

Translocation of South African Carnivores

by Jeremy Anderson*

While translocations of ungulates in South Africa have reached the level where more than 20,000 animals are moved annually, re-introductions of carnivores have been far more limited and proportionally less successful. These re-introductions have been done primarily by the Conservation Agencies, rather than the private sector, and the aims have been to re-establish a component of faunal diversity and to enhance the attraction of the area to visitors. Of the larger predators present in the region, only the spotted hyaena *Crocuta crocuta* is yet to be translocated.

The first documented re-introduction was of lion *Panthera leo* into the Hluhluwe/Umfolozi complex in Zululand. Following entry of a nomadic male in 1958, two adult females and two female cubs were introduced in 1965. This was successful, and the population rapidly increased. The gene pool from which this lion population originated is very small; the adult females came from the same pride and were presumably related. It is also likely that when they formed a new pride with the male, he killed the two cubs. To date, no detrimental results of this probable inbreeding have been suspected.

Without a lion-proof fence it was inevitable that there would be conflict with pastoralists. Since the mid-1970s, the population has been managed at a level of approx. 100 animals. This management reduces the degree of dispersal, and the level of livestock killing (for which compensation is paid) is acceptable to neighbouring communities.

Two further lion re-introductions are in progress, both for less than a month so it is too early to comment on the outcome. However, in each case the use of electric fencing, implanted radio-transmitters and insurance against livestock losses due to lions should enhance the chances of success.

All leopard *P. pardus* re-introductions have been into areas where leopard numbers had been so reduced that signs of the species were extremely rare. The animals were problem animals captured at least 200 km from the site of release. While there was no post-release monitoring, leopard signs and sightings are now commonplace in Mkuzi and Itala. In Songimvelo, leopard sign are encountered on a monthly basis, whereas previously spoor was recorded only about once over a four-year period.

Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* introductions into Ndumu, Mkuzi and the Eastern Shores of St. Lucia were unsuccessful, in part due to lack of suitable habitat. Re-introductions to Pilanesburg, Suikerbosrand and Itala were regarded as being too successful in that rapidly increasing populations were having a significant impact on ungulate populations. As a consequence, cheetah were either controlled or removed. It has been speculated that absence of lion and spotted hyaena caused the rapid increase in the cheetah populations. The introduction of cheetah into the Kalahari Gemsbok and Kruger National Parks was to improve the status of the species which was perceived to be rare. The animals were problem animals captured in

Namibia, and as the resident cheetah in both parks were at carrying capacity it is not surprising that there was no noticeable change in the status of the species. Despite ear-tagging, none of the introduced cheetah were re-sighted after release.

Most of these translocations (including re-introductions) can be regarded as unplanned experiments. An important point is that virtually all the animals involved were problem animals captured outside conservation areas. Had they not been translocated they would have been destroyed. The les-

sons learned confirm what would have been expected from recent studies on predator ecology. Perhaps the most useful experience of re-introducing large carnivores has been growth in confidence, to accept both the risk of failure and adverse public and media reactions.

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