists, and (3) on distribution and habitat models allowing to extrapolate the confirmed information and compare them with the expert models. The advantage of such a system is that it permits a critical assessment of available information and helps us to identify gaps of knowledge. To develop the SISCat is a long-term goal of the Cat Specialist Group. With the assessment of the Neotropical cats in 2005, a first step was made.

Assessment of the Neotropical Cat Species – A Joint Effort of the South American Cat Conservation Alliance (SACCA) and the Cat Specialist Group

Workshop in São Francisco de Paula, Brazil, 9–11 June 2005

In June 2005, eighty cat experts from the Americas joined for a three days' workshop in southern Brazil to review the status of the ten cat species living in the neotropics. The meeting was a joint effort of the South America Cat Conservation Alliance (SACCA) and the Cat Specialist Group, organised by Peter Crawshaw, Tadeu de Oliveira, Susan Walker, Kristin Nowell and the co-chairs of the Cat Specialist Group.



Cat experts from the Americas and core group members of the Cat SG in São Francisco de Paula

The meeting aimed to advance the cooperation among the cat specialists of the region and to strengthen the partnership between the SACCA and the Cat Specialist Group. The plenary of the first half-day was reserved for introductory talks, given by Tadeu de Oliveira: Status of the Neotropical Cats; Eduardo Eizirik: Taxonomic Review of the Neotropical Cats; Kristin Nowell: Red List and Cat Action Plan; Urs Breitenmoser: Global Mammal Assessment for the Cats; Mauro Lucherini: Andean Cat Alliance; and Estaban Payan and Carlos Valderrama: Conservation of Cats in Colombia.



Estaban Payan and Carlos Valderrama from Colombia (Photo L. Marker).

For the next two days, the plenary split in working groups to compile the expert knowledge on the status of the ten regional cat species. The process followed the Cat Assessment Data Sheet (CADS), an assessment tool derived from several similar procedures. The assembly first split into regional working groups and later regrouped to species working groups. In each of the two sessions, part of the CADS was filled in, and the work done earlier under a different group composition was reviewed and completed. The most difficult and longest disputed task was the mapping exercise. Each group received a series of geophysical and ecological maps prepared with the contemporary distribution polygons of the respective species from the Global Mammal Assessment GIS project. The group then had to review and correct this distribution and to identify areas of high and low density, occasional and questionable occurrence. Furthermore, the members of the



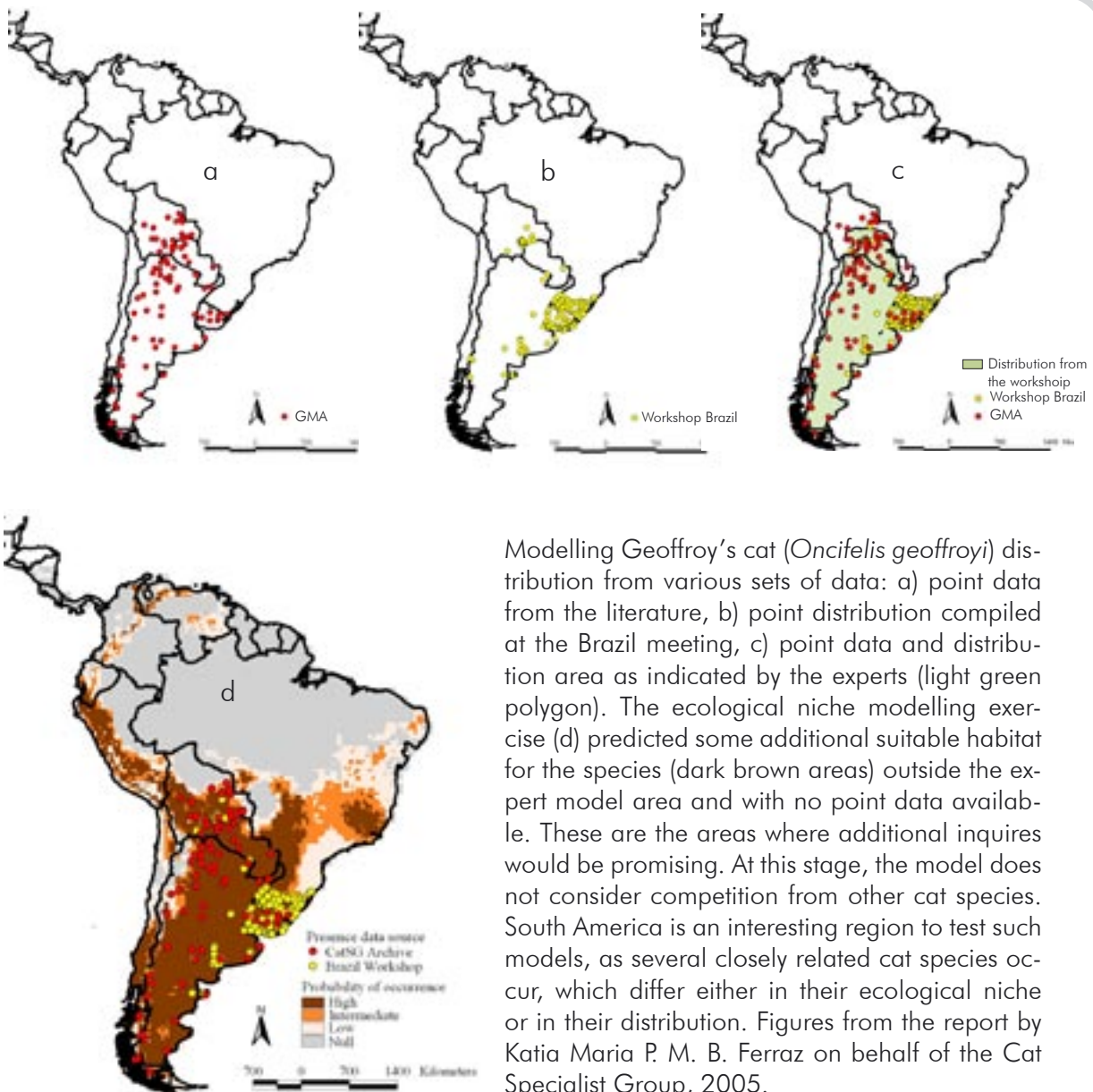
Ronaldo Morato leading his group through the mapping exercise (Photo L. Marker).

