

CAT NEWS

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originally captured in the wild. But the pedigree history of this population has been such that the amount of genetic material that was even in those nine, which is quite a limited sample out of a wild gene pool, has been further reduced. Seventy-four percent of the genes in the current captive population descend from just two founders. There is a further complication, in that one of those two founders is of suspect origin. It is not at all clear that this animal did indeed originate from the population of Amur leopards. So, at the moment, I do not believe that there would be a benefit, and indeed, there might be a detriment, in using animals from the current captive population for reintroduction into the wild.

If there is serious interest in a rehabilitation program for this subspecies, and in the use of a captive propagation program as part of that strategy, what would seem more advisable is to consider removing some of the animals from the population that exists in the wild. We could then try to propagate them in such a way that maximizes both the production of animals and the preservation of diversity. Then, at a later time, we can try to reinforce the wild population from that new stock. There are some animals in captivity that could be utilized in such a program, but, of the 82 that are in captivity, 74 have representation from these two founders, one of which is suspect.

Anatolian leopard *Panthera pardus tulliana*

Heinrich Mendelssohn

The Anatolian leopard is almost extinct. It is one of the largest, maybe the largest of the subspecies of leopard. It has a distribution from southern Turkey to Galilee in northern Israel. In Galilee, it was still relatively common in the 20s and 30s of this century, but there was no nature preservation. If a specimen was preying on domestic livestock, then the whole village tracked it until it was shot. In this way, we got a few skins and skulls of this subspecies. The last specimen, a very old male, was killed in 1965. This was the end of the subspecies in Israel. If there are any surviving in Syria, I do not know. I would not think so because there is no nature preservation there. In Turkey, the species was considered already extinct. Several papers have been published about the situation, and decrees made in the name of conservation of the subspecies. I was quite sure, according to publication, that it was extinct. However, we have now seen that there may be still some specimens alive. If there are specimens still existing, everything should be done in order to arouse public opinion in Turkey to the situation, and to try to protect the last remnant of this very distinct subspecies.

Arabian Leopard *Panthera pardus nimr*

Ralph H. Daly, Advisor for Conservation of the Environment, Diwan of Royal Court Affairs, P.O. Box 246, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Our story, I am afraid, is not a very happy one at the moment. We have a population of the Arabian leopard in the south of Oman in Dhofar. We do not know how many there are as we have not yet had an opportunity to study the area. It is one of our proposed National Nature Reserves, and I am hoping that something will be done to get action taken on that reserve before it becomes inhabited. At the moment, it is registered as uninhabited. Some years ago, having thought that there really was almost no chance at all of protecting the leopards in the wild, the Sultan said to me on more than one occasion: "If we make a law, can we enforce it? Because if we can't, there is not much point in making it."... with which one has to agree.

For some time we thought of trying to bring some of these leopards into captivity for breeding at His Majesty's Oman

Mammal Species and Breeding Center. It took us a very long time to capture any of them at all, because there was little known about them. We started working in the very north of Oman, in Musandam peninsula, where, 7-8 years ago, there were obviously quite a number of them, because we kept hearing about skins being exported from there for sale in the United Arab Emirates. But it is a very difficult and remote area and we did not succeed. Then we turned our attention to Dhofar, and there, with some local tribesmen who knew quite a lot about the leopards, we were able to get an idea of where particular leopards were operating. But again, it was in very difficult terrain, involving helicopters to get traps and people in, and then they had to remain there to keep the traps under observation. When a leopard was actually caught in a trap, we had to call in helicopters again to get everything out. They were transported by air from the southern province to Muscat. This meant that we required a lot of cooperation from the airforce of Oman, which is not always available just when you want it.

We got four leopards out, two males and two females. Unfortunately, one of the males died from trauma because we had difficulty getting it transported. The others survived for some time, but were not breeding. We had special enclosures made for them, but they took long time to settle down. There was a certain amount of disturbance within the breeding center because of construction work. We could not be sure when we were going to get the leopards, and therefore, we could not guarantee that everything would be ready for their reception when they arrived. This was nearly five years ago. We kept thinking we were going to get breeding, but nothing ever happened. Then it began to look as if the remaining male might be infertile. We began to make plans as to what we could do about that, when, suddenly, in May, the one remaining fertile female died after getting a piece of bone stuck into her upper jaw. It had to be operated on, and she did not survive very long after the operation. A kitten was born to the remaining female on the 18th of May, but it was immediately abandoned, and we have reason to believe that perhaps there were others in the litter that were eaten inside the artificial cave. We tried hand-raising the kitten and kept it going for about a month, and then it died too. Our vets were not able to tell us exactly why it had not lived, but it was found to be very heavily jaundiced. We still have one male and female, and maybe next time we will be more successful.

Some years back, I persuaded the Sultan and everybody else that we should not try to take any further animals out of the wild until we were sure that we could successfully breed them. The idea had been that, if we were able to breed them successfully, we could perhaps reintroduce them into areas where there had been leopards. That meant that we had to have our National Nature Reserve Plan actually working. At the moment the surviving leopards are in a balanced ecosystem. They are feeding on hyrax, Nubian ibex, and the red-legged partridge. It is still a remote area with no habitation, and I am hoping we can keep it like that until we get all the other things settled. The next thing I would like to do in Oman is get a proper survey made of the leopards by putting in a team to carry out a multidisciplinary survey in that area.

Leopard *Panthera pardus* in Israel

Giora Ilany

The only ecosystem in Israel that remains fully undisturbed is a stretch of mountains and cliffs over the Dead Sea. All of the fauna and flora components of this ecosystem are still there, except for the recent extinction of the lammergeier. Not only that, the ecosystem is also complete in the original food chain, the energy