

SPECIES STATUS REPORT ON THE ARABIAN LEOPARD IN OMAN (*Panthera pardus nimr*)

Habitat and Distribution

The former habitat of the leopard included the whole of the Northern Oman mountains from Musandam to the southern end of the Eastern Hajar range near Sur, as well as the Dhofar mountains. A new report indicates that leopards have ranged in the southern Central Region, and are probably still there.

The last leopard confirmed seen alive in the Northern Oman mountains south of Musandam was near Nakhl in 1976. The skull and part of the pelt was recovered for science in 1976, three months after it was shot by a young bedu who saw it approach his goats to attack them. However there were no other recent leopard sightings in that area within the living memory of the oldest inhabitants. Therefore it is possible that it had escaped or had been released from captivity in a house or garden somewhere in the region. (Insall pers. comm.).

A leopard was shot in the Jebel Aswad at Bu Haleyfah FL628650, now within the Wadi Sareen Wildlife Reserve, approximately 35 years ago by the first head ranger. (Insall pers. comm.).

In 1976 large footprints (45mm across) similar to leopard spore were found near Warrawarra, in Wadi Quyyid, in the Wadi Sareen, but positive identification could not be made. (Munton 1985).

In 1979 a bedu reported seeing a leopard in Jebel 'Alka, to the south of the Wadi Sareen Reserve. His brother reported seeing it again there in the winter of 1980/1981. No further investigation was able to be made. No further reports have been received by the Wadi Sareen rangers, who patrol that area and have relatives who graze it. (Insall pers. comm.).

Legends and stories of leopards abound in the remaining regions of Northern Oman, often carried down in place names, giving evidence of their former distribution. These include that of Hayl Selmah, in the Eastern Hajar, Hayl Salman in Jebel Kawr and Wadi Ghawr Naqa, near Bilad Shahoom and Kahf Seb An Naar at Sho'uf An Nimr in the Jebel Al Akhdhar above Al Hamra. The last was said to have been seen in the Wadi Hawasinah region about 40 years ago. (Insall pers. comm.)

Recent reports from the Dhofar mountains include the following:

- a. 14 October 1994 in upper Wadi 'Aydim, above Mughsayl, in Western Dhofar. Seen asleep in a cave by a member of staff of this Ministry at a distance of 200m.
- b. In early 1994 one was heard calling in the jebel just above 'Ayn Hamran, on the north-east fringe of the Jerbeeb (Salalah Plain), for the first time for many years.
- c. The photographs taken by David Willis this year provide continuing evidence that they are in Jebel Sumhan, a mountain with many inaccessible waterholes and an apparently substantial Nubian Ibex population.

From Musandam, reports include the following:

- a. One seen in 1994 above in Jebel Jemayim, above Al Khalidiyah in the Wadi Sal Al 'Aala.
- b. In February 1995 two were seen walking at the foot of the jebel behind the Bayah industrial area, just before sunset.

should be Northern Oman mountains.

January

Jebel Sumayna

c. In the first week of February 1995, one seen on a mountain east of Shuwayb, on the border between Oman and the UAE. (ALT Newsletter).

d. In 1994 one was seen crossing the mountain above Bait Sheikh, near Khassab, moving from north to south.

e. On 02 September 1994 one seen at dusk at an uninhabited village and garden at Luwaib 4 km south of Wadi BiH. (ALT report).

In the past week a report from a reliable source indicates that there may still be leopards in the southern escarpments of the Central Region:

In August 1994 the man was travelling with a friend in the Wadi 'Ayayna when they saw a leopard at about 1 km distance, at about 8.30 am, high in the surrounding escarpment of the Jiddat Arkad, north of Lakbi, from down below in the Wadi 'Aynayna. He has seen them many times before in that area and this was the last occasion.

Conservation Measures Taken

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman has already taken the following measures which will benefit the conservation of the leopard:

- (1) Made a comprehensive plan for the protection and management of its wildlife, following the IUCN Survey in 1985/86 and subsequent work.
 - (2) Established in 1979 an Omani Mammal Breeding Centre under the Diwan of Royal Court. Leopards have been successfully bred there in captivity, for eventual re-introduction into the wild.
 - (3) Established legal measures by Royal Decree in 1982 which require that all development projects be subjected to environmental scrutiny and licensing, enabling important wildlife habitat and landscape to be protected.
 - (4) Established in 1992 a Directorate-General of Nature Protectorates, which is now responsible for the monitoring and management of wildlife inside and outside protected areas, in close co-operation with the Regional Municipalities, giving it a strong nation-wide administrative infrastructure to support this work. Additionally, the regional municipalities are providing a steadily increasing flow of wildlife information.
 - (5) Become a founder signatory to the Biodiversity Convention at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, giving added commitment to the protection of endangered species.
 - (6) Strengthened earlier laws by a Ministerial Decision in July 1993 banning the hunting and capture of all wild animals and birds.
 - (7) Commenced the formation of mobile 5-man wildlife protection units for the Governorate of Musandam and the Governorate of Dhofar, with the following objectives:
 - (i) To patrol the whole of each region to increase public awareness of conservation issues.
 - (ii) To gather information about wildlife populations.
 - (iii) To enforce the laws against poaching.
- They are part of a nation-wide network of such units which may be deployed to any region as required. Vehicles have been bought and radios will be issued in about 4 months' time. Other field equipment is in various stages of procurement or issue. This will enable a more formal system of information reporting to be implemented.
- (8) Drafted a further Ministerial Decision to strengthen certain aspects of the law, current under consideration.
 - (9) Made a comprehensive plan for wildlife conservation, submitted for the Fifth 5-Year Development Plan.
 - (10) Commenced drafting an Updated Strategy and Action Plan for the conservation of the Arabian Tahr, for submission to the SSC, helping to ensure the survival of this important prey of the leopard.

