

Background to the cheetah and wild dog national conservation strategy

The African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) and the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) present major challenges for conservationists in the 21st Century. Both species were formerly widely distributed in Africa, but both have experienced dramatic reductions in numbers and geographic range in recent decades (Ray, Hunter & Zigouris, 2005). All large carnivores need large areas to survive; yet wild dogs and cheetahs range more widely, and hence need larger areas, than almost any other terrestrial carnivore species anywhere in the world. As human populations encroach on Africa's last wild areas, wild dogs and cheetahs – particularly susceptible to the destruction and fragmentation of habitat – are often the first species to disappear.

Despite their globally threatened status (wild dogs are listed as endangered and cheetahs as vulnerable (IUCN, 2006a)), their ecological importance as top carnivores (Woodroffe & Ginsberg, 2005b), and their value to Africa's tourism industry (Lindsey *et al.*, 2007), to date remarkably little conservation action has been implemented for these two species. The majority of Africa's protected areas are too small to conserve viable populations, and active conservation efforts on unprotected lands have hitherto been restricted to a handful of projects. Three factors have hindered conservation activity for cheetahs and wild dogs:

- (1) The species' massive area requirements mean that conservation planning is needed on a daunting spatial scale, rarely seen before in terrestrial conservation.
- (2) Information is lacking on the species' distribution and status, and on the tools most likely to achieve effective conservation.
- (3) Capacity to conserve these species is lacking in most African countries; expertise in managing more high-profile species such as elephants and rhinos may not be transferable to wild dogs or cheetahs because the threats and conservation challenges are likely to be different.

Against this background, conservation issues associated with wild dogs and cheetahs are being addressed together because, despite being taxonomically quite different, the two species are ecologically very similar and hence face very similar threats.

Planning large carnivore conservation within Kenya

The national strategy for cheetah and wild dog conservation in Kenya is the first of a suite of strategies planned for the country's large carnivore species. These strategies are being developed within a common framework (Woodroffe *et al.*, 2007b) and, together, are intended to achieve:

- (i) numerically viable and ecologically functional populations of all large carnivore species native to Kenya;
- (ii) numerically viable and ecologically functional populations of key wild prey species within Kenya; and
- (iii) a declining proportion of livestock killed by predators within Kenya.

Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) intends to develop national strategies for all six of the country's native large carnivore species: cheetahs, lions, leopards, striped and spotted hyaenas, and African wild dogs. Five main themes are expected to be common to these strategies (Woodroffe *et al.*, 2007b):

- (1) Ensuring that ecologically functional predator and prey populations are preserved *inside* reserves, through minimal management intervention
- (2) Establishment of *carnivore conservation zones* outside government protected areas, to boost reserves' ability to conserve numerically viable carnivore populations

- (3) Instituting *targeted lethal control* of problem animals as a replacement for indiscriminate poisoning
- (4) Encouraging new mechanisms for local people to receive *financial benefits* from hosting large carnivores and their prey, especially in carnivore conservation zones
- (5) Continually evaluating the policy's performance based upon a system of *adaptive management*, by monitoring carnivore and prey numbers and distribution, and conflicts with local people

These broad approaches were kept in mind in the course of developing the national strategy for cheetah and wild dog conservation.

National planning within a rangewide context

This national strategy for the conservation of cheetahs and wild dogs in Kenya was developed as part of a Rangewide Conservation Planning Process for these two species. Recognising the serious conservation issues facing cheetahs and wild dogs, in 2006 the Cat and Canid Specialist Groups of the IUCN/SSC, in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) initiated a process to plan for the species' conservation across their combined geographic range. This process, conducted in close partnership with government conservation authorities, aimed to develop a coordinated array of national conservation strategies for all range states, nested within broader regional strategies. The Kenya national strategy is the first such strategy developed within this rangewide process.

The Rangewide Conservation Planning Process has six stated objectives:

- (1) To foster appreciation for the need to conserve wild dogs and cheetahs, particularly among conservation practitioners in range states.
- (2) To collate information on wild dog and cheetah distribution and abundance on an ongoing basis, in order to direct conservation efforts and to evaluate the success or failure of these efforts in future years.
- (3) To identify key sites for the conservation of wild dogs and cheetahs, including corridors connecting important conservation areas.
- (4) To prepare specific global, regional and national conservation action plans for both cheetahs and wild dogs.
- (5) To encourage policymakers to incorporate wild dogs' and cheetahs' conservation requirements into land use planning at both national and regional scales.
- (6) To develop local capacity to conserve cheetahs and wild dogs by sharing knowledge on effective tools for planning and implementing conservation action.

