

# CSS Cats – a new partner in cat conservation

The IUCN Species Survival Commission has signed a memorandum of understanding with The Big Cat Sanctuary in Kent, UK, to establish the world's first Centre for Species Survival for cats. The CSS Cats will closely cooperate with the Cat Specialist Group to promote and advance cat conservation around the globe.

Centres for Species Survival are partnerships between the SSC Chair's Office and conservation organisations, mostly located at zoos and aquariums. CSSs have either a taxonomic, geographic or thematic focus. So far, some 30 CSSs have been established (see <https://iucn.org/our-union/commissions/species-survival-commission/partners-and-donors/centers-species-survival>).



The Centre's work will be based on an agreement between IUCN SSC and the host organisation of the CSS. In the case of the CSS Cats, the Cat SG co-chairs and the management of The Big Cat Sanctuary have agreed on an amendment to the MoU, which outlines the cooperation between the two institutions. The objective of the agreement is that the CSS Cats is supporting IUCN SSC and the Cat Specialist Group in the implementation of the Assess – Plan – Act (APA) concept, specifically, to contribute to Assess to Plan (A2P) and Plan to Act (P2A) intermediate steps, capacity building of young conservationists in range states and support in growing the network of cat conservationists.

These principles are also the basis for the cooperation between the CSS Cats and the Cat SG. The APA concept provides a convincing framework for conservation, but we need to improve the outreach and the practical implementation of these standards. The components A2P, P2A and capacity building are elements that the Cat SG wants to strengthen during the next quadrennium, and we are thrilled to have the CSS Cats as a new partner to help us reach these goals.

The Big Cat Sanctuary (<https://thebigcatsanctuary.org>) will hire two Species Survival Officers for the CSS Cats, which will closely cooperate with the Cat SG Chair's Office. This will boost our capacity in assessments, strategic planning, and capacity building. As a start, we will introduce the CSS Cats staff to the IUCN SSC and Cat SG philosophy and approach to conservation, e.g. based on the recently revised Cat Conservation Compendium (<https://www.catsg.org/catnews-1>). But beyond, The Big Cat Sanctuary will be an amazing venue for cat conservation meetings. Founded in the year 2000, The Big Cat Sanctuary is a UK-based charity located in the countryside in Smarden, Kent, some 50 km southeast of London. It hosts a variety of different wild cat species on 13 ha of grassland. It has the vision to be a leading animal charity supporting the conservation of wild cats as well as promoting the importance of biodiversity and the role cats play in maintaining balance in ecosystems around the world. This is achieved through developing and supporting partnerships with other conservation organisations and co-ordinating with breeding programmes of these endangered cats and by fulfilling the following five pillars of ethos: Welfare, Breeding, Education, Conservation and Rescue.

The CSS Cats will help to achieve this mission. We are certain that the cooperation between the Cat SG and the new CSS Cats will be beneficial to the conservation of wild cats and are looking forward to this new partnership.

*Urs Breitenmoser*



Signing MoU and amendment with The Big Cat Sanctuary team (left) and the SSC Chair Jon Paul Rodriguez (right).