(11) Pursued an expanding programme of environmental awareness, including regional lectures and seminars conducted in Arabic. A draft Leopard fact sheet and information report form, for distribution among schoolchildren, is currently under production, as are self-adhesive stickers depicting the leopard. School visits to nature reserves will be increased from this Autumn and coverage in the press and TV is also being increased.

Conservation Measures Proposed

The following action is planned:

- (1) The continued expansion, equipping and training of the wildlife protection units, increasing activity according to the aims stated above.
- (2) The designation in Musandam Governorate of national parks, zoned into strict nature reserves and scenic reserves, with only limited industrial development and urban areas excluded from the boundary. The aim is to promote ecological tourism for the region in a way which will benefit the local community, ensuring that the landscape and wildlife resources are protected and utilised sustainably. The Wadi Hasna in the Omani enclave of Mad-ha is under consideration for designation as a natural park administered by the Municipality, with technical guidance from the Directorate-General of Nature Protectorates. Further survey this winter may result in recommendations that other areas of Mad-ha may be designated, possibly into a higher category if the presence of Arabian Tahr and Caracal is considered significant.
- (3) The designation of Jebel Sumhan and Jebel Al Qamar regions as national parks, followed by other proposed protected areas in Dhofar.
- (4) The initiation of studies to gain more information about the population and range of the leopard, as and when funding can be secured.
- (5) Continued environmental awareness programmes, both nationally and locally.
- (6) Continued exchange of data on leopards with neighbouring countries.

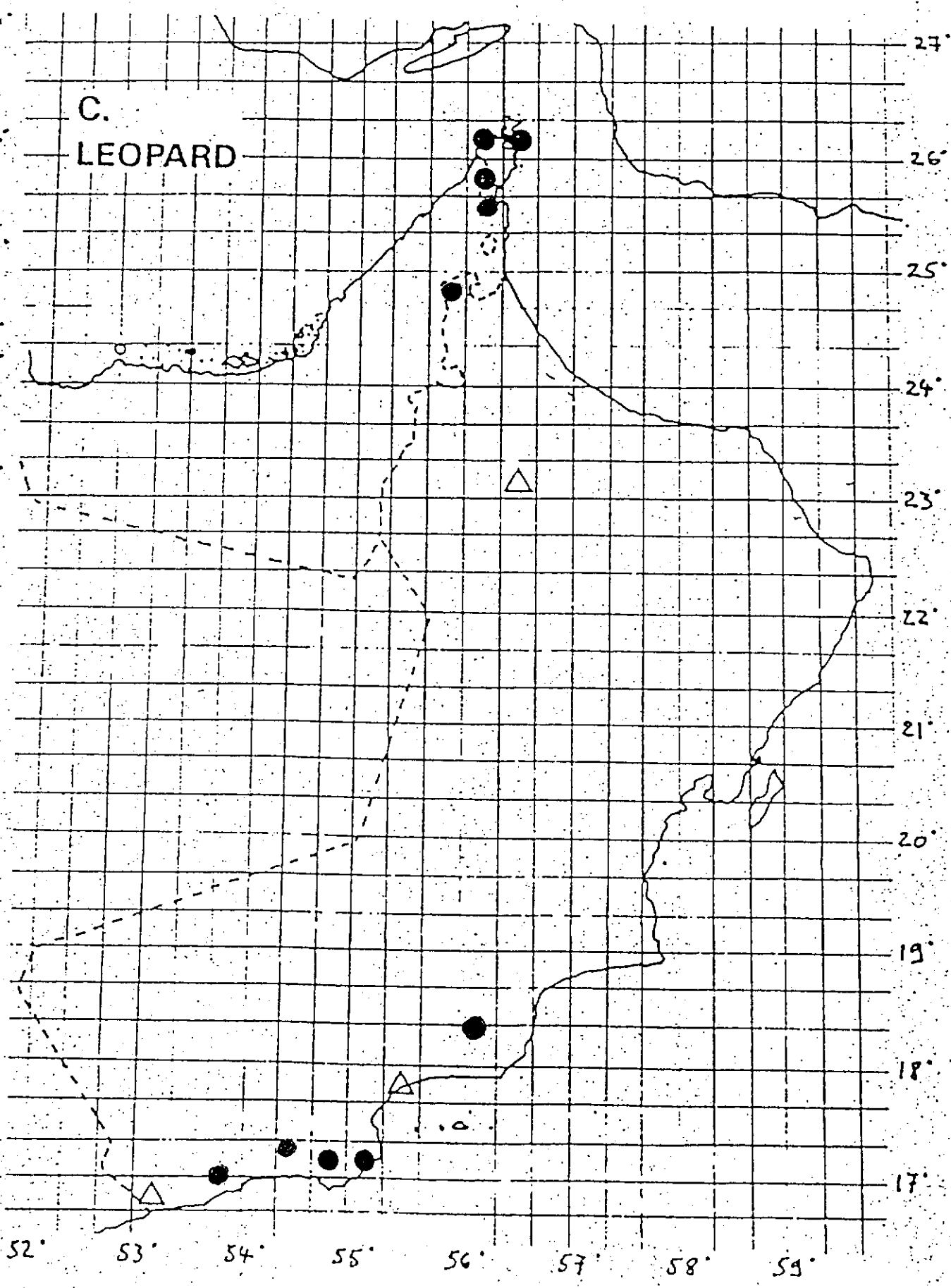
Conclusions

It can therefore be seen that much work has already been done to establish proper safeguards for the Leopard and its habitat in Oman. Much is in the formative stage and the next twelve months will see considerably more activity in the field, as the rangers become operational.

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● - Sightings 1994/1995