CAT NEWS

N° 40 · Spring 2004 Edited by Peter Jackson ISSN 1027-2992

IUCN
The World Conservation Union

SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION

CAT SPECIALIST GROUP

29 Lake Close, London SW19 7EG
United Kingdom
Tel: ++44 (20) 89 47 01 59

eas that support leopards in Sri Lanka must be of sufficient size to ensure that at least minimum viable populations could survive within their boundaries.

Outside protected areas, the best opportunity for leopard conservation appears to lie in some form of multiple-use-pattern of forest development (Myers, 1976). If conservation of the leopard and other carnivores is to succeed in the island, the needs of the predators should be balanced with those of the people. Otherwise, disenchantment with conservation will antagonize the people and make them less willing defenders of the top carnivore in Sri Lanka.

References

Ashby, K.R. & Santiapillai, C. 1987. An outline strategy for the conservation of the tiger (*Panthera tigris*) in Indonesia. In: *Tigers of the World: The Biology, Biopolitics, Management and Conservation of an Endangered Species*. eds. Ronald L. Tilson & Ulysses S. Seal. Noyes Publications, 411-415.

Clark, A. 1901. (Reprint 1971) Sport in the low-country of Ceylon. Tisara Prakasakayo, Dehiwela.

Eltringham, S.K. 1994. Can wildlife pay its way? *Oryx*, 28: 163-168.

Flannery, T. 2003. The Lady, or the Tiger? *The* New York Review of Books, 50: 13-14.

Kingdon, J. 1977. East African Mammals. An Atlas of Evolution in Africa. Vol. III Part A (Carnivores). The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Lewis, J.P. 1895. Manual of The Vanni Districts of the Northern Province, *Ceylon*. H.C.Cottle, Acting Govt. Printer, Ceylon, Colombo.

Pain, S. 2003. Last of the Lions. New Scientist. 20 September 2003, pp. 37-39.

Quammen, D. 2003. Monster of God: The Man-Eating Predator in the Jungles of History and the Mind. Norton, 515 pp.

Santiapillai, C., Chambers, M.R. & Ishwaran, N. 1982. The leopard *Panthera pardus kotiya* (Meyer 1794) in the Ruhuna National Park, Sri Lanka, and observations relevant to its conservation. Biological Conservation, **23**: 5-14.

[1] Department of Zoology
University of Peradeniya
Sri Lanka
<csanti@slt.lk>

[2] The Leopard Trust (Sri Lanka)
4A 2/1 Gregory's Road
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka
<rukshan@eureka.lk>

Leopard Spotted in Georgia

At the end of April 2004, remote-sensing cameras placed in Vashlovani State Reserve (arid lands in the extreme south-eastern part of Georgia, bordering Azerbaijan) obtained pictures of a leopard (*Panthera pardus*).

Earlier, in winter 2003, two zoologists (Bejan Lortkipanidze and George Darchiashvili) from NACRES (Georgian Centre for the Recovery of Endangered Species) came across footprints of a large cat during routine fieldwork in the Vashlovani Reserve. The fieldwork is being carried out within the World Bank/GEF funded project for the Development of a Protected Areas System in Georgia.

The footprints were much larger than those of the biggest known cat species of Georgia, the lynx (*Lynx lynx*). Field officers took plaster casts of the footprints and NACRES sent them to the Asian Leopard expert Dr Victor Lukarevski for validation. The response was thrilling: without any doubt, the prints were made by a leopard.

In April 2004, NACRES placed remote sensing cameras in the Vashlovani Reserve and photos confirming this evidence were taken.

Founded in 1989, NACRES chose a leopard for its logo, not only because the animal remains a dynamic symbol of Georgian culture and literature, but also because it remains the most endangered mammal species in the South Caucasus, and has been considered extinct in Georgia for more than 50 years.

Naturalists and zoologists from the beginning of the last century were describing extremely rare sightings of the leopard in the high mountains of the Great Caucasus Range. In 1952, one leopard was killed in east-central Georgia and it was considered to be the last animal in the country. However, since the end of the 1990s some anecdotal and verbal information from local populations in the Khevsureti (high mountains of the Great Caucasus Range) concerning sightings of a "huge, cat-like" animal has been collected by the NACRES teams. In 2001, the WWF Caucasus Office, supported by Dr Lukarevski and NACRES carried out an assessment project in the Khevsureti region. No leopard presence was recorded.

Since the middle of the last decade, the arid and semi-arid ecosystems of Georgia have been one of the priority research places for

First photo ever of a living leopard in Georgia (and presumably in the South Caucasus)

NACRES. Nevertheless, no sign of leopard presence was recorded during these years. Moreover, it was not even assumed that leopards could be present in the arid lands of the country, as leopards had never been observed in the region.

