CATS IN MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique has suffered grievously from the war between the government and Renamo rebels. Its people have suffered many depredations, as well as famine. Not surprisingly the once flourishing wildlife has declined sharply, and a promising management programme to cull herbivores for food has collapsed. José Tello has prepared a detailed report for WWF International on the current status of protected areas and large mammals. Here is his report on the big cats:

CHEETAH *Acinonyx jubatus* — Status: Endangered

Until about 1950 cheetah were abundant in all suitable habitats, particularly in the dry grasslands and savannas of the Lebombo range of Maputo Province, in the interior of Gaza and Inhambane Provinces, in the south and in the north central areas of Manica and Sofala Provinces, and in the southern regions of Tete Province.

North of the Zambezi River cheetah were less abundant than in the southern region, but appeared to be common in the dry areas of the Rovuma/Lugenda Valleys. Other records are from Maravia and Mutarara in Tete Province, from the districts of Morrumbala, Mocuba, Alto Molocue and Gile in the Zambezi Province and from Ligonha, Lurio and Messalo Valleys.

By the 1970s, the cheetah was already an endangered species and only small populations were known in parts of the former range.

At the present time, there is only evidence of relict populations in some parts of the dry areas of the Gaza and Inhambane Provinces, in the north of Manica Province, and in southern regions of Tete Province. During wildlife surveys in 1977/82 in the Niassa and Cabo Delgado Provinces cheetah were recorded by the author, but the species was not seen during the 1982/83 safari hunting seasons in the Lugenda Valley (EMOFAUNA records, *pers.obs*, and M. Tornielli *pers.comm.*). The author believes that there are at present fewer than 100 cheetah in Mozambique.

The situation is due to tremendous poaching in recent years and to the destruction of prime habitat, particularly by wild fires. The occupation of large areas of cheetah habitat by cattle farmers who kill them as a threat to domestic stock, is also a problem. A few cheetah skins still appear in the illegal trade, particularly in the towns of Tete, Beira and Maputo.

LEOPARD *Panthera pardus* — Status: Secure

The species still occurs everywhere in Mozambique, but it is endangered in Maputo Province, as well as in the coastal belt up to about the Lurio River. Leopards are very adaptable, and can be found from the low grasslands, particularly those with termite and palm thickets, to the mountain forests. Leopards also take advantage of secondary habitats, such as degraded grasslands with scrub invasion, degraded prime forests with invasion of dense scrub, sugar cane plantations etc.

Leopards are particularly abundant in the Upper Limpopo Valley in the Gorongosa National Park and adjacent areas, in the Zambezi Valley Wildlife Utilisation Unit, in the Lugenda Valley, and in the coastal belt of the Cabo Delgado Province.

However, poaching is heavy, although the military situation in the country does not permit the deadly night poaching of leopard. The majority of leopard skins seen by the author are from animals killed by traps or by rural poachers. It also looks as though many of these leopards were killed near traditional villages to protect small domestic stock. Leopard skins appear often in the illegal trade and many are illegally taken out of the country. In spite of this, the author does not believe that poaching is organised.

Since it is well distributed, and has excellent habitat and availability of prey, leopard is not at all threatened in Mozambique.

LION Panthera leo Status: Vulnerable

Up to 1975 lions were widely distributed throughout Mozambique. They were extinct in the coastal belt south of the Save River, but some vagrants from western and northern regions appeared from time to time in the interior of Inhambane Province. They were also extinct in Maputo Province, except as vagrants from the Kruger National Park. In Manica Province lions were almost extinct, they were decreasing in Zambezia Province, and endangered in Nampula Province. In the rest of the country lions were common to abundant.

The situation at present, so far as is known, is as follows:

Maputo Province - vagrants from Kruger National Park occur in the northwestern sector.

Upper Limpopo Valley - lions appear to be increasing, and are still common in the northwestern sector of Gaza Province. In the rest of the Province, including the Banhine National Park, lions are decreasing.

Inhambane Province - lions are extinct, except in the Zinave National Park and in the extreme western region of the Massinga/Govuro districts. But even here they are rare and endangered.

Manica and Sofala Provinces - in the southern area of these provinces lions have decreased, and they have not been recorded in western Manica Province. They still occur, apparently in good numbers, in north-central Manica Province, as well as in the north-central areas of Sofala Province. In 1978 there were about 300 lions in the Gorongosa National Park. In the Zambezi Valley Utilisation Unit lions have been increasing since 1976 and the author's estimate is about 150. Lion poaching in the Gorongosa and the Zambezi Unit have never been serious.

Zambezia Province - lions are endangered. They are rare (10) in the Gile Game Reserve (S. Bonito pers.comm.) and are still recorded in Mopeia and Morrumbala districts. In Nampula Province lions are sometimes recorded in the littoral of Pemba district and in the east Lurio River (F. Costa 1979).

Tete Province - Lions still appear to be relatively common in the Mutarara and Macanga Districts, as well as in the southern regions. They are still recorded in other areas, but are decreasing because of poaching.

Niassa Province - Many records exist of lions in this province. During the 1982/83 hunting season the author found lions common.

Cabo Delgado Province - Lions still occur in most of the province, but are vulnerable in the coastal belt.

While lions are not endangered as a species in Mozambique, their future in the region south of the Save River depends on the recuperation of the Limpopo Wildlife Utilisation Unit, as well as of the Banhine National Park. In addition, the establishment of conservation areas in Provinces where they do not exist is necessary if lions are to survive.

The author estimates that there are between 1,000 and 2,000 lions at present in Mozambique. There are no signs of organised commercial poaching, but many lions are killed by wire snares at watering places, and many lions have been killed to protect people and livestock. Rehabilitation of the larger wildlife species is also necessary to conserve lions outside conservation areas.

Ref. Tello, J. (1986). Survey of Protected Areas and Wildlife Species in Mozambique with Recommendations for Strengthening their Conservation, report to WWF, Gland, Switzerland. (NOTE: The report is still in draft and the final version is awaited.)

SAVING THE FLORIDA PANTHER

The Florida panther Felis concolor coryi is one of the most endangered cats with only 20-50 estimated to survive in remote areas of southern Florida with 23 in Collier and Hendry Counties. It is one of 30 subspecies of the puma/cougar/mountain lion and originally ranged from eastern Texas through Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida and parts of Tennessee and South Carolina. Long limbs, small feet and rich ferruginous colour, particularly in the mid-dorsal region, distinguish the Florida panther, along with a right-angle crook at the tip of the tail, "cowlick" whorl of hair in the mid-back and irregular white flecking on head, nape and shoulders.

The panther has been declining in range and numbers since Europeans arrived and most populations were eliminated before 1900. Only recently has it been given legal protection, being still listed as a predator in Mississippi in 1973. The once significant panther population in southern Florida has declined continuously in the face of the enormous growth of the human population.

A Florida Panther Record Clearinghouse was established in 1976 and from investigation of sightings confirmed places where the cat survived. A Florida Panther Recovery Team was appointed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in July 1976 and a Recovery Plan was approved in 1981. A revision of the Plan was published in July 1987, and has been provided by Robert Belden. It reports that considerable recovery effort has been made.

Radio-tracking data has been computer analyzed to document habitat use, daily activities, home range characteristics, social interactions etc, and to identify where panthers cross roads.