

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

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Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Regular and special reports

Appendix-I species subject to export quotas

LEOPARD: EXPORT QUOTA FOR SOUTH AFRICA

1. This document has been submitted by South Africa.

2. Proposal

In accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.21 on The interpretation and application of quotas for species included in Appendix I, paragraph a), the Republic of South Africa requests the Conference of the Parties to increase its export quota for leopard hunting trophies and skins for personal use indicated in Resolution Conf. 10.14 (Rev. CoP12) from 75 to 150.

3. Proponent

Republic of South Africa.

4. Supporting statement

4.1 Distribution

The leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is widespread throughout the southern African subregion (Skinner and Smithers, 1990). In South Africa (Figure 1) they occur throughout the mountainous parts of the eastern, western and northern Cape, along the Orange River from the Richtersveld eastwards to about 20° E and marginally in the north along the Botswana border, including the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Conservation Area. Leopards are widely distributed in the Limpopo, North West and Mpumalanga provinces of South Africa. They also occur in north-eastern KwaZulu-Natal and sporadically in the Free State. The highest populations are in the Kruger National Park and on private game reserves on its western boundary.

Leopards are formally protected in national parks and provincial nature reserves. A total of 5.4 per cent ($\pm 67,000$ km²) of South Africa's surface area is under formal conservation (Figure 2). South African National Parks manages 52 per cent of this area. A large number of leopards however occur on private or communal land.

4.2 Habitat availability

Leopards can adapt to a wide range of habitats and while they are generally associated with areas of rocky hills, mountain ranges, riverine or kloof forests, which provide them with shelter, they also occur in semi-desert areas where there is cover in the form of stands of tall grass or underbrush. The least specialized of the big cats, the leopard is successful wherever diversified habitats afford a variety of small- to medium-sized mammals. In densely settled areas where its natural prey have been eliminated it often manages to survive on domestic animals.

High densities of leopards occur in the Limpopo province, where approximately two-thirds of the total surface area ($\pm 75,000 \text{ km}^2$) can be considered as suitable leopard habitat.

In many areas of South Africa traditional land-use practices such as livestock farming are no longer viable. Game ranching has become a more viable and lucrative land-use option where vast tracts of land are now stocked with indigenous species of antelope. This phenomenon has created a much improved prey base for leopards and has possibly made previously unsuitable habitat more suitable for predators such as the leopard.

4.3 Population status

The South African Red Data Book of Terrestrial Mammals (Smithers, 1986) classified the leopard as 'rare'. The national assessment of 2003 classifies the leopard as of 'least concern' (LC). A taxon is of least concern when it has been evaluated against the criteria and does not qualify for 'critically endangered', 'endangered', 'vulnerable' or 'near threatened'. Widespread and abundant taxa are included in this category (IUCN, 2001). The leopard population in South Africa is therefore not regarded as being threatened.

Absolute numbers of leopards in South Africa is difficult to determine owing to their secretive habits together with the nature of the habitat in which they live. The leopard populations in national parks are protected and no hunting or any other form of consumptive utilization is allowed in these parks. As mentioned above, approximately $67,000 \text{ km}^2$ of South Africa's surface area is under formal conservation (Figure 2), of which 52 per cent is managed by South African National Parks. Leopards occur in most of these protected areas.

The Kruger National Park has a healthy and stable population of more than 1,000 leopards (Mills, 2004). The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Conservation Area in Northern Cape has a population of approximately 150 animals (Funston, 2001), while KwaZulu-Natal has a population of over 200 leopards (Rowe-Rowe, 1992).

4.4 Population trends

Owing to the growing game farming industry in South Africa, the habitat available to leopards has increased and so has their numbers. Leopard sightings and conflict with farmers and communities adjacent to protected areas and reserves has increased owing to the growing number of leopards occurring outside protected areas.

4.5 Geographic trends

Geographic trends are stable and most probably the distribution is expanding with the developments in the game-ranching industry. Prey species are now available in areas previously devoid of a high biomass of natural preys.

4.6 Role of the species in its ecosystem

The leopard can be classified as a large solitary predator predominantly nocturnal and arboreal. Leopards mainly prey on medium-sized antelope of 15-50 kg in weight. Preys also often include primates and birds. With the exception of some of the larger formally protected areas, leopards are often the only large predator in many areas of South Africa. Their presence in an area is therefore often recognized as an indicator of a healthy ecosystem.