group and all participants were asked to provide point distribution information to be included in the SISCat (see box p. 9). It was amazing to see (and to hear) the groups at work! The discussions were lively, sometimes emotional, but all participants were highly motivated and well prepared. Without such fierce dedication, it would have been impossible to assess ten species within three days.

Modelling the Distribution of the Neotropical Cats

The information compiled at the Brazil workshop were all integrated into the GIS of the SISCat by Tammy Baldwin and Katia Maria P. M. B. Ferraz, forming the baseline dataset for the New World cats. Katia, a GIS modelling expert from the University of São Paulo, Brazil, visited with the Cat Specialist Group in fall 2005 to perform a first series of analyses of the data sets. She used the program GARP (Genetic Algorithm for Rule-set Prediction) to predict the species' potential distribution based on ecological niche modelling from the point data and then to compare the outcome with the distribution area as indicated by the experts (see box). Some of the expert and habitat modelling maps matched pretty well, indicating that the point data available were rather representative for the distribution and the habitat

preferences of the respective species. Other expert maps did not correspond with the distribution as predicted by the GARP modelling exercise, demonstrating that either the distribution is not well known, the point data are biased towards an atypical habitat, or the model is not valid for this species. One weakness of the models to day is the resolution of the baseline data to feed the GIS projects; many important ecological features are not yet available or only in a very rough resolution. But the geo-referenced information available for free is growing fast, allowing coming up with ever better tools to assess the data available for the cats. The aim is to compile the wealth of data gathered at the Brazil meeting into a comprehensive report on the status and conservation needs of the ten Neotropical cats.



Iberian Lynx

First Lynx Kittens Born in Captivity

On 28 March 2005 a captive female Iberian lynx gave birth to three kittens at the Acebuche breeding centre in Spain, the first ever to be born in captivity!



The Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) is the most endangered of the 36 wild cat species, with fewer than 200 estimated to remain in the wild, and therefore listed as **Critically Endangered** in the IUCN Red List. The Cat SG has been involved in Iberian lynx conservation over the past few years, initiating two important meetings and workshops.

The successful birth, to three-year-old Saliega, occurred at the Conservation Breeding Centre in El Acebuche, Doñana National Park, which has for many years been the centre of breeding attempts. Saliega was captured in the Sierra de Andújar Natural Park, in the Sierra Morena in south-western Spain. The father, Garfio, aged four, came also from the Andújar area, which is the only remnant population besides Doñana National Park. The medium-sized cat depends on healthy rabbit populations as their staple food. The rabbit, endemic to the Iberian Peninsula and a keystone species in this ecosystem, is considered a pest across the world. The virulent disease myxomatosis, introduced to reduce the population of rabbits, led to a catastrophic fall in numbers, with a fatal effect on lynx. As

rabbits slowly overcame the disease, they were struck by viral hemorrhagic fever. Although protected since 1964, many lynx were poached or died from being injured in traps set for rabbits, or killed on the increasingly numerous roads. A captive population as a backup and a source for future reintroductions is urgently needed.

The kittens were born after 64 days gestation. The mother, Saliega, showed excellent maternal behaviour, but was not able to prevent that one of the kittens was killed in a sudden violent fight among siblings. Nevertheless the first litter was a great success. The Conservation Breeding Programme, led by Dr Astrid Vargas, is one of the measures aiming to help the remaining two populations in the wild adopted by the Spanish Ministry of Environment and the Regional Government of Andalusia.

For more reading see Cat News 43.



Photos: Iberian Lynx ex-situ Conservation Programme

Rabbit Decline Threatens Endangered Predators and Ecosystems

Diseases killing off rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are bringing rare eagles and the world's most endangered cat to the brink of extinction, says a report from conservation groups including **several SSC Specialist Groups**. Myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease, combined with habitat loss and over-hunting, have brought rabbit numbers in Spain and Portugal to as low as 5% of population estimates 50 years ago. The Iberian Lynx, whose diet consists of 80-100% rabbits, has seen its own numbers fall to little more than 100 adults, according to the latest official figures, partly due to rabbit decline. The Iberian imperial eagle, another rabbit specialist predator has declined to around 150 pairs. The report, "Reversing Rabbit Decline", calls for the rabbit to be reclassified under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, given that it is currently classified as Least Concern and this does not adequately reflect its recent and rapid decline in Spain and Portugal, where the rabbit is endemic.

"Whereas the rabbit is seen as a pest in countries where it has been introduced, it is the keystone of the Mediterranean ecosystem in Spain and Portugal," said **Dan Ward, a conservation consultant for SOS Lynx**, and author of the study. "At least 39 predator species rely partly or exclusively on the rabbit, and rabbits are also important for many invertebrate and plant species." The report also says that although some rabbit conservation projects are underway – including habitat improvement – they are not widespread or co-ordinated enough, and lack suf-



Artificial burrow built to increase breeding success for rabbits (Photo U. Breitenmoser).



