



National Conservation Action Planning workshop for cheetah, wild dogs and lions

Oasis Camp, Juba, Southern Sudan

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African wild dogs, cheetah and lions present major challenges for conservationists in the 21st Century. All three species were formerly widely distributed in Africa, but have experienced dramatic reductions in numbers and geographic range in recent decades. All large carnivores need large areas to survive. As human populations encroach on Africa's last wild areas, they – being particularly susceptible to the destruction and fragmentation of habitat – are often the first species to disappear. Despite their threatened status, ecological importance as top carnivores, and value to Africa's tourism industry, to date remarkably little conservation action has been implemented for these species and the gaps in knowledge is still huge. The majority of Africa's protected areas are too small to conserve viable populations, and active conservation efforts on unprotected lands have so far been restricted to a handful of projects.

Recognising these concerns, 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 Rangewide Conservation Planning process for cheetahs and wild dogs. 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 organisations. Close involvement of government representatives was considered absolutely critical since they represent the organisations with the authority to implement any recommendations at the management and policy levels. While the process is covering the entire geographic range of the species, the large number of range states involved means that productive discussion and interchange would have been very difficult to achieve at a single workshop covering the whole area. Workshops are therefore being conducted at the regional level. For cheetahs and wild dogs a regional workshop has been conducted in Kenya for East Africa and in Botswana for southern Africa.

The situation of the lion drew international attention at the October 2004 COP13 (13th Conference of the Parties to CITES). A proposal to transfer the lion to Appendix I sparked extensive debate among African Range States, and highlighted the need to achieve pan-African consensus on the way forward for lion conservation. The proposal was withdrawn, and Range States agreed that a series of regional workshops should be held to address the conservation needs of the African lion. IUCN-The World Conservation Union was asked to organize workshops which would develop sub-regional conservation strategies using a participatory approach based on a logical framework. The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group partnered with a parallel initiative of WCS to organize a Rangewide Priority Setting (RWPS) exercise for lions. The Eastern and Southern African Lion Conservation Workshop was

held in early 2006 in Johannesburg, South Africa. It followed a similar regional workshop for lions in West and Central Africa held in Douala, Cameroon in fall 2005.

Since wildlife conservation policy is formulated, authorised and enforced at the national level, it is critical that conservation planning be enacted at this level. The development of national plans, through national workshops, is thus a vital component of the Rangewide Conservation Planning process. Each regional workshop has therefore to be followed by a series of national workshops in the range countries.

The Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism of the Government of Southern Sudan asked for support to conduct such a national workshop to develop an action plan. To use the available resources in a most efficient way, we decided to include all three species for this national planning workshop. After the workshop dates were postponed twice in 2008, we finally managed to have a final date at the end of March 2009. The workshop would never have happened without the tireless efforts and the incredible commitment of Martin R. Malek, who organized everything on his personal budget as the Ministry was not able to help. On our side it was Sarah Durant, ZSL and Amy Dickman, Ruaha Predator Project, WildCRU, and me supporting this workshop as facilitators.



Martin Ring Malek



Amy and Sarah busy preparing talks

When the date was finally set - and we were sure it was going to happen this time - we started to look for flights and visas. The first was easy, the second developed at least for me into an adventure. As Southern Sudan is not recognised as a country, we had to apply to the embassy of Sudan for a visa. Amy and Sarah were able to get theirs in London. Switzerland has no embassy, but a "Mission permanente" with the UN in Geneva. They were very unhelpful, and finally it was agreed after three weeks that they would send my passport back without a visa as in the meantime we had developed a plan B. Southern Sudan has so called liaison offices in the neighbouring countries. As we were flying through Ethiopia, it was planned that I would get the visa there. A day before we left I learnt that plan B did not work either. I also still did not have my passport back. Martin assured me that this was no problem as there was now even a plan C, and that was to get the visa in Juba directly. To make sure that I had a passport to travel, I had to organize a temporary passport the day before I left...

FRIDAY 27 MARCH 2009

My passport finally did arrive in the morning. I was supposed to meet Amy and Sarah in Heathrow around 7 p.m. Then there was this phone call of a panicking Sarah, she was stuck in a traffic jam. Amy arrived in time and we were wondering whether we had to travel on our own. Amy was especially worried to find herself alone in Juba, as I still had no visa. Then another panicking phone call came, they had closed the check-in for our flight three people before it was Sarah's turn. We ran to the transfer desk of Ethiopian Airlines. The lady told us first that she could not do anything for us as the flight was overbooked by 30 people. We simply told her that this was not possible as we even had reserved seats. After 20 minutes of excitement and many phone calls back and forth, Sarah was allowed to check-in. We only met her at the gate just when we were called for boarding. What a start!

SATURDAY 28 MARCH 2009

After changing plane in Addis Ababa we arrived in time in Juba. Martin and Paul Peter were waiting for us on the airfield. Martin was wearing his uniform with two stars on the shoulders, and he managed to get all necessary stamps in our passports and our luggage was not checked. I had now a stamp in my passport but still no visa. The International Airport of Juba, a little building, was very busy as our plane had been full. We were happy that everything went so smooth.