There is great cause for alarm, however, because the remote cameras have also taken pictures of wildlife poachers in exactly the same area.

NACRES would like to draw the attention of international and local communities to a most urgent problem – the extremely high level of poaching taking place in the most important protected areas of Georgia. Wild animal populations have dramatically declined during the last decade mainly due to the former administration's almost non-existent policy on environmental protection.

Jaguars in Bolivian Park

Bolivia's sprawling Kaa-Iya Gran Chaco National Park, known for some of the world's highest densities of ticks, may now lay claim to another superlative: more jaguars (*Panthera onca*) than any protected area on earth.

According to a recent study by the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and other groups, published in the Journal of Zoology, as many as 1,000 jaguars may be in the park. The researchers employed remote camera "traps" to photograph jaguars, recording each animal's unique spotting pattern. Through a statistical analysis that counts each animal re-photographed within a given territory, a population estimate is determined.

"Our results show that the Chaco is rich with jaguars – and Kaa-Iya probably contains the largest population recorded in any protected area," said Andrew Noss, who co-authored the paper along with representatives of Fundación Ivi-Iyambae, Captinía de Alto y Bajo Isoso, a Bolivia-based indigenous group that helps manage the park.

The 34,000 km^2 of Kaa-Iya Park also contains Latin America's highest diversity of large mammals, including the highly-endangered Chacoan guanaco (*Lama guanaco*), eight species of armadillo (*Euphactus spp*.) (including one that weighs 80 pounds), and the Chacoan peccary (*Catagonus wagneri*)- a pig-like animal once believed extinct. The park is also known for its extreme heat, vast forests of thorn scrub, and untold numbers of ticks. Created in 1995, it is the only park in South America established at the initiative of a Native American organisation, which has taken on a central role in its protection.

The authors warn that fragmentation of habitat, both within the Chaco and other areas, coupled with poaching, continue to threaten jaguars throughout their range. The researchers are now looking at how to better protect jaguars both in and out of the park – part of a long-term WCS campaign to safeguard populations throughout Latin America.

(Source: WCS Press Release 11 May 2004)

The Last Stronghold: Cheetah in Iran

by Mohammad S. Farhadinia[1]

Introduction

Once distributed from the Indian subcontinent through Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Iran to the Arabian Peninsula and Syria, the Asiatic cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*) is now one of the most endangered members of the family Felidae in the world. The last physical evidence of the cheetah in India was of three shot in 1947 by the ruler of the then Korea state. Since then, the cheetah has rapidly disappeared from most of its range (Nowell & Jackson, 1996). Over the past 20 years, Iran has been the last stronghold for the Asiatic cheetah, known in Iran as *yuz*, although there have been occasional reports of cheetahs across the border in Pakistan.

Background in Iran

Before World War II, the cheetah population was estimated to be around 400, ranging in almost all of the steppes and desert areas of the eastern half of the country and some western terrains near the Iraqi border (Harrington, 1971), but the advent of the jeep after the war marked the beginning of a decrease of this animal, largely through slaughter of their essential prey species, the gazelle (Lay, 1967). As a result, the cheetah population declined greatly in number.

In 1956, the former Iranian Game Council gave legal protection to the gazelles, and, in 1959, protection was extended to the cheetah. The gazelle population recovered in many areas and so did the cheetah. Cheetah sightings increased in different localities, particularly inside the gazelle habitats, revealing a remarkable resurgence of its population and the efficacy of conservation measures.

In the late 1970s, the cheetah population was estimated to be 200-300 for the whole of the country (Firouz, 1976), while some other experts, believing it to be an over-estimate, suggested about 100, including 30 cheetahs in the Khosh Yeilagh area (Joslin, 1984), where cheetah sighting was common (e.g. in 1970 and 1973, 13 and nine cheetahs were seen just in a couple of hours). The cheetah range appeared to include all the desert areas of the eastern half of the country, which consists of vast expanses of largely unpopulated terrain.

In 1979, the country witnessed a revolution, which interrupted wildlife conservation for a few years. Many areas were occupied by livestock, and the flat plains and steppes became a place where armed 4WD vehicles and motorbikes chased desert species, such as Persian gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*, Jebeer gazelle *Gazella bennettii*, onager *Equus hemionus onager*, as well as the cheetah. Gazelles declined in many areas, so the cheetahs had to move toward the foothills and mountainous habitats to avoid persecution. On the other hand, because of the remarkable reduction in gazelle numbers, cheetahs had to look for a new food source, wild sheep *Ovis orientalis* and wild goat *Capra aegagrus*, which, in their mountain habitat, had not suffered the same pressures as the gazelles. Khosh Yeilagh Protected Area, which was once con-