Reversing Rabbit Decline

One of the biggest challenges for nature conservation in Spain and Portugal

Dan Ward, 2005



ficient political support and long term funding. In addition, changes are needed in agricultural (including EU) policies to revert from modern intensive farming back to less intensive mixed farming that benefits rabbits. Rabbit expert **Andrew Smith, Chairman of the IUCN/SSC Lagomorph Specialist Group** said it was now vital to recover rabbit populations in Spain and Portugal. "For many years our worry was with European rabbits overpopulation in areas where they had been introduced, such as Australia. This report presents a dire warning that natural populations of the rabbit are seriously in jeopardy and that the loss of rabbits would be devastating to the ecosystem on the Iberian Peninsula."

Urs Breitenmoser, Co-chair of the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, added "the Iberian Lynx is the undisputed flagship of conservation on the southern Iberian Peninsula. However, the ultimate keystone species of the ecosystem is the humble rabbit. Neither the Iberian Lynx nor the Imperial Eagle will survive the next few decades if rabbit decline continues. I hope that this report will push this eminent but neglected species into the limelight."

Source www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/news

Balkan Lynx

The „Balkan lynx“ is an isolated population of the Eurasian lynx, which exists today only in Albania, FYRo Macedonia and in the south of Montenegro and the Kosovo. The stronghold of the remnant population is the border region between Albania and FYRoM. According to the newest estimation from the Elois project (<http://www.kora.unibe.ch/en/proj/elois/online/index.html>), there are only about 100 lynx left, and we consider this even an optimistic estimation. The conservation of the population is even more urgent as the Balkan lynx has been described as an own subspecies *Lynx lynx martinoi*. This classification was never really recognised because of the geographic proximity to the Carpathian population, but preliminary genetic analyses indicate that the two populations are as distinct as other recognised subspecies. We have tried to facilitate the conservation of this most threatened

autochthonous lynx population for many years and have built contacts to colleagues in the range countries. In 2000, regional experts met in Croatia during a LCIE meeting, what resulted in a first country-based status report. The lasting unrest in the region however prevented further activities for some time. The political situation has now considerably improved, and so has the interest in nature conservation. As a matter of fact, a joint effort to conserve the shared natural heritage is considered a good way to build mutual trust and understanding. The Cat SG has established a partnership with the German NGO Euronatur and with local GOs and NGOs from Macedonia and Albania. In spring 2005, the „Balkan Lynx Compendium“ (see also p. 7) was launched on the Cat SG's website (www.catsg.org) to prepare a lynx workshop in Macedonia and another one in Albania.

Workshop on the Conservation of the Balkan Lynx in Mavrovo, FYR of Macedonia, 21-23 April 2005 and Tirana, Albania, 25-26 April 2005



Workshop participants in FYR of Macedonia

The workshop goals were to review the status of the Balkan lynx, its prey and habitat, to understand the organisational structures and the institutional responsibilities, and to identify potential partners for a Balkan Lynx Alliance. Participants concluded that the lynx would be a perfect flagship species to promote IUCN's Green Belt initiative (www.greenbelteurope.org) in the south-west Balkans, and that international co-operation and on-the-ground activities should be discussed in a joint meeting between the two range countries and international organisations in fall 2005.



Workshop participants in Albania

Seminar on Large Carnivores - Balkan Lynx Under the Auspices of the Bern Convention and Workshop on the Conservation of the Balkan Lynx, 14-15 April 2005

The lynx is a flagship species for the conservation of the natural heritage in the whole south-west Balkans; it has suffered not only from direct persecution, but also from prey depletion and habitat deterioration mainly on the Albanian side of its distribution area. The remnant population's distribution is congruent with the area of the Green Belt Initiative in the region. The significance of the conservation of the Balkan lynx has been emphasised also within the framework of the Bern Convention and its partner organisations. Several reports and recent seminars refer to this issue. The seminar held on 15 November 2005 in Mavrovo National Park, in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", was the first joint Macedonian-Albanian meeting on this topic ever. The meeting was organised by Euronatur, the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, KORA, and the Macedonian Ecological Society, under the patronage of the Bern Convention secretariat. During the first day of the seminar, the situation of the Balkan lynx was reviewed, its conservation discussed, and a draft Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries was presented. This MoU is expected to be signed by the two countries under the auspices of international organisations such as the Council of Europe or the IUCN during a meeting of their ministers of environment in 2006. Days two and three of the meeting were dedicated to the survey and monitoring of the Balkan lynx, its prey and habitats. Lectures on basic concepts and field techniques were followed by a workshop during which the participants outlined a monitoring concept for the two countries.



Albanian group discussing the future of their lynx



There is no recent photo of a life specimen of this seriously endangered subspecies of the Eurasian lynx. The three stuffed lynx were presented during the workshop in Mavrovo and belong to the Museum of Natural History in Skopje.

The conclusion of the seminar were that

- (1) an official agreement between the two countries and international partner organisations including conservation NGOs is needed to advance the conservation of the Balkan lynx;
- (2) the lynx should be used as a flagship species for the conservation of wildlife and natural habitats in the frame of the Green Belt Initiative and for the creation of cross-border protected areas;
- (3) there is a considerable need for more detailed baseline information on the taxonomy, ecology, distribution and abundance of the Balkan lynx, allowing defining target-oriented conservation measures. Basic field surveys and specific biological/ecological research have high priority;
- (4) establishment of a broad partnership, capacity building, and a public awareness campaign must be advanced;
- (5) outside/international funding is urgently needed as the economic situation of the range countries does not allow financing the conservation and recovery programme for the Balkan lynx.

Cheetah

Founder Meeting of the „Observatoire du Guépard en Régions d’Afrique du Nord“ (OGRAN; North African Region Cheetah Action Group NARCAG) in Paris, France

The Zoological Society of Paris SZP hosted the inauguration meeting of a monitoring group working on cheetah conservation in the north African region on 2 February 2005. Already in 1987, a cheetah group uniting representatives from several captive facilities in France had



Participants of the OGRAN meeting in Paris (Photo L. Marker)

been created with the support of the French Ministry of Environment. Some of the members recently became more involved in in-situ conservation projects for cheetahs in northern Africa.

