

# Background on large carnivores in Kenya

1. Large carnivores are in decline throughout the world, and Kenya's carnivores are no exception. Despite their reduced populations, large carnivores still cause problems for pastoralists and farmers and, for conservation managers. Predation on livestock by large carnivores is a serious problem – first, because it can have a major impact upon the livelihoods of pastoralists and farmers, and, second, because it leads to the killing of large carnivores, many of which are species of local or international conservation concern.
2. Lion also play a critical role in Kenya's tourism industry for lion presence in an area is considered an indicator of its wild and natural integrity. The lion is thus one of the flagship species of Kenya for research and tourism and indeed one of the BIG FIVE.
3. However, the African lion is classified as *vulnerable* by IUCN. The world population is declining. Lions have been extirpated from at least 30% of their historical range in Eastern and Southern Africa and Kenya's lions are no exception. As often is the case in conservation, there is limited data on status, population trend, and ecology. However, Kenya's national population of lions was estimated at 2,749 in 2002, 2,280 in 2004 and about 2000 in 2008
4. Despite their declining numbers, lions are a serious threat to livestock, taking cattle as well as smaller stock. Their large size and aggressive demeanour allow them to stampede cattle out of bomas, and also make them difficult for people to chase away. In Laikipia, for instance, lions are the most important predator of livestock on commercial ranches.
5. In addition, there is a small amount of indirect evidence to implicate lion predation in local declines of prey species of conservation concern, such as Grevy's zebra, bongo and Lelwel hartebeest.
6. Spotted hyenas occur in most of Kenya's parks. Spotted hyenas are disliked in community areas where they are often the most serious predators of livestock. They are very susceptible to poisoning and slow to recover in areas from which they have been extirpated. Hence, their numbers are severely depleted outside protected areas. Their limited ability to recover in areas where they have been extirpated makes spotted hyenas particularly reliant on conservation efforts.
7. Apparently, spotted hyena predation has also been blamed for declines of Lelwel hartebeest and also for low recruitment in some rhino populations, although there is currently no direct evidence for hyenas' role in either decline.
8. Cheetahs in Kenya appear to have experienced a marked contraction of their geographic range over the past one or two hundred years. Despite this, two extensive cheetah populations are known to remain, which should be viable in the long term if appropriate conservation measures are enacted.
9. Although cheetahs are economically and ecologically important inside protected areas such as the Masai Mara and Samburu National Reserves, the overwhelming majority of Kenya's cheetahs live outside protected areas – over

- 80% of occupied habitat falls on community and private lands. Given cheetahs' low population density, the populations inside protected areas are almost certainly dependent on adjoining unprotected lands for their long-term viability. Hence, conservation activities outside reserves are absolutely critical if populations are to be conserved, both inside and outside protected areas, in the long term. Measures such as the designation of carnivore conservation zones on private and community lands are therefore likely to make a substantial contribution to cheetah conservation.
10. Over half of Kenya's known resident cheetahs live in a population which spans the Kenya-Tanzania border. Other possible populations straddle the borders with Ethiopia and Uganda. In the long term, conserving such populations is likely to require trans-boundary cooperation.
  11. No areas were identified where recovery of extirpated cheetah populations might be considered. Reintroduction is not; therefore, appropriate to conserve cheetahs in Kenya in the medium term. This indicates the irreversible nature of the decline in the distribution of cheetahs. Once the habitat is lost, it is very difficult to recover it, demonstrating the importance of ensuring that planning for cheetah conservation is put in place as soon as possible, before habitat is irretrievably fragmented and lost.
  12. Wild dogs in Kenya have experienced a substantial contraction of their geographic range over the past one or two hundred years. However, several populations have begun to recover naturally in recent years, highlighting the possibilities for future wild dog conservation in Kenya
  13. Most remaining resident populations rely on unprotected, as well as protected, lands for their survival: two-thirds of resident range falls outside protected areas. This highlights the need for conservation efforts outside parks and reserves. Given wild dogs' vulnerability to extinction inside reserves, measures such as the designation of carnivore conservation zones on private and community lands are likely to make a substantial contribution to wild dog conservation.
  14. Nearly a third of Kenya's wild dogs live in populations which span international boundaries, particularly the Kenya-Tanzania border. Conserving such populations is likely to require trans-boundary cooperation.
  15. Although the number and geographical extent of known populations is fairly small, no data are available from large tracts of north-eastern Kenya: surveys of this area are urgently needed.
  16. Only a comparatively small number of locations were identified where recovery of extirpated wild dog populations might be considered. All of these adjoin areas that are currently occupied and natural recovery is therefore likely. Reintroduction is not, therefore, necessary to conserve wild dogs in Kenya in the medium term.
  17. The importance of these conservation challenges facing carnivores is increasingly recognized in conservation circles. However, few solutions have been developed, and management policies are lacking in the vast majority of affected regions.

Kenya becomes the first African country to develop national conservation strategies for its large carnivores.

18. KWS recognises an urgent need to resolve these problems. In response, the KWS established a large carnivore task force to advise, among other issues, on the development and implementation of national strategies for large carnivore conservation.
19. KWS has established a Species Conservation and Management Department that coordinates all conservation issues related to endangered species. This department has since spearheaded the formulation of national conservation strategies for black rhinos, Hirola, lions, hyaenas, cheetah, wild dog and Grevy's zebra that have already been approved for implementation by the KWS Board of Trustees. The development of national conservation strategies for elephants, bongo, roan antelope, sable antelope, sea turtles, and endangered primates. We will soon commence processes for developing national strategies for bongo, sea turtles and corals. In the long term we hope to have in place articulate national conservation strategies for all critically endangered, endangered and threatened species to provide frameworks within which such species can be conserved for posterity. This is an ambitious undertaking and KWS will continuously consult with stakeholders to ensure that these targets are achieved.