

African Lion Conservation Workshops: Conservation Biology and Sub-Regional Conservation Strategies Developed by Range States and Stakeholders

Organized by: IUCN-the World Conservation Union and its Species Survival Commission, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Africa Resources Trust

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Africa is the primary remaining range of the lion, *Panthera leo*. While the lion ranged over the last hundred years across much of Southwest Asia, outside Africa there is now just a single population, of Asiatic lions (*P. leo persica*), in India's Gir Forest. Africa is home to most of the world's lions, and the solutions for lion conservation must be developed here. The lion is a powerful symbol of Africa, yet living with lions poses hardships for many African communities. In some areas, the lion is a major predator on domestic livestock, leading to profound conflicts with local herders. Lions also take human life, with worrying frequency in certain areas such as south-eastern Tanzania (Baldus 2004; Craig Packer pers. comm. 2004). Yet the lion is not only a source of personal and economic damage and danger, but also of economic and personal benefits, as a primary attractor for tourism and one of Africa's "Big Five" trophy animals.

There is a need for a conservation framework that integrates legislative provisions and a system of incentives for the lion and other wildlife species to successfully compete and co-exist with human activities outside protected areas. Unless the lion is perceived to have value by communities and other stakeholders outside protected areas, it will fail to compete for habitats. The national level is critical for the development of a conservation framework that leads to the resolution of the human – lion conflict. These national efforts need to be linked across geographic regions for enhanced impacts

Background to the African Lion Conservation Workshops

On 21 April 2004, prior to the 13th Conference of the Parties to CITES, Kenya circulated a proposal among lion range states to change the listing of the African lion from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I. The proposal stated that the African lion met the requirements for Appendix I under Res. Conf. 9.24 because of an estimated recent decline in the continental population, the small size of the population in the West African sub-region, and because the African lion was potentially threatened by trade.

Also in April 2004, the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group carried out an assessment of the African lion for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. This was not published until

November 2004 and was not available at the time the Kenya proposal was produced. Using two important sources for population estimates not referenced in the Kenya proposal (Ferrerias and Cousins, 1996; Chardonnet, 2002), the lion was assessed as Vulnerable (VU A2abcd) according to the following justification: “*A species population reduction of >30 - <50% is suspected over the past two decades (three lion generations = 19.5 years). The causes of this reduction are not well understood, are unlikely to have ceased, and may not be reversible.*” This suspected reduction is based on direct observation; appropriate indices of abundance; a decline in area of occupation, extent of occupation and habitat quality; and actual and potential levels of exploitation (IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, 2004). The decline is uncertain because of the uncertainties inherent in estimating lion numbers on a continental basis. There is a need for improved information on the status and distribution of African lion populations, and for more comprehensive population monitoring.

Many in the cat conservation community, including the Cat Specialist Group and its affiliated African Lion Working Group (ALWG), do not consider the primary causes of this suspected decline to be trade-related (Nowell, 2004). Resolving human-lion conflicts and stemming loss of habitat and wild prey are seen as the priorities for lion conservation (Nowell and Jackson, 1996; Chardonnet, 2002; Bauer & Van Der Merwe, 2004; Machena, 2005).

At COP13 in November 2004, Kenya withdrew this proposal following extensive negotiation and discussion among the Parties, particularly among the African lion range states of East and Southern Africa where most of the trade in lions (mainly hunting trophies) originates. A consensus emerged from these informal discussions around an initiative put forward by the nations of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to hold a series of regional African lion workshops to determine lion status and develop conservation recommendations. At COP13, the UK Department of Environment, Food Resources and Agriculture (DEFRA) pledged support for these workshops. Shortly afterward, Safari Club International (SCI) also stepped forward with major funding support.

SADC invited IUCN to organize the workshops, and IUCN asked the Species Survival Commission (SSC) and its Cat Specialist Group (Cat SG) to provide technical support. Africa Resources Trust (ART) was invited to draft an original concept note and funding proposal (Machena, 2005). At the same time, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) was planning a Rangewide Priority Setting (RWPS) exercise for the African lion. In accordance with previous exercises for other cat species, this process involves working with specialists and their population and threats data to prioritize populations for conservation based on their biological status. In addition, the African Lion Working Group was planning a major update of its African Lion Database. As IUCN began to liaise with the various groups and stakeholders involved in lion conservation, it became clear that these parallel initiatives should be brought together in the interest of providing a unified view on the status, the threats and the recommended actions for conserving Africa's lions.