Cheetah Status in North Africa

The status of the cheetah is poorly known in North, West and Central Africa. In 2004, the world population was estimated to be less than 15,000 individuals, mainly distributed in South and East Africa. The estimation for North Africa is less than 500 animals, for West Africa around 500 animals and for Central Africa 500–1000 animals, but more reliable information is urgently needed for the whole North African Region. Recently, surveys have started in Algeria and Benin, and several field examinations are under way.

Françoise Claro, president of SZP, Thierry Petit from Zoo La Palmyre, Christelle Vitaud from Safari Parc de Peaugres, and Hélène Leriche from Fondation Nicolas Hulot and French Institute of Biodiversity had asked the IUCN/SSC Cat SG to help creating a group to foster and coordinate cheetah conservation in the North African region. The strong cultural and scientific bonds between the North African Region (NAR) and Western Europe, have already promoted several programmes on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, and can now be used to advance cheetah conservation activities. During the meeting in Paris, the current knowledge on cheetahs in North Africa, threats to the survival of the species, research needs and currently applied conservation measures in the NAR were presented. The next meeting will be in Algeria in 2006 to consolidate the group and to define priority conservation actions.



Cheetah in the Termit area, Niger (Photo Zoological Society of Paris)

Southern African Regional Cheetah Workshop Hosted by the Cheetah Conservation Fund Namibia



Female cheetah on Namibian farmland (Photo Ch. Breitenmoser)

On the 6 and 7 December 2005, 32 cat experts from several countries attended the Southern African Regional Cheetah Workshop, held at the **Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF)** near Otjiwarongo, Namibia. Yolán Friedman and Brenda Daly from the **IUCN/SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group** Southern Africa facilitated this first regional cheetah meeting of its kind, organised under the auspices of the Global Cheetah Forum. The **Global Cheetah Forum** was developed in 2001 to bring together researchers, conservationists and stakeholders worldwide to discuss solutions toward cheetah survival in the 21st century.

Workshop participants were experts in cheetah conservation from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia, and the co-chair of the **IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group** Christine Breitenmoser. The workshop reviewed and evaluated accomplishments in cheetah conservation in the Southern African region to date and identified further achievable objectives. Topics such as the methodology for estimating cheetah populations, conservation of cheetah within and outside protected areas, human-predator conflicts, and advanced education initiatives were discussed in depth. Concepts for improved collaboration and co-operation between the regional cheetah conservation organizations were also addressed.

The participants agreed on the need for a Cheetah Conservation Compendium, which should combine all available information on cheetahs into a web-based KIMS. Beyond ecology, the Compendium should also feature human-based and developmental issues with regards to a broad approach to long-term survival of the cheetah. CCF and Cat SG raised funds for the **Cheetah Conservation Compendium** that will be designed and managed by the Cat SG. The aim is to have the compendium up and running within 6 months.

It will be a working tool for the **Regional Status Report for Southern Africa**, which will be completed in 2006. The amount of work recently completed throughout the Southern African region now allows compiling status reports and make a regional assessment. A responsible coordinator was assigned for each range country. The Cat SG will facilitate the drafting of the country chapters and the regional assessment. Based on this in-depth analysis of the situation, a conservation strategy for the cheetah in southern Africa will be developed, allowing the countries to design their specific action plans.



Participants of the Southern African Regional Cheetah Workshop in Namibia (Photo CCF Namibia).

Tiger

Reintroduction of the Chinese Tiger

On 17–18 December 2005, the Department of Wildlife Conservation of the State Forestry Administration (SFA) of the P. R. China has, supported by the non-governmental organisation Save China's Tigers, organised a workshop on the rehabilitation and reintroduction of the South China Tiger (*Panthera tigris amoyensis*). The China Tiger is listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List. There may be some tigers left in the wild, but the population is virtually extinct. The tiger is not only an ecological umbrella species but has an outstanding cultural significance, and the Chinese are dedicated to save it. The plan is to reintroduce captive born China tigers into large enclosures in southern China. Two years ago, four young tigers from



U. Breitenmoser with two Chinese artists



Participants of the tiger workshop in Beijing

Chinese zoos were brought into a large enclosure in South Africa for rehabilitation and to learn to catch wild prey. This translocation was widely criticised in the conservation community, and the Cat Specialist Group, together with other IUCN institutions, has expressed its concern about this approach (see article in *Cat News* 39, autumn 2003), but also offered the Chinese authorities its help for the development of a consistent conservation strategy.

The State Forest Agency and Save China's Tigers invited national and international experts and representatives of the Chinese provinces involved to the workshop in Beijing to review the situation of the Chinese tiger in the wild and in captivity and to discuss possibilities to

conserve it. Wang Wei, director of the Wildlife Conservation Department, stressed that the survival of the China tiger is a high priority of the Chinese government, and Li Quan, director of Save China's Tigers, expressed the dedication of her organisation to continue supporting the efforts of the Chinese authorities to recover the tigers, their habitats and prey, and emphasised the opportunity to combine this with economic incentives for the local people through eco-tourism. National and international experts – many of them members of the Cat Specialist Group – presented papers on the situation of the Chinese tigers in the wild and in captivity as well as on the conservation efforts taken in the northern provinces, where China shares the Siberian tiger population with Russia, and on educational and community-involvement projects elsewhere. Representatives of the southern provinces Hunan and Jiangxi introduced the reintroduction project and the designated sites.