4.7 Threats

In South Africa the survival of leopards are mainly threatened by the following activities:

- habitat fragmentation (game fences);
- conflict with farmers and communities adjacent to protected areas; and
- conflicting land-use options.

Owing to conflict with farmers and communities, the leopard is in some instances regarded as vermin as it kills livestock and prey species that are the livelihoods of the farmers and communities. There is little incentive to promote tolerance towards the species.

The utilization of leopard through trophy hunting has changed this viewpoint, but the CITES quota allocated is too small to address the demand adequately. Over and above the 75 permits that are issued annually for trophy hunting, approximately 50 permits are issued per annum to farmers to hunt leopards that cause damage to livestock and game. This does not take into account the number of leopards that are killed to protect lives and properties.

The growth in the game-farming industry resulted in higher numbers of available preys and in direct correlation therewith the rise in leopard numbers. South Africa currently has approximately 6,000 game farms. This number is rising annually as cattle farmers convert to game farming. Most of the farmers will tolerate leopard on their property if it has a commercial value for them.

5. Utilization and trade

5.1 National utilization through eco-tourism and sport hunting

South Africa is a popular tourist destination. Non-consumptive use of leopards takes place through game viewing in the countries national parks, provincial nature reserves, private nature reserves and approximately 6,000 game farms.

Controlled consumptive use takes place through trophy hunting, hunting of damage causing leopard by landowners and hunting by local hunters. The season for leopard hunting ranges from May to September each year.

Government allocate hunting rights to licensed hunting outfitters for the marketing of a leopard hunt within the country. Each application for leopard hunting by foreign hunters is evaluated in terms of the following criteria:

- the distribution of leopard in any given area;
- complaints received from landowners about damage-causing leopard occurrence; and
- utilization patterns in a given area.

5.2 Damage causing leopards

Leopards occurring outside protected areas often cause damage to game and livestock. Reports of damage caused by leopards involving livestock and game are on the increase. In many instances game farmers loose expensive species of game to leopard predation. Leopard is also drawn to cattle farms owing to the availability of cattle as easy prey.

Approximately 50 permits are issued per annum to landowners to hunt damage-causing leopards. It is believed that more damage-causing leopards are killed without being reported. It is estimated that the unreported killing of problem leopard could be the same as the number hunted with permits, i.e. 50 animals.

5.3 Utilization patterns

In order to monitor leopard utilization patterns, provincial nature conservation authorities keep a database of all leopard hunts. Nature conservation authorities allocate hunting rights for leopard hunts based on the number of leopard hunts that have taken place in a given area or farm. Hunting is not allowed to take place in consecutive years on the same property. Leopard hunts are also distributed between various regions in order to prevent over-utilization.

Local communities are included in projects dealing with the utilization of leopard. A percentage of the allocated quota is reserved for the use of communities. Communities may transfer hunting rights to a licensed hunting outfitter where such hunt will take place within a communal area. The income generated for these hunts will be utilized for sustainable development within the given community.

In cases where damage-causing animals are hunted, permits are only issued after an inspection to verify damage to game or cattle. In some cases the leopard is caught and translocated to a protected area.

5.4 Legal international trade

South Africa has a quota of 75 leopards. This quota is distributed among the nine provinces in South Africa and permits are issued for 75 leopard hunts per annum. Trophies are not necessary exported in the year the hunts took place owing to the time-consuming taxidermy process.

Data obtained from UNEP-WCMC from 1999 to 2002 indicates that South Africa mainly exported hunting trophies, skins and parts and derivatives obtained from hunting trophies.

5.5 Illegal trade

South Africa has strict domestic legislation regulating the hunting and export of indigenous fauna. Nature conservation officials inspect all shipments at the Johannesburg International Airport, one of the major ports of entry and exit. Illegal shipments are confiscated and the persons charged. The frequency of such confiscations is low and is not on the increase.

