

North African Cheetah Conservation Workshop

Representatives of Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia and of the IUCN Secretariat and the Cat Specialist Group participated in a workshop in Rabat on 2-4 April 1996 to coordinate efforts to conserve cheetahs in North Africa. The participants were:

- Algeria – Dr Bouredjli Hachemi Amir, Agence Nationale pour la Conservation de la Nature.
- Egypt – Dr Mustafa Saleh, Dept of Zoology, Al Azhar University. Project Coordinator.
- Morocco – Dr Brahim Haddane, Parc Zoologique National de Rabat.
- Tunisia – Dr Mohamed Ali Abrougui, Association Tunisienne pour la Protection de la Nature.
- IUCN – Francis Parakatil.
- IUCN Cat Specialist Group – Peter Jackson.
- Libya's representative, Dr Husni, Technical Centre for Environmental Protection, was unable to attend owing to a last-minute minor car accident.

The cheetah project is a component of a North Africa Biodiversity Programme sponsored by the IUCN and funded by the Swiss government. The programme involves five major activities in 1995-96:

1. conservation of centres of biological diversity;
2. conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants;
3. conservation of the cheetah;
4. biodiversity conservation education;
5. translation into Arabic of the IUCN Guide to the Biodiversity Convention.

North Africa's natural resources are especially vulnerable, in particular because:

- life is distributed very unevenly over the region, with large areas of uninhabited desert;
- the population is growing rapidly;
- in the northern fringe, where most of the people live, desertification is a constant threat;
- much land is being converted to agricultural use, and much existing agricultural land suffers from salinization;
- the growth of industry and of human settlements is putting pressure on natural resources;
- land, sea and inland waters are being polluted by dangerous and hazardous chemicals;
- most biotic and abiotic resources are not effectively managed; and
- there is a need for greater institutional development to tackle environmental and sustainable development issues.

At the Rabat workshop, Peter Jackson reviewed the world cheetah situation. He said that the total population was estimated at 9,000-12,000, almost all in sub-Saharan Africa. In North Africa, cheetah were known to survive in very small numbers in Algeria and Egypt, and possible Morocco. In Asia, the cheetah was considered extinct, except for a population of fewer than 100 in Iran.

The main concentrations of cheetah are in Namibia (about 2,500) and East Africa (about 3,000). In Namibia, where 95% of the cheetahs are found on livestock farms, the Cheetah Conservation Fund is conducting a major programme to study the ecology of the animal, and to assist farmers in managing and protecting their livestock to reduce predation, which has led to extensive killing of cheetahs.

Dr Saleh, who has been appointed Regional Coordinator for the cheetah project, said that specimens collected in the past showed that cheetahs in North Africa were only two-thirds the size of those in sub-Saharan Africa, and had tails with spots rather than rings. Thus it represented something unique to North African countries and could be used as a "flagship" species for nature conservation in the region. Cooperation between the five countries was essential. It was important to involve local people. Former cheetah habitats needed to be identified for possible reintroduction in due course e.g. 20 years time.

National Reports

Algeria

Dr Bouredjli Hachemi Amir presented two documents on "Conservation of the Cheetah in Algeria" and "Programme for the Rehabilitation of the Cheetah in Algeria". Two sites in southern Algeria have been selected for investigation in the light of credible reports of cheetah presence. They are in the vicinity of the Ahaggar National Park, and Tassili N'Ajjars.

Egypt

Dr Mustafa Saleh said that the Western Desert had an extremely arid climate. Potential cheetah habitats were scattered spots. During recent field expeditions he had found that places where he had found cheetah sign in the past appeared to have no cheetahs now.

Libya

In the absence of Dr Husni, Dr Mohammed Ali Abrougui explained that there was no information about cheetah in Libya since the publication of Libyan Mammals (Hufnagl 1972). He considered it possible that cheetah might be found near Libya's eastern frontier with Egypt.

Morocco

Dr Brahim Haddane reported that cheetah tracks had been found in the past five years along the Draa River in southern Morocco. Cuivier's gazelles *Gazella cuivier* were present in the area in small numbers. Surveys were planned in the area. Southern Morocco (former Spanish Sahara), where cheetahs had been reported in the past, was a closed military zone and it had not been possible to enter the area, where cheetahs had been reported in the past. However, collaboration with the Forest Department could lead to permission to carry out surveys.

Tunisia

Dr Mohammed Ali Abrougui said a survey needed to be carried out on the eastern border with Libya, but this was a restricted military area. Permission had been sought for work to be carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, which had relations with local people in the area.

During the period April 1996 to March 1997, the North African countries will carry out field surveys to establish the status of cheetahs, prey species (especially gazelles and hares), and habitats.

On the basis of the results of the surveys, a detailed plan for the protection of the cheetah in its natural habitats will be prepared. The plan will include recommendations for legal, administrative and enforcement requirements for the effective and immediate protection of the animal in its present range. The

involvement of the local bedouins and authorities will be of key importance in this respect.

The plan will also include the selection of a suitable area (or areas) to be declared as a special cheetah reserve conforming to the requirements of the United Nations List of National Parks and Reserves, and the preparation of an initial management plan.

Dr Saleh said the aim should be to collect information of value to management. The services of wildlife biologists, plant ecologists, botanists, desert guides and expert trackers was required. Equipment should include a Global Positioning System (GPS). During surveys, the general ecology should be studied, and traps used for capture/release studies of potential cheetah prey species, such as hares *Lepus spp.*

Reference

Uulfnagl, E., 1972. Libyan mammals. Oleander Press.