The main concerns of the experts regarding the reintroduction are the availability of suitable habitat and adequate prey, and the fitness of the captive stock. In 2005, the captive population included 78 individuals. Many tigers were caught in the wild to supply Chinese zoos before 1970, but the reproduction was so low that the present population bases only on six founders. The crucial question however is whether enough living space with suitable habitat and sufficient wild prey is left in the traditional range of the China tiger to support a viable po-

pulation, or whether the space needed could be re-established.

The Cat Specialist Group welcomes all efforts to save the China tiger as long as they are done in accordance with general IUCN policy and standards. To create large enclosures in the China tiger's historic range and to stock them with captive animals can be a first step towards reintroduction, but the ultimate goal must be the recovery of a self-sustaining free-ranging population. To re-integrate wild tigers into the human dominated landscapes of southern China is a great challenge that needs sound expertise, long-term commitment and adequate funding.

China experiences a tremendous economic development, with fast growing cities and an unseen rural exodus, leaving many villages in the mountains abandoned. The transition from a rural to an urban society changes the peoples' attitude to nature and opens new perspectives for the recovery of natural habitats and wildlife – why not for the majestic China tiger, which could, as a flagship species, help to conserve many other species.

Read more about the workshop for the reintroduction of the Chinese tiger in Cat News 44, spring 2006, and on the Cat Specialist Group web-portal www.catsg.org.



Zhusuqiao Liuyang



Zixi Wuyi (all photos U. Breitenmoser)

Tiger

Tiger Crisis in India

2005 was an extremely turbulent year for tigers in India. Tigers disappeared from Sariska Tiger Reserve, and many tigers vanished from Ranthambhore. Delhi police discovered a huge stock of wildlife products, including tiger skins and bones, and in Tibet Autonomous Republic and China a shocking amount of skins of tigers and leopards were openly presented for sale. The tiger crises was extensively covered in Cat News (issues 42 and 43), and on the Cat SG website.

India's prime minister called an emergency meeting of the National Board for Wild Life and set up a Task Force to propose action. The Task Force consisted of Ms Sunita Narain, Director of the Centre for Science and Environment NGO, as Chairperson; Hemendra Panwar, former Director of Project Tiger and the Wildlife Institute of India; Professor Madhav Gadgil, Environmental Historian and member of the National Board for Wildlife; Valmik Thapar, Director, Ranthambhore Foundation and member of the National Board for Wildlife; and Samar Singh, retired government Director of Wildlife Preservation and former Director of WWF India. The Task Force produced an impressive report that was presented to Prime Minister in August and made available through the web, a very new approach.

Tiger specialist and Cat Specialist Group member K. U. Karanth analysed key aspects of the TTF report and produced an article for Cat News 43, addressing great concern in regard to the endorsed monitoring scheme, no clear stand against the continuation of various eco-development projects, which have a great impact on tiger habitat and its protection, the poor section dealing with anti-wildlife trade operations and field protection, and the lack of clearly assigning responsibilities for the disastrous situation.

In August, the State Empowered Committee on Forests and Wildlife Management (SEC) published its report on Forest and Wildlife Management. SEC was constituted by Chief Minister of Rajasthan in February 2005 to review the problems of conservation and management of wildlife in Rajasthan. Cat SG members Belinda Wright and Valmik Thapar were part of the SEC. The disappearance of tigers from Sariska was shocking and the threat of tiger poaching



Indian tiger (Photo A.Sliwa).

in Ranthambhore was looming large. The SEC implemented a series of measures in the affected protected areas. The current crisis has exemplified the inadequacy of the field formations as well as the administrative setup at the state-level to effectively deal with matters both at the field as well as policy levels.

The Tiger Task Force report „Joining the dots“ and the SEC report „Securing the Future...“ are available on the Cat SG website (www.catsg.org). The Cat SG core group has written a letter to TTF chairperson Ms Sunita Narain, and Peter Jackson, supported by the Group's Indian tiger specialists, prepared a background paper for IUCN to express the concern about the critical situation.

Already in April 2005, the Director of Project Tiger announced that India would invite global experts to join the first national census of tigers and other predators. „Besides Indian experts, we will invite an international panel from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for validation“ Mr Gopal said. The census was planned from November 2005 to February 2006. We have been asked to propose experts from the Cat SG to be part of this panel. Unfortunately there was no agreement on the Terms of References when they finally were submitted to the Species Survival Commission in November, when the planning and selection of methods for the nation-wide census was already done. However, we still hope to be able to do a post-hoc assessment.

Snow Leopard

Evaluation of the WWF Snow Leopard Conservation Activities in Mongolia

The Mongolian snow leopard population is estimated to be about 1000, threatened by direct persecution, prey depletion, and habitat deterioration and population fragmentation. WWF and partner organisation have launched a conservation programme in the Mongolian Altai region in 1995, focussing on the snow leopard. WWF asked Urs Breitenmoser and Victor Lukarevskiy to evaluate the programme and make recommendations for its continuation. In September 2005, the two experts from the Cat SG visited Mongolia, logistically supported by Onon Yondon, WWF's national programme co-ordinator. They went to see several protected areas to assess the monitoring of the snow leopard and its major prey species, met with community officials, park administrators and rangers, spoke to herders, local women participating in Snow Leopard Enterprise, and visited teachers and students of local schools. The snow leopard conservation project is well known by the local population and widely accepted. A Mobile Anti-Poaching Unit with a tight network aims to reduce illegal killing of snow leopards and their prey. WWF runs education programmes for local schools by supporting youth clubs, and educates and trains local people. Many local women produce handicrafts for Snow Leopard Enterprise, which are sold in North America. Profits go back to the community, but only if the conservation contract