5.6 Actual or potential trade impacts

South Africa proposes that an increased leopard quota for hunting trophies and skins be subject to conditions similar to those currently applied by South Africa, namely:

- exports of leopards are restricted to skins or nearly whole skins that include hunting trophies as stipulated in Resolution Conf. 10.14 (Rev. CoP12);
- skins, trophies and parts and derivatives thereof which were confiscated or are of unknown origin are not eligible for export;
- no more than two skins or trophy may be exported to an owner within any calendar year; and
- each skin or hunting trophy is equipped with a self-locking tag attached to it in accordance with Resolution Conf. 10.14 (Rev. CoP12).

5.7 Captive breeding for commercial purposes

The leopard has good breeding potential in captivity (Smithers, 1986), but no commercial captive-breeding operations are registered.

6. Conservation and management

6.1 Legal status

6.1.1 National

In South Africa the leopard is protected in all national parks and government nature reserves. Leopards occurring outside protected areas are categorized as 'protected game' by the provincial nature conservation legislation and permits are required to hunt, catch, sell, import, convey or export these leopards. Permits are only issued upon a written application and each application is handled on its merits in accordance with environmental legislation and policies.

6.1.2 International

As a signatory to CITES, South Africa abides by the conditions applicable to a CITES Appendix-I species, as is currently the case with the leopard.

6.2 Species management

6.2.1 Population monitoring

Population monitoring for a species such as the leopard is extremely difficult owing to the elusiveness of these animals. The widespread distribution of the species also contributes to the difficulty of population monitoring. There are monitoring projects on specific properties to monitor leopards and their movements mainly for eco-tourism purposes.

6.2.2 Habitat conservation

Habitat for leopard is conserved by an array of stakeholders in South Africa. The South African National Parks as well as the provincial conservation authorities conserve leopard habitat through a network of formally protected areas. Private landowners as well as local communities often involuntarily contribute to leopard conservation by maintaining natural and domestic prey populations and some game farmers actively participate in the conservation of leopard.

6.3 Control measures

6.3.1 International trade

The South African Police Service, the South African Revenue Service through Customs and Excise and the provincial nature conservation authorities cooperate closely to control illegal trade in live leopards, trophies, skins, parts and derivatives in South Africa. The National Environmental Management Biodiversity Bill will enhance the efficiency of law enforcement.

6.3.2 Domestic measures

The National Environmental Management Biodiversity Bill and the provincial ordinances ensure the protection of indigenous fauna and as mentioned above activities involving these species are regulated through permits.

7. References

- Funston, P.J. 2001. *Final report: Kalahari Transfrontier Lion Project*. Submitted to the Endangered Wildlife Trust and Green Trust.
- IUCN. 2001. *IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria: Version 3.1*. IUCN Species Survival Commission. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK. ii + 30 pp.
- Mills, M.G.L. 2004. Personal communication.
- Rowe-Rowe, D.T. 1992. *The carnivores of Natal*. Unpublished Report. Natal Parks Board, Pietermaritzburg.
- Skinner, J.D. and Smithers, R.H.N. 1990. *The mammals of southern African subregion*. 2nd Ed. University of Pretoria Press, Pretoria.
- Smithers, R.H.N. 1986. *South African Red Data Book – Terrestrial Mammals*. Foundation for Research Development, Pretoria.

COMMENTS FROM THE SECRETARIAT

- A. In this document, South Africa requests an increase in its export quota for leopard hunting trophies and skins for personal use, as indicated in Resolution Conf. 10.14 (Rev. CoP12), from 75 to 150. The proponent does not provide national population estimates, but does suggest numbers are increasing, from reports of leopard sightings and conflicts with humans. The proponent explains that an increased quota for hunting trophies would be subject to the same conditions that currently apply to exports of skins and trophies, and that an increase in the quota would provide a greater incentive to conserve and promote tolerance towards the species.
- B. The Secretariat notes however that the trade data from the annual reports of the Parties (as computerized by UNEP-WCMC) on the exports of leopard trophies from South Africa, suggest that, from 1992 to 2002, the annual export quota of 75 specimens was exceeded in all but two years (1992 and 1996), with annual exports averaging 96 trophies. Although it realizes that data on trophy trade can easily be misinterpreted, the Secretariat recommends that unless South African can explain these discrepancies or address the apparent problems in a satisfactory manner, this proposal be rejected.



Figure 1. Map of the Republic of South Africa



Figure 2. Protected areas of South Africa