A key component of this process is a series of workshops, bringing together specialists on the species' biology with conservation managers from governmental and non-governmental conservation organisations. Close involvement of government representatives was considered absolutely critical since these are the organisations with the authority to implement any recommendations at the management and policy levels. While the process will eventually cover the entire geographic range of both species, the large number of range states involved means that productive discussion and interchange would be very difficult to achieve at a single workshop covering all regions. Workshops are therefore being conducted at the regional level, covering eastern, southern, and west-central Africa for cheetahs and wild dogs together, and North Africa and Asia for cheetahs only (wild dogs being absent from this last region).

Although the species' extensive area requirements demand conservation planning on a very large spatial scale, wildlife conservation policy is formulated, authorised and enforced at the national level. It is critical, therefore, that conservation planning be enacted at this level, and

national workshops were considered a vital component of the rangewide process. Each regional workshop is therefore being followed immediately by a national workshop in the host country. Hence, the eastern Africa regional workshop was followed by a Kenya national workshop. As well as providing an opportunity to develop a national conservation strategy for the two species, this workshop allowed delegates from other countries in the region (invited to attend as observers) to acquire the experience needed to prepare national workshops in their own range states. This process will eventually lead to the development of national action plans for all range states.

The eastern Africa regional workshop

The eastern Africa regional workshop on conservation planning for cheetahs and wild dogs was held on 1st-6th February, 2007, at Mpala Research Centre in Kenya. It was attended by 28 delegates including government and NGO representatives from southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, and species specialists from Botswana, Namibia, Kenya, Tanzania, USA and UK (Figure 1.2). Data were also contributed by a participant from northern Sudan, who was prevented from attending by a US trade embargo against the Government of Sudan.

The eastern Africa workshop had two principle objectives: to collate information on wild dog and cheetah status and distribution within the region, in a format that could be used to inform conservation planning, and to prepare a regional strategic plan for the species' conservation. The strategic plan was designed to form a template which could be used, with fairly minor modifications, to develop national strategies for the species' conservation.

The Kenya national stakeholders workshop

The Kenya national workshop on conservation planning for cheetahs and wild dogs was held on 7-8th February, 2007, at KWS Headquarter in Nairobi. It was attended by 38 participants including KWS and NGO representatives, as well as 16 observers from southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Botswana and Namibia.

Highlights of the cheetah and wild dog national conservation strategy

The African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) and the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) present major challenges for conservationists in the 21st Century. All large carnivores need large areas to survive; yet wild dogs and cheetahs range more widely, and hence need larger areas, than almost any other terrestrial carnivore species anywhere in the world. As human populations encroach on Africa's last wild areas, these two threatened species are often the first species to disappear.

Kenya supports globally important populations of both cheetahs and wild dogs. This national strategic plan for their conservation is the first step in a programme to manage and conserve all of Kenya's large carnivore species. Given wild dogs' and cheetahs' similar ecological needs, it makes sense to plan their conservation together. Moreover, management enacted for these two species will also benefit lions, leopards, and hyaenas, though the converse is not necessarily the case given wild dogs' and cheetahs' requirement for far greater areas of wildlife-friendly habitat. This national strategy is also the first to be developed as part of a rangewide conservation planning process for cheetahs and wild dogs, conducted in collaboration with the Cat and Canid Specialist Groups of IUCN/SSC.

Important populations of cheetahs and wild dogs are recognised in the Tsavo, Mara-Serengeti and Laikipia-Samburu ecosystems. Encouragingly, wild dog populations appear to have increased in size and extent over the past decade. Areas of northern and eastern Kenya could potentially support cheetahs and wild dogs in ecological settings quite distinct from those further south and west; however the species' status in these areas is poorly known and surveys are badly needed.

Although both cheetahs and wild dogs are economically important to Kenya's tourism industry, the majority of animals reside outside the protected areas which are the focus of most tourism. Over 80% of cheetah geographic range, and two-thirds of wild dog geographic range, falls on community and private lands. As a result, the populations inside protected areas would not be viable if isolated from unprotected lands. For this reason, conservation activity outside protected areas is absolutely critical for the long-term survival of these two species both inside and outside reserves.

Several important wild dog and cheetah populations straddle international boundaries. Transboundary management is therefore likely to be needed for conserving both species in Kenya in the long term.

As little or no unoccupied habitat was identified where wild dog or cheetah populations could be restored, the strategic plan focuses on securing the remaining populations rather than restoring those that have been lost.

The strategic plan for the species' conservation in Kenya recognises the need to (i) promote coexistence of cheetahs and wild dogs with people and domestic animals; (ii) provide relevant stakeholders and managers with scientific and timely information on the status of and threats to cheetah and wild dog populations; (iii) strengthen human, financial and information resources for conserving cheetahs and wild dogs; (iv) ensure that appropriate legislation is in place to allow wild dog and cheetah conservation at the national and international level; and (v) mainstream cheetah and wild dog conservation in land use planning and its implementation.

Kenya Wildlife Service is the appropriate authority to oversee implementation of this strategic plan, in partnership with a number of NGOs and other institutions.