Statement on the Fate of Confiscated Snow Leopards in Kyrgyzstan

Dr. Barbara Maas, chief executive, Care for the Wild International, asked the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group to express its opinion regarding the future of three confiscated snow leopards presently kept at a rehabilitation centre in Kyrgyzstan. The co-chairs expressed their opinion according to general IUCN policy after consultation with several members and partners from the zoo-world. The Guidelines for the Placement of Confiscated Animals (IUCN 2000) provide recommendations on how to handle confiscated animals. The most obvious solution is to reintegrate them into the source population, but any decision should aim to foster the conservation of the wild population, respect the welfare of the confiscated individuals, and avoid by all means to directly or indirectly encourage further removals of specimens from the wild. There are often important practical

with SLE is fulfilled. Several strictly protected areas were created and many nomad families had to leave these areas. But the local people understand that sustainable use of the landscapes and pastures is the key to their own survival. "Quality before quantity" is a slogan nowadays often heard among the nomads, and sustainable management plans are developed for the buffer zones surrounding the SPAs. Nevertheless, the total amount of livestock is still increasing and threatens the long-term success of the conservation programme.

The snow leopard conservation programme in north-west Mongolia is a classical flagship species project with a high potential to become a model for integrated species and ecosystem conservation with a broad approach and partnership between governmental and private conservation agencies, scientists, and local people. The evaluators recommended continuing the programme and to advance or improve it in several aspects, such as the monitoring of snow leopard and prey species, the partnership agreement between private and public partners in regard to the long-term tasks, the reporting and communication, and to launch model projects improving the economic situation of local people. The full report can be downloaded from the Digital Cat Library (www.catsglib.org).



Snow leopard (Photo A. Sliwa)

constraints to the release of confiscated animals. The three snow leopards in captivity in Kyrgyzstan were taken from the wild as young animals, two of them were physically damaged, and they were fed with livestock. These are not preconditions allowing releasing the animals to the wild. They are potential problem animals, which is not only a potential threat to them, but could negatively affect peoples' attitudes and hence the conservation efforts for snow leopards in Kyrgyzstan in general. Furthermore, important preconditions for a reintroduction – as defined in the Guidelines for Re-Introductions (IUCN 1998) – are not fulfilled in Kyrgyzstan. After consultation with Dr. L. Blomquist, Cat SG member and European studbook keeper, it was not even recommended to integrate the three snow leopards into the EEP. The Cat SG statement allowed Care for the Wild International and the German NABU to agree on how to continue their co-operation in Kyrgyzstan.

Lion

Workshop for the Development of Conservation Strategies for the Lion *Panthera leo* in West and Central Africa, Douala, Cameroon, October 5-7 2005

Recently there has been serious concern about the status of the African lion, and recognition of the need to achieve consensus among the Range States on the way forward for improving its conservation and management. Organized by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), its Species Survival Commission, and its Cat Specialist Group, as well as the Wildlife Conservation Society and Africa Resources Trust, a workshop was held in Douala, Cameroon, in October 2005 to develop conservation strategies for the lion in West and Central Africa. Participants included representatives from range state ministries in charge of wildlife conservation in West and Central

The objective of the workshop was to develop conservation strategies for West and Central Africa, to assure conservation of the African lion in these sub-regions.

More specifically, the objectives were:

1. To ensure a better protection and management of threatened lion populations and consequently, the total biodiversity of the regional savannah ecosystems;
2. To identify and include the principal actors in lion conservation;
3. To reinforce partnerships in favour of the conservation of lion;
4. To strengthen capacity at the national and regional levels for more effective lion conservation;
5. To help identify and guarantee the resources, both human and financial, needed for lion conservation in the sub-regions; and
6. To provide guidelines for the formulation of national strategies, policies and action plans for lion conservation.

As a starting point for this strategic planning workshop, a technical session was held from October 2-4 in Douala, organized by WCS in co-operation with the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group, the African Lion Working Group (ALWG), and the West and Central African Lion Conservation Network (ROCAL). This workshop developed an updated distribution map for lions in the region, modelled on similar exercises for the tiger, jaguar, and other species. Specific objectives of this technical session included:

1. To develop a spatially explicit summary of the status and distribution of the lion across its historical range in Africa;
2. To establish biological conservation priorities for African lion populations;
3. To arrive at those priorities through a consensual process involving all the major current data holders and active conservation groups working on the lion in Africa.



African lion (Photo A.Sliwa)

Africa, regional offices of the World Conservation Union, members of the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group (Cat SG), members of ROCAL (West and Central African Lion Conservation Network), members of cooperating and nongovernmental organizations, and the national Cameroon media.

After various presentations, the participants identified a common Vision and Goal for their lion strategies, the Vision being “A West and Central Africa which sustainably manage their biodiversity”, and the Goal: “To ensure the conservation and sustainable management of the lion in West and Central Africa.” The participants then undertook a problem analysis in plenary, identifying a number of threats to the lion in the two sub-regions. Afterward, the participants split into two working groups, one for West Africa and one for Central Africa, to finalise the problem analysis for their respective sub-regions, to identify objectives and actions, and complete the logical framework, which will form the basis of the resulting conservation strategies.



Workshop participants in Cameroon

Recommendations of the Participants

Upon the completion of the workshop’s third day, the participants recognized and appreciated the process of mobilizing stakeholders to work within a logical framework to develop conservation strategies for the lion in West and Central Africa. Their principal recommendations were as follows:

- the designation of a “focal point” for lion conservation and management by the Ministers of the governmental wildlife authorities in the lion Range States of West and Central Africa;
- the inclusion of all stakeholders (governments, private sector, NGO) in the development of national management plans for the lion, given that in West and Central Africa a large proportion of the lion population inhabits safari hunting concession zones;
- the development and implementation of national lion action plans by all the Range States;
- to inform and encourage all actors in lion conservation to be guided by the sub-regional conservation strategies;
- to carry out the recommended actions of the strategies through national action plans for lion conservation;

- the placement of coherent mechanisms of implementation of action plans on the scale of the sites of abundance of lions (Lion Conservation Units);
- monitoring and coordination between the national steps at the regional level by ROCAL working closely with the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group.