After some discussion, it was agreed that all these parties would cooperate to link the processes through this series of African lion conservation workshops. A Central Coordinating Committee (CCC) was set up comprising: Cecil Machena (ART and Chair of the CCC), James Murombedzi (IUCN-Regional Office, Southern Africa), Daniel Ngantou (IUCN-Regional Office, Central Africa), Holly Dublin (IUCN SSC), Kristin Nowell (IUCN SSC Cat SG) and Luke Hunter (WCS).

Structure of the African Lion Conservation Workshops

There is general agreement that the status and conservation management of the African lion differs among the four sub-regions of Sub-Saharan Africa: West, Central, Eastern and Southern. While the lion is considered Endangered in the West African sub-region by the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group (Bauer and Nowell, 2004), in East and Southern Africa lions are widespread and numerous in some areas. There is also agreement that there needs to be greater cooperation between these sub-regions, so that range states can share experiences, cooperate on trans-boundary issues, and as much as possible and practical speak with a unified voice about the solutions to the problem of conserving Africa's lions. For that reason, the CCC decided to convene two workshops, one for West and Central Africa (to be simultaneously translated in French and English), and one for East and Southern Africa (to be conducted in English).

Each workshop will have two sessions. The need for greater understanding of lion status, threats and distribution will be addressed by lion specialists in a 3-day technical session. The need for improved conservation management will be addressed in a subsequent 3-day strategic planning session, by multiple stakeholders (including range state government officials, community leaders, safari hunting operators, lion specialists, and national and international governmental and non-governmental organization representatives). The technical session will provide the strategic planning session with updated information on the African lion population and a starting point for elaboration of sub-regional conservation strategies.

The technical session, funded by WCS and organized by WCS in cooperation with the IUCN SSC Cat SG, ALWG, and Réseau Ouest et Centre Africain pour la Conservation du Lion (ROCAL), will be a Rangewide Priority Setting modelled on previous exercises conducted for tigers, jaguars and other species. The goals are:

- (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; and
- (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.

In preparation for the workshops, WCS, in consultation with the IUCN SSC Cat SG-ALWG-ROCAL technical advisory committee, has developed a series of questionnaires

which will provide data for GIS range maps of the African lion. At the technical sessions of the two workshops, approximately 20-30 lion specialists will review the results of the mapping exercise and assess population vulnerability.

Following the technical session, we will re-convene with other stakeholders to begin strategic planning (total 45-55 people per workshop). The goal of these sessions will be to develop lion conservation strategies for the four sub-regions (West, Central, East, and Southern). The African lion sub-regional conservation strategic planning process will be modeled on the successful range state-driven, multi-stakeholder process that resulted in the West African Elephant Conservation Strategy (IUCN, 2003) and is currently underway in Central and Southern Africa. Participants will be expected to elaborate long-term goals and short-term objectives and actions, with measurable indicators of success.

The needs for and benefits of sub-regional strategies can be summarized as follows:

Needs for sub-regional strategies:

- Address the importance of lions as a natural resource for the Range States of the species;
- The challenge presented in conserving and managing lions, which are dangerous predators and which also utilize and sometimes require cross-border ranges;
- The need for a sound and factual base of knowledge to support management decisions;
- The strong political will expressed by African range states to conserve the lion;
- The keen interest of the international community in African lion conservation;
- The benefits of a common voice on policy issues related to lions within the context of CITES; and
- The need to identify and resolve the primary threats to lions and to establish the cause(s) of a suspected decline (since 1980) in the continental population.

Potential benefits of sub-regional strategies:

- Ensure better protection and management of threatened lion populations and hence, the overall biodiversity of African savannah ecosystems;
- Identify and involve key actors in lion conservation;
- Strengthen partnerships for the benefit of lion conservation;
- Ensure capacity building at the national and regional levels to further lion conservation;
- Help to secure and focus resources, both human and financial, for the conservation of lions in Africa; and
- Provide guidelines for the formulation of national and sub-national strategies, policies and action plans for lion conservation management.

