

# CAT

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# news





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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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Photo Paul Funston

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## National lion action plans and strategies in Benin, Cameroon and Senegal

**Lions *Panthera leo* in the region of West Africa are threatened with extinction. As a contribution to a major conservation effort three related Lion Conservation Workshops in Benin, Cameroon and Senegal were organised with funds from the National Geographic Big Cat Initiative to develop National Conservation Action Plans for lions. These three countries harbour (parts of) the three main Lion Conservation Units in West Africa; (A) W-Arly-Pendjari, (B) Benoue-Gashaka Gumti and (C) Niokolo Koba and adjacent parks. The workshops were bilingual (English and French). For each country national lion conservation strategies were developed and are now in the process of approval. In addition after each workshop, eco-guards have been trained in camera trap techniques, track surveys and large carnivore ecology. All countries were given a Bushnell digital camera trap for experimental purpose. Additional objectives included were: (1) where relevant include other large carnivores (2), and to convene regional carnivore conservationists (3) under the umbrella of the Regional Carnivore Initiative for West and Central Africa with the aim to strengthen conservation efforts directed at lions, leopards *Panthera pardus*, cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus*, African wild dogs *Lycan pictus* and hyaenas *Crocuta crocuta* and *Hyaena hyaena*.**

Lions are threatened with extinction in the Region of West Africa, with some 550 lions remaining in the region (Riggio et al. 2013). The main aim of this project was to strengthen conservation efforts directed at lions but also befitting conservation of leopards, cheetah, African wild dogs and hyaenas.

This project had the following sub-objectives: 1) Development, endorsement and generating buy in from government and stakeholders for national conservation action plans, 2) Strengthening and capacity building of a network for large carnivore conservation in the region while practising human-carnivore-conflict mitigation, and 3) Communication of the results of research. The workshops were bilingual (French and English) and implemented in a joint partnership between the Leo Foundation, the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU), Zoology, University of Oxford, the Institute of Environmental Sciences (CML) of Leiden University and local partners.

Local partners were a.o. the Ministry of Environment and the National Parks service in Senegal, the Ministry of Environment and the University of Abomey in Benin and the Ministry for Fauna and Forest management and the University of Dschang in Cameroon.

Additional contributing organisations included the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group, the IUCN SSC Canid Specialist Group, Zoological Society London, Panthera, African Parks

Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Society and the Born Free Foundation – each of these organisations brought in their own funding, expertise and local contacts. This collaboration brought efficiency, synergy and complementarity since different organisations focused on different aspects. Through this project, the existing Regional Lion Network in West and Central Africa (ROCAL; <http://www.rocal-lion.org/>) and Large Carnivore Initiative (LCI) for West and Central Africa ([www.largecarnivoresafrica.com](http://www.largecarnivoresafrica.com)) were supported. The LCI network also expanded its scope to other large carnivores such as cheetahs, leopards, African wild dogs and (striped hyaenas and spotted hyaenas). In addition, on the job training courses were organised after each workshop, on topics such as tracking methods, camera trap application and the use of GIS/telemetry for large carnivore conservation. A camera trap plus accessories were donated to each local partner after the workshop for experimental use, funded by the project.

### National Lion workshop Benin

The action planning workshop for Benin took place in Hotel Grand Popo, near the capital Cotonou, on 5 and 6 December 2012 and was attended by some 25 participants both from government and NGOs. There was another workshop preceding the action plan, so most people were already in place, including senior

staff of the Directorate of National parks, a representative of the Minister, who participated throughout the lion conservation workshop.

Some highlights covered presentations by Leo Foundation, WildCRU, CENAGREF and Panthera, a problem analysis (working groups), the development of a Logframe (working groups), the establishment of a drafting committee and the adoption of an 'aide memoire' and roadmap for adoption of the action plan. There was a good discussion on age-based hunting. Benin has always had the proviso in its legislation that lion quotas only concerned 'old males' (henceforth old will be understood as older than 6 years) – the only new thing is it will be operationalised. There is no concrete idea yet about the set of incentives and penalties and mechanisms of verification to enforce this, but all are looking forward to learn from the experience of Tanzania. While the aging guide offers some good clues, lions here are extremely wary and hunters may have to rely primarily (but not exclusively) on the manes and that is where the problem is. We studied our archives of photos from Pendjari and the collective memory of the guides and concluded that we need to adapt the mane drawings, since manes in this ecosystem are very poorly developed or even absent. This will require more work and sources of funding are currently being identified.

### National Lion workshop Cameroon

The Lion Conservation workshop Cameroon was facilitated by IUCN in Hotel Meumi Palace, Yaounde and attended by about 20 participants, with representatives of the Ministries MINFOF and MINEP and of the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), WildCRU, Leo Foundation, a.o. The first morning opened with several lectures.

During the remaining days the National Lion Action Plan was discussed in small subgroups based on a vision and mission, objectives, targets and actions. The final plan was agreed upon by all present on the last day. The workshop also prepared an 'aide memoire' for the Minister of MINFOF suggesting that there is a strong need for a survey of lion populations in the North province. One point of discussion was if the workshop should recommend a temporary moratorium of lion hunting or not. It was concluded that the article of Croes et al. (2011) only covered data on 3 hunting zones and that lion data of remaining hunting zones should become available, before a final conclusion can be drawn.

Another point of discussion was whether cattle illegally invading the hunting zones and national parks should be shot as a warning to the transhumant herders, or whether other means should be used to get them out of the protected areas. No final conclusion was drawn on the latter and it was suggested that illegal intrusions by cattle and transhumant herders are presently one of the greatest threats to lions in the North province.