It is planned for the West and Central African lion conservation strategies to be issued under the aegis of the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group in January 2006. The West and Central African workshop and strategies will serve as a model for the East and Southern African lion conservation workshop, which will take place in Johannesburg, South Africa, on January 13-15 2006, and will feed into an overall continental synthesis strategy for the African lion.

Report by Kristin Nowell and additional documents on www.felidae.org and www.catsg.org

Amur Leopard

Proposed Russian Oil Pipeline Threatens Amur Leopard

A proposed oil pipeline in the Russian Far East could cause the extinction of the Amur leopard *Panthera pardus orientalis*, which has been reduced to very small numbers in the wild by over-hunting and loss of habitat. The Amur leopard is Critically Endangered according to the IUCN Red List. The pipeline, designed to make Russian oil available to Japan, Korea and others in the Pacific area, would run east from near Lake Baikal and down the coastal area of the Russian Far East between China and Amur Bay, opposite Vladivostok. This southernmost section, near the proposed terminal site of Perovoynaya, represents the last refuge of the Amur leopard, and contains a small isolated population of Siberian tigers, another threatened species.

Bukhta Perevoynaya, where the oil terminal is planned, is located on the Amur Bay in Southwest Primorye, Russia's region with the highest biodiversity. SW Primorye is home to 30% of Russia's endangered "Red List" species. One of the endangered species, the Amur leopard, is one of the rarest cats on earth. The pipeline will run through two protected areas (including a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve) before reaching the coast where the terminal will be built. The oil will be shipped on tankers to Japan and other oil importing nations such as the USA, South Korea and China. The oil transfers and transport threaten to pollute the most popular beaches in Primorsky Krai as well as Russia's only marine reserve located nearby in the Amur Bay. The Amur Bay is the worst possible location for an oil terminal and oil refinery.

The very fragile population – not more than 40 leopards are believed to live in the wild – will not be able to survive another menace. This new and potentially fatal threat comes at a moment when the local people and the conservation world built up new hope. Over the past years, Russian scientists and nature conservationists from around the world have taken tremendous efforts to save the remaining population of this fascinating cat, and the Russian and Chinese authorities increasingly supported these efforts. There is a solid and approved strategy to stabilise, increase and expand the remnant population. These efforts include fighting against poaching, education of local land-users, and,



Amur leopard (Photo WCS and ISUNR)

above all, habitat protection on both sides of the Russian-Chinese border. The habitat on the Russian side is still suitable and was declared UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. In recent years, huge effort were undertaken to restore the habitat on the Chinese side and to create a protected area comparable to the one in south-west Primorye. In 2001, the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group has co-organised an international conference on the status and conservation needs of the Amur leopard. Following this conference, a boost of activities developed to save the Amur leopard from extinction, including a close cooperation with the Chinese authorities, following the model of the conservation of the Siberian tiger. All these efforts are now seriously challenged through the construction of this pipeline.

Together with our members involved in the region we prepared the necessary background information for IUCN to pronounce its concern about the project.

For further reading see Cat News 42 and 44 and www.tigris.org

In January 2006, we received the exciting news that the pipeline will not be built along the leopard habitat and that the plan to construct the terminal in the Amur Bay has been given up.

Caracal

Assessment of the State of Knowledge and Conservation Status of the Caracal

The caracal (*Caracal caracal*), a medium-sized cat, inhabits arid and semi-arid habitats from southern Africa to Central Asia. It is classified as Least Concerned in the IUCN/SSC Red List. In the frame of the Red List assessment, the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group is continuously evaluating the status of all cat species across the world. For many species, however, a basic review of available information has not been made since the publication of the IUCN Cat Action Plan (K. Nowell and P. Jackson. 1996. *Wild Cats – Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan*. IUCN, Gland). This is especially true for smaller cats like the caracal, which get less attention than the big charismatic species. The caracal, as a matter of fact, has received most attention in South Africa, where it is considered a stock raider and hence a problem species. For its northern African and Asian range, our knowledge bases on very generic and probably outdated information. The assessment of the species in Central Asia e.g. still bases on information provided by Soviet scientists. It was recently questioned whether the Least Concerned classification is still justified for the north African and Asian sub-species, but we even lack a comprehensive review of the information available to even assess the quantity and quality of our knowledge. The first step was to compile all available information for the species, focus-



Caracal (Photo A. Sliwa)

ing on recent publications not yet considered for the 1996 Action Plan. The ultimate goal is an assessment of the distribution and conservation status of the caracal in its entire range from South Africa to India. The steps in this process are

- 1) To compile all available publications and reports and to summarise the present state of knowledge;
- 2) To identify gaps of knowledge and areas in need for intensified surveys, and
- 3) To identify the most urgent conservation needs.



Approximate distribution of the eight subspecies of Caracal caracal recognised in the 1996 Action Plan.

Mirjam Lüpold, an intern with the Cat SG, took on the assignment under the guidance of Manuela von Arx to produce a commented literature review on the caracal. The report on the species compiled by Gail Foreman for the "IUCN Cat conservation plan 1989" served as a starting line for the literature research, and the outline polygon distribution maps and point information compiled 2004/05 for the caracal in the frame of the GMA (page 8) was guiding the review of the distribution area. The output of Mirjam's project will be an annotated literature review for the caracal made available through the Cat SG's Digital Cat Library.