Prior to the workshops, participants will receive a series of background papers on: the status and distribution of the African lion; the lion and community-based natural resource management; lion-human conflict and problem-animal management; trophy hunting management for sustainability; and an overview of conservation strategic planning processes.

Workshop Schedule

West and Central African Lion Conservation Workshop. Douala, Cameroon.

October 2-4, 2004: Rangewide Priority Setting

October 5-7, 2004: Strategic Planning for Conservation and Management

East and Southern African Lion Conservation Workshop. Venue TBA, South Africa

January 8-10; 2006: Rangewide Priority Setting

January 11-13, 2006: Strategic Planning for Conservation and Management

While the CCC is aware that there is a large constituency for African lion conservation, participation in the African Lion Conservation Workshops must be limited due to practical aspects of the workshop structure. Thanks to the generous support of the workshop sponsors, the travel and accommodation costs of invited participants will be covered. Invited participants will be expected to represent not only their own individual views, but also those of their respective networks of colleagues, agencies, and organizations. While it is impossible to involve all data- and stake-holders in these workshops, they should be seen as part of a larger conservation planning process for the African lion. Assessments and strategies arising from the workshops will help guide but cannot replace the detailed development and implementation of policies, priorities and practices by a wide range of actors on the national and sub-national levels. In turn, the workshop's assessments and strategies are expected to adapt to and reflect the results and experiences of people engaged in lion conservation, management and research.

Background Papers

The following background papers have been commissioned, for distribution to participants prior to each workshop (additional papers may also be commissioned):

Lion Status and Distribution in Africa. Hans Bauer, Philippe Chardonnet and Kristin Nowell. This paper gives a continental overview of lion status based on the Cat Specialist Group's Red List assessment (Cat Specialist Group, 2004) and, on a country-by-country basis, compares the population estimates from two recent surveys carried out by the African Lion Working Group (Bauer and Van Der Merwe, 2004) and the International Foundation for the Conservation of Wildlife (Chardonnet, 2002).

Major Lion Conservation Issues in West and Central Africa. Philippe Chardonnet, William Crosmary and co-authors from the region. This paper will review habitat loss, prey base depletion, human lion conflict, and the role of trophy hunting in the region. In French.

Human-Lion Conflict and Problem Animal Control in East and Southern Africa. Laurence Frank, Graham Hemson and Craig Packer, with others. This paper will review the problem of lion-human conflict, including predation on livestock as well as man-eating, and examine solutions for problem animal management.

Management for Sustainable Lion Trophy Hunting in East and Southern Africa. Craig Packer, Karyl Whitman, Andrew Loveridge and others. This paper will review trophy hunting in the region, and examine solutions for ensuring sustainability.

Strategic Planning for Lion Conservation. Holly Dublin and Kristin Nowell. This paper describes the logical framework process that will be used at the workshops to produce regional lion conservation strategies.

Workshop Outputs

There will be two types of output from the African Lion Conservation Workshops.

1. **Conservation Strategies.** Regional conservation strategies will identify objectives and actions for lion management in the four sub-regions of Sub-Saharan Africa (West, Central, East and Southern). In addition, a continental summary overview document will be produced. This series of conservation strategies will be the first of their kind for a wild cat species. With the range states having full participation in their development, the strategies will guide national and sub-national lion conservation management, promote inter- and intra-regional cooperation, and provide a framework for international investment in lion conservation in Africa. IUCN will produce and publish these strategies.
2. **Updated Overview of Lion Population Distribution and Status.** Lion Conservation Units will be identified, which include estimated, mapped populations grouped by similarity in status and threat. This information will feed into the conservation strategies, and will also be communicated to the conservation community through publication in peer-reviewed journals. This Lion Geographic Information System built by WCS will support continuing efforts to monitor lion status by the African Lion Working Group and the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group.

These workshop outputs are anticipated to serve as a catalyst for African lion conservation. They will provide the best assessment of the current status of the African

lion, with populations prioritized for conservation. They will help develop a GIS-based database which can be continually updated to monitor lion status. They will provide a framework for Range States to set out mutually agreed objectives and actions for lion conservation and management. These will guide not only national and sub-national policies, practices and priorities, but also those on the continental and international level.

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