We stopped at the office of WCS – Southern Sudan Program, and met the country director Paul Elkan and his wife Sarah, as well as their pilot and GIS person Falk Grossmann. We discussed the agenda and role of Falk in the mapping exercise during the workshop.

We were very happy when we finally were dropped at the Oasis Camp at the board of the Nile. The Camp used to consist of tents; today there are little huts with iron roofs and the luxury of air condition what we very quickly learnt to appreciate.

We went to bed early as we were all really tired after a long trip and a sleepless night in the airplane.



The Oasis Camp has a nice terrace at the Nile.



Communal area with dining room (left)

SUNDAY AND MONDAY 29-30 MARCH 2009

We used these two days to finalize our talks and the agenda. On Monday afternoon we went back to the WCS office to practice with Falk the projector pen, called eBeam, which Sarah had brought. It is quite an amazing tool. We projected a map of Southern Sudan, and with the pen we are able to draw on the screen and save the map together with the drawings as a jpg file. On the drive there we got to see a little bit of Juba. They just recently have destroyed the huts of a lot of people who have settled on land that did not belong to them. As construction is currently booming in Juba, the owners see an opportunity to sell their land now for construction. These areas look dreadful. Some people still live in the ruins left. As there is almost only work in Juba in Southern Sudan, people now have to leave their jobs and go back to their villages as there is no place for them to live in town that they could afford. This will of course also affect all the hotels and camps in Juba.



The WCS office in Juba





One of the destroyed areas near the Oasis camp



Juba

In the evening we organized an icebreaker as in the meantime the participants also staying in the Oasis Camp had arrived. Unfortunately not everybody was able to come because of transport problems. It was a very hot night and we were sitting in a corner of the camp where no breeze coming from the Nil could reach us. Even our African colleagues were sweating.



Margret, Martin, Amy and Sarah



Sarah and Martin greeting the participants

TUESDAY 31 MARCH 2009

Now the big day had come, the opening of the workshop was planned for 9.30 h and the Minster was expected to come and open the workshop. As usual the start was slower than anticipated, and we finally started without the official opening as the Minster had not yet arrived. Some participants also arrived with a delay again because of transport problems. Martin welcomed everybody and we got started with presentations. At 11.30 h the Minster, Agnes Poni Lukudu, arrived and officially opened the workshop.



Martin starts the workshop



Geraldo Wol presenting protected areas



The Minister Agnes Poni Lukudu (centre) opens officially the workshop



Group photo with the Minister

The session with presentations was very informative for us as we received a lot of background information. There are two categories of protected areas with the same legal status: game reserves that are under the Minister and national parks that are under the President. There are 5 national parks and 14 game reserves. For many it is not clear if the borders are still valid, and they basically only exist on paper. The area west of the Nile is still not safe. There are a lot of poachers heavily armed in this area. Nobody dares to go to the Southern National Park. WCS is doing a lot of aerial surveys for large mammals, but mainly east of the Nile including Boma National Park. They surveyed once the Southern National Park in 2007. As the vegetation is much thicker there, the results have not been as good as for the eastern part of Southern Sudan.



Falk Grossmann from the WCS Southern Sudan Program presented information about the aerial surveys that they had been doing over the past three years. They have very little sightings of cats,

lions are nocturnal, cheetahs are well camouflaged, and wild dogs are rare, so it is very difficult to detect them in aerial surveys. He also presents data on prey species. There are still large herds of migrating white-eared kobs and tiangs and areas with reasonable sized elephant herds. But in most areas the numbers have gone down dramatically compared to the 1980s surveys done by John Frixell. The only exception is the Jonglei region where numbers have not dropped, but where the overall density is a lot lower compared to e.g. Boma NP.

In the afternoon, we updated the distribution maps from the regional strategy workshop using the magic projector pen. There were only 6 confirmed cheetah sightings, 14 for wild dogs, and 20 for lions. Most of the observations are from the years 2000s.



Capturing information on the map with the pen



Capturing information on the observations

WEDNESDAY 1 APRIL 2009

We started the day with the problem analysis for the three species. There were six broad topics discussed: (1) Legislation and policy with the longest list of items; (2) Law enforcement; (3) Education and awareness; (4) Conflict and persecution; (5) Broader wildlife issues and (6) Capacity development again with a very long list of items. Most of the problems were valid for all three species with a few exceptions, e.g. intentional hunting for cultural use and illegal trade that are relevant to lions and cheetahs, but not to wild dogs.

This session was followed by two talks presenting possible solutions to some of these problems: “Tools for conflict resolution” by Amy Dickman and “Monitoring methods for large carnivores” by Sarah Durant. Frazer Tong and Paul Elkan presented afterwards conservation programs already happening in Southern Sudan and some ideas for future work.



Frazer Tong



Paul Elkan

In the afternoon, we started with the National Action Plan for cheetahs and wild dogs. Vision and goal from the regional strategy were reviewed, discussed and amended in plenary. After this, the participants split into work groups starting to work on the objectives, targets and activities. The working groups in action:



At the end of the day everybody was very tired.