Miscellaneous

Presentation of the Cat Specialist Group at the AZA Felid TAG 2005 Mid-year Meeting

The Annual Mid-year Meeting for the North American Felid Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) was held March 18-20 in Saint Louis, Missouri, hosted by the St. Louis Zoo. Beginning in 2005, the Felid TAG steering committee decided that the mid-year meeting agenda each year should be focused on one special topic allowing more in-depth interaction and discussion of specific felid-related issues. This year, the special topic selected was African Felids. The Felid TAG invited several speakers working with African felids in range countries to present their research findings at the TAG meeting. Invited speakers included Dr. Sarah Durant from the Zoological Society of London who studies cheetahs in Tanzania, Dr. Alex Sliwa from the Wuppertal Zoo who conducts field research on black-footed cats in South Africa, and Dr. Dewald Keet, a veterinarian studying disease issues in African lions. In addition, several U.S.-based curators, scientists and veterinarians gave presentations focused on ongoing conservation projects and research studies in cheetahs, black-footed cats and other African felids. Other speakers presented brief updates and progress reports that focused on various management, veterinary and research issues with non-African felids. Dr. Christine Breitenmoser, co-chair of the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, gave an overview of the Group's activities. Working groups were

convened during the meeting, focussing on in situ conservation efforts with African felids, including the Standardized Guidelines for Large and Small Cats, outlines for the first Felid TAG husbandry course, and educational initiatives with small felids. During the TAG meeting,



Ch. Breitenmoser presenting the Cat SG at the AZA Felid Tag meeting in St. Luouis (Photo A. Sliwa)

the population managers provided brief status updates for most of the Felid SSPs, PMPs and DERPs. (Source: AZA Felid TAG Annual Report 2005, www.felidtag.org.)

Sustainable Hunting of Large Cats in South Africa

The Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Mr Marthinus van Schalkwyk has appointed a Panel of Experts to develop norms and standards for the regulation of hunting in South Africa. Recent incidents and media reports concerning canned hunting of large predators and trophy hunting in buffer zones adjacent to National Parks, particularly where fences have been dropped, have raised serious concerns regarding practices within the hunting industry and profession, highlighting the lack of an overall framework for regulating the hunting industry at a national level. Experts were requested to investigate the overall norms and standards required at a national level to ensure a sustainable hunting industry.

Panel member and SSC Chair Dr. Holly Dublin invited the Cat SG co-chairs to provide a background paper with information on the status and biology of the three large cats lion, leopard and cheetah including management considerations and conservation implications of hunting. After brief consultation with South Africa core group member Dr. Gus Mills, we gave some general input on the role of hunting in conservation, using the hunting statement developed by the IUCN/SSC task force LCIE as a guideline. The recent lion workshops in Cameroon and South Africa have demonstrated how important this issue is, and the Cat SG will continue discussing it.

Core Group Meeting

Along with the international conference and workshop on the Status and Conservation Needs of the Neotropical Cats in São Francisco de Paula, Brazil (p. 10-11), the core group of the IUCN/SSC Cat SG had a two-day meeting. After a series of updates on various activities, we discussed the permanent tasks of the Cat SG (Red List, CITES, Global Mammal Assessment, etc.), communication strategy, how to set conservation priorities and update the existing action plan, and membership policy for the upcoming renewal of the group for the new quadrennial period. Peter Crawshaw and his crew hosted the Group in the National Forest. The great environment was very inspiring.



Core group members during an evening excursion in the National Forest near São Francisco de Paula.

Staff and ...

We wish to thank all the dedicated colleagues and members of the Cat Specialist Group, who have helped steer the group through the year 2005. Working very closely with the Cat Specialist Group Co-chairs were Manuela von Arx (Assistant to the Chair), Adrian Siegenthaler (book keeping), Kristin Nowell (Focal Point of the Cat SG Red List Authority and representing the Cat SG on the Central Coordinating Committee which was organizing the lion conservation workshops), Peter Jackson (Advisor to the Chair and Co-editor of Cat News): a great thank you to all of them.

We would like to thank the many enthusiastic people who helped develop and run the various projects in 2005: Fridolin Zimmermann (Iberian lynx habitat modelling, Balkan lynx workshop), Tammy Baldwin (intern for fund raising, Neotropical cats workshop, January to June 2005), Marlis Hofstetter (intern Digital Cat Library, January to April 2005), Urs Kägi (supervision of web projects, staff January to May 2005), José Juan Klee (web version of the Balkan lynx compendium, new website), Pietro Persico (intern for the GMA, January to February 2005), Ivan Sasu (intern for Cheetah Conservation Compendium, October to December 2005), Mirjam Lüpold, intern for the caracal review), Katia Ferraz (GIS work on the South American Felids) and Christof Angst (web version of the Cheetah Conservation Compendium, November 2005). We would also like to thank the many colleagues who have contributed to the launch of the new website. With a minimum budget we would not have been able to realise it without the help of our colleagues! Urs Kägi was responsible for the technical concept. In the programming tasks, he was supported by Jose Juan Klee and Tien-Minh Nguyen-Ha. A special thanks goes to Jon Wikne, who is hosting the Cat SG web family.

We are also grateful to Kristin Nowell and David Mallon, who provided us with much advice and represented the Cat Specialist Group at international meetings. Alex Sliwa has generously donated a lot of his superb cat pictures for Cat SG purposes.

Sponsors

Although much of our work as an IUCN/SSC Specialist Group is done on a voluntary basis, our projects would not be possible without financial support from many committed institutions and private persons. We would like to thank the following organisations for their partnership and support: WWF International, the Mava Foundation, Charles Knowles from the Wildlife Conservation Network, Columbus Zoo, CCF Namibia, Federal Agency of Nature Conservation with financial means of the Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Federal Republic of Germany, Ms Renate Stock and last but not least, the many *Friends of the Cat Group*.