

African Lion Conservation Strategies

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The SSC Cat Specialist Group recently cooperated with African regional offices of IUCN and the Wildlife Conservation Society to hold a series of workshops to assess the status of the lion *Panthera leo* and develop conservation strategies. The West and Central African Lion Conservation Workshop was held in Douala, Cameroon, in October 2005. The Eastern and Southern African Lion Conservation Workshop was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in January 2006.

Each workshop consisted of two sessions. During the first 3-day technical session, biologists used the RangeWide Priority Setting process developed by WCS to map current lion range, identify Lion Conservation Units (LCU's, in three classes of viability), and assess threats to the population and limits to range.

The second 3-day strategic planning session brought together stakeholder participants – including high-level officials representing range state governments, as well as lion specialists and representatives of non-governmental organizations and industries working at the lion-human interface. Conservation strategies were developed through a participatory process following a logical framework. The regional strategies set out specific objectives, targets to aim for, and numerous activities that should be carried out to achieve effective lion conservation over the next decade.

The West and Central African Lion Conservation Strategy focuses on three primary objectives to address threats that directly impact lions: to reduce lion-human conflict, and to conserve and increase lion habitat and wild prey base. For example, one objective is: “to ensure the availability of wild prey in lion habitats.” The objectives of the Eastern and Southern African Lion Conservation Strategy are articulated around the root issues in lion conservation, including policy and

land use, socio-economics, trade, and conservation politics. For example, the policy and land-use objective is “to develop and implement harmonious and comprehensive legal and institutional frameworks that provide for the expansion of wildlife-integrated land-use, lion conservation and associated socio-economic benefits in current and potential lion range.” The trade objective is “To prevent illegal trade in lions and lion products while promoting and safeguarding sustainable legal trade.” Both regional strategies share common priorities of conserving and restoring lion populations, improving management capacity, and increasing the flow of benefits to communities living with lions.

These strategies should be used by governments to guide national lion action plans, policies and programs, and by the conservation community to guide their project development. By setting out common priorities to guide action on both national, community and landscape levels, the regional conservation strategies have the potential for broad and significant improvement of lion status and management.

The regional lion conservation strategies will be published by the Cat SG, and will also be available online at www.felidae.org and www.catsg.org, along with background papers written to provide context for the workshops. The regional strategies and lion range assessments will be brought together into a continental African Lion Conservation Strategy to be published later this year by IUCN and WCS.

The Cat SG, along with its partners in lion conservation, the African Lion Working Group (ALWG) and West and Central African Lion Conservation Network (ROCAL), should use the strategies to guide their work in lion conservation, and also encourage and support governments and the private and NGO sectors to adopt and implement strategy recommendations. More SSC Specialist Groups are expanding their action planning and priority sett-



African lion (Photo: A. Sliwa).

ing approach to work with governments, partners and stakeholders to develop regional conservation strategies for species of concern.

The Lion Conservation Strategy initiative was generously supported by the Safari Club International Foundation; the UK's Department of Environment, Food Resources and Agriculture; WCS; and IUCN. The initiative was launched by the Southern African Development Community and Africa Resources Trust, following consultation among the lion range states attending the 13th CITES COP in October 2004. WCS partnered with the Cat SG and the lion strategy initiative in an approach that linked the planning process to expert knowledge of lion status and distribution.

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