THURSDAY 2 APRIL 2009

We start the day with the presentation of the group work. The discussion was extremely lively and took a lot more time than we had planned, but as the items discussed were critically important for the implementation of the action plan we let it happen. A lot of the arguments were around responsibilities and time lines. The Ministry is underfunded and understaffed. They formulated it as following: "We have very few people with a pen" meaning that there are very few people with a proper education for their job. The few that there are get often get hijacked by the international organizations where they get higher salaries.



Three important people from the Ministry



Sarah explaining the next steps

A few other problems that were addressed had to do with the fact that not all faculties of the universities of Southern Sudan had yet moved back, some of them are still in Khartoum. So we were not able to have the social science people at the workshop because of the US funding put into the workshop and restrictions to Sudan. We were lucky that the wildlife science section of the University of Juba had moved back south after the war.

After the peace agreement was signed, some people were forced into their current position, for instance Martin; he is in Juba against his will. It is very hard to find a place to live in Juba because of this incredible price level. He has not seen his family since three years, as he cannot go back to his home town for security reasons. There are so many people out in the bush with guns. Just three weeks ago, there was a major cattle raiding in and around Boma where more than a hundred people got killed. Boma is one of the safer places in Southern Sudan...

There were once in a while boats going up and down the river. They transport a.o. displaced people from Khartoum to the south with all their belongings. The trip takes four days. They have to find a place to live in Southern Sudan or go as refugees to one of the neighboring countries. Everybody was always running outside to greet these people and wave them a welcome.



We finished the day at 6 p.m. with the National Action Plan for Cheetahs and Wild Dogs being finalized. The discussions during the presentations were very long and everybody really participated, and there was very little friction, even if there was a disagreement.

FRIDAY 2 APRIL 2009

The last day was confined to the development of a Lion National Action Plan. We learnt during the morning that the Minister was coming at 4 p.m. to close the workshop, so we really had to work hard to get everything done by then. As the participants were already familiar with the process, we were able to speed up quite a bit. An important topic that came up during the discussion of the targets and activities is the problem with CITES. Sudan has two representatives at the CITES meetings and both are from Khartoum. Wildlife issues and trade are mainly happening in Southern Sudan and one representative should be from that region. It has been agreed internationally that Sudan is a country with two systems, so now the Ministry of Legal Affairs and Constitutional Development is asked to take care of the matter.

We just had about finished with the presentations of the group work on activities, and we were discussing the way forward when the acting Minister arrived. Ms Agnes Poni Lukudu had to go to Khartoum and was represented by Prof Philip Yona Jambí, Minister of Cooperation and Rural Development. We had prepared a certificate and a CD with all presentations, a copy of the regional strategy and photos documenting the workshop – only two participants had a camera. The CDs were distributed by the acting Minister at the end. They were all so happy about this little gesture of appreciation for their hard work during the past four days. In the evening we were invited by the Ministry for dinner.



Prof Jambí handing over the certificate to Gerardo Wol



Dinner at the Da Vinci.

SATURDAY 4 APRIL 2009

Martin R. Malek picked us up at 9 to bring us to the airport. He made a detour for us across Juba so we could see again a few more areas of the town. Here some impressions:



THE FACILITY: Oasis Camp

When we looked into possible facilities for this workshop, we were confronted with the incredible price level of Juba. The first two possibilities offered to us were in the range of 180-350 \$/person per day, completely out of our budget line. Amy did a lot of searching on the internet and found the Juba forum, where NGOs list the facilities they recommend with price ranges. Everybody made a clear statement about not staying in town, but rather along the Nile because of noise, security and temperature reasons. We needed a conference facility with air condition, which brought down the list of options quickly down. The explanation for the high prices was that everything has to be imported from Kenya and there are a lot of international NGOs in Juba that can pay high prices. We then found out that food and part of the water comes from Uganda, the border is about 160 km south of Juba, and construction material comes from China. They just put in new furniture to many of the rooms at Oasis camp that was imported from China.

Amy wrote to several camps and became the best offer from the Oasis Camp including the meeting facility. We ended up paying 100\$ per day and person. For a double room they charged 200\$ even if only one person was living there. For people not staying at the camp we had to pay additionally 20\$ per meal. They charged us 250\$ per day for the conference room, which included tea and coffee and one bottle of water per participant, but no snacks during the breaks. At lunch and dinner, very good food was served. There was always a variety of vegetables and meat, as well as salad and dessert.

The rooms are simple but practical, nothing is missing. All rooms have a little bath room with a shower. They come and pick up laundry every day and return it in the afternoon. We never had a power problem.

Here some pictures:





The camp is in the midst of a Mango forest. One day we had quite a strong wind and heavy clouds. Instead of water it was raining mangos. On the huts with iron roofs, this made quite a noise. The mangos tasted so good. All the staff of the Camp was very busy collecting the fruits.

The Oasis Camp is a safe place. We were told not to go out at night on our own, there is a curfew. The camp is quite far away from the main road and there are all these destroyed areas in between. So we only got a glimpse at Juba during driving in and out of camp.



After a mango rain...