

Muri/Bern, 7 August 2004

## **IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group Quadrennial Report 2001-2004**

By the end of the previous term, Peter Jackson, who had led the Cat Specialist Group for 17 years, stepped down, and the SSC chair invited us to co-chair the group. To get started, we asked some recognised experts in cat conservation to meet in Switzerland in summer 2001 to discuss priorities in cat conservation. One result of this meeting was the establishment of a Core Group in order to support the co-chairs. Core group members are: Sarah Christie, Peter Crawshaw, Peter Jackson, Rodney Jackson, AJT Johnsingh, Ullas Karanth, Thomas McCarthy, Laurie Marker, Gus Mills, Dale Miquelle, Kristin Nowell, Steve O'Brien, Alan Rabinowitz, and James Sanderson. The Core Group represents different fields of expertise, regional experiences, and specific knowledge of different cat species. It is the strategic body of the CatSG, which develops cat conservation concepts, identifies priorities, and supervises the permanent tasks of the CatSG, such as the red list assessment. Certain areas – for instance Asia with the exception of India – are underrepresented in the group, but this is a consequence of the distribution of the CatSG members and of the fact that still most cat conservation experts are North Americans and Europeans.

The Cat SG has some 200 members from all over the world. As no specific general assemblies can be organised, we profit from international conferences to hold “plenary” meetings. One such session took place during the ITC VIII in South Africa in 2001. The Core Group intends to meet about ever second year in a priority region for cat conservation, so that general CatSG business can be combined with the discussion of regional cat conservation questions. Such a meeting took place in October 2002 in southern Spain, where we organised, together with international and national partners, a symposium on the conservation of the Iberian lynx. *Lynx pardinus* was, as the first cat species ever, uplisted to Critically Endangered. The CatSG has since been involved in the conservation of this medium-sized cat, of which no more than about 200 individuals exist, and will co-organise a follow-up meeting in late 2004.

The co-chairs of the CatSG have been involved in the development of conservation strategies for several also Critically Endangered sub-species of cats, such as the Amur leopard, the Arabian leopard or the Asiatic cheetah. For all these superb cats, the total number living in the wild has declined to 40-60 individuals. For the Amur leopard, a well-managed captive population exists, and for the Nimr, the Arabian leopard, one is being built up. Asiatic cheetahs, however, do not exist in captivity. It's survival depends fully on the conservation efforts taken in Iran, the only country still hosting a population.

The CatSG Core Group has re-defined the forms of partnership. Besides the many alliances with other organisations regarding the conservation of cats and co-operation with other specialist groups, such as the Re-Introduction SG or the Conservation Breeding SG, we have decided to have two forms of sub-groups: The first is a “working group”, dealing with a specific species, topic or region,

and the second is a “partner group” which closely co-operates with the CatSG in a certain field. Whereas the members of a working group are all members of the CatSG, this need not to be the case with a partner group. The relation of a partner group and the CatSG is defined through a Memorandum of Understanding. The first sub-group recognised by the CatSG was the African Lion Working Group, a very active group chaired by Sarel van der Merve. The ALWG is deeply involved in the assessment of the lion’s status throughout Africa, and the ongoing re-evaluation of the lion in regard to its Red List classification. A new formal sub-group is the Andean Cat Alliance (the former Andean Cat Conservation Committee), a group coordinated by Lilian Villalba and supported by the Wildlife Conservation Network. This working group is preparing a conservation action plan, but also running a field project on the Andean cat, a rare and not well known small cat species. They have managed in June 2004 to radio-collar the first Andean cat ever. The CatSG has established a close co-operation with the Snow Leopard Network, which was initiated by the International Snow Leopard Trust, a long-term partner of the CatSG in the conservation of this charismatic cat of Central Asia.

As a service to members, friends and all individuals and institutions working in cat conservation, the CatSG has established the Digital Cat Library. The library contains some 5,000 PDFs of papers and reports relevant to the conservation of wild cats. It is accessible under [www.catsglib.org](http://www.catsglib.org). Other services are the members' database, the cat conservation project database (generated in co-operation with the Zoological Society London). These services will all be available through the CatSG website ([www.catsg.org](http://www.catsg.org)), which is currently being extended.

A task started this year is the Global Mammal Assessment. For the GMA, the CatSG has produced updated distribution maps for all extant 36 cat species. This exercise revealed how heterogeneous the available intelligence is. Whereas the status and distribution of some species in certain regions is a matter of ongoing systematic monitoring, the distribution maps for other areas still refer to the publications of Sven Hedin.

The CatSG’s biannual newsletter Cat News has reached its 20<sup>th</sup> year of publication and the 40<sup>th</sup> issue was mailed in July 2004. The newsletter is edited by Peter Jackson, the former chairman of the Cat SG and currently advisor to the chair. Every year, 600 copies of two issues with 40-56 pages are mailed to members and people interested in cat conservation around the world. All subscribers to Cat News, the *Friends of the Cat Group*, support the production of the newsletter.

The activities of the CatSG would not be possible without the support from other institutions. During the 2001-04 term, we have gratefully received funding from WWF International, Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Network, Wildlife Conservation Society, Cat Action Treasury, Bosak and Kruger Foundation (through CAT), and the Karl Mayer Stiftung.

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