### National Lion workshop Senegal

The workshop was organised at the training centre in Dalaba, Niokolo Koba National Park. The centre is located in the central part of the park South of the Origin of The Gambia River. There were a total of 24 participants from the Ministère Eaux et Forêt, Institute Gestion de Faune, the Foundation Derbianus SCAW, WARA Foundation, WildCRU, Panthera, Chimbo foundation, and Leo Foundation. The workshop was opened by Marius Niaga (Chief Veterinary doctor) and Mallé Gueye (Deputy Conservateur) who welcomed the participants. The latter introduced the situation of Niokolo Koba NP. Other presentations covered a summary of the regional status of lions in West and Central Africa and the results of a 40 day carnivore track-survey during February-March 2012 in Niokolo Koba NP. During this survey evidence was found for the presence of 18 lions. Evidence also pointed to the presence of leopard, African wild dog and spotted hyena. Daha Kane (Master student Virginia Tech University, USA) presented the initial results of his camera trap survey using Moultrie Game Spy D50 and L55 cameras and Deer cam 200 and 300. In February 2013 he confirmed the presence of African wild dogs, lions, leopards and spotted hyaenas in Niokolo Koba NP with clear photographs. Finally presentations were given on the results of research on collared lions and genetic research on lions in West and Central Africa. The afternoon of the first day and the whole second day were used to develop the National Lion Action Plan, which was discussed in small subgroups based on a vision and mission, objectives, targets and actions. The final plan was agreed upon by all present on the last day, Saturday 2 March. A big debate was the inclusion of corridors between the Niokolo Koba NP and the Boundou Reserve North of the park, a zone mixed with hunting zones and cattle areas. There was also a debate on the inclusion of actions to mitigate conflicts between lions and local communities.



Workshop participants in Niokolo Koba National Park, Senegal (Photo H. de Iongh).

### Training of eco-guards

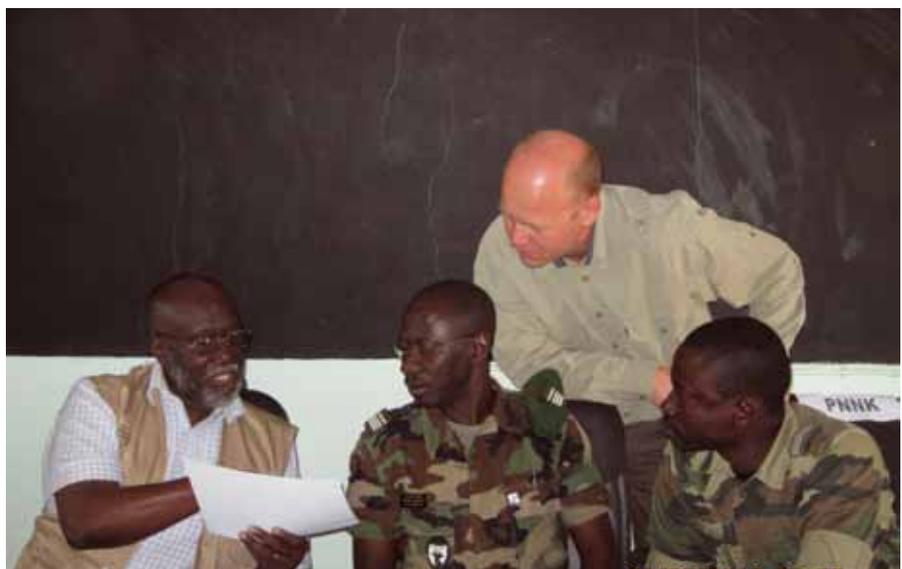
#### Benin

A two-day training for trackers and guides of the National Parks and Hunting Zones in the North of Benin was organised on 7-9 December 2013. Trainers were Hans Bauer, Marjolein Schoe and Aristide Tehou, plus the Park Warden during field excursions. The training took place in Pendjari NP and was co-financed by the UNDP-supported WAP project. The training was very successful: the participants were very excited and engaged actively in questions and discussion. Practical work consisted of camera trapping. The Leo foundation donated a new camera trap to Aristide Tehou, to be used in addition to the two camera traps already in place. We had one picture of a jackal (*Canis aureus*), hopefully there will be an African wild dog picture in the future. The general thought is that

there is still a small population somewhere in the complex, because people keep seeing dispersers (but not packs!). Cameras could not remain in the park now as this is the main season for fires, but when the tall grass is all burnt they will be put up around inferred wild dog passages.

#### Cameroon

During 24 and 25 February 2013 Hans Bauer and Hans de Iongh, together with Nadia Niomogh (EFG) and Pricelia Tumenta (UDs) were involved in the training of 17 eco-guards at the Campement Buffle Noir, in the central part of Benoue NP. The training consisted of short presentations by Hans de Iongh, Hans Bauer, Pricelia Tumenta and Nadia Niomogh on lion research and on survey methods of large carnivores. Plastified sheets were distributed with carnivore track recognition, taking



Discussions during the national lion strategy workshop at the training centre of Niokolo Koba National Park in Senegal (Photo H. de Iongh).



Training of eco-guards in Benoue National Park, Cameroon (Photo H. de Jongh).

genetic samples from scat and aging of lions. The ecoguards were also instructed in the use of a digital Bushnell camera trap which was given to the Conservateur (Mr Mvogo) for use in Benoue NP. The training was completed with a field work exercise by placing the Bushnell camera trap near a saline and by investigating carnivore tracks in the river bed of the Benoue river. A Bushnell camera trap was left with the Conservateur Mr Mvogo for experimental use in Benoue NP.

#### Senegal

On 3 March a training of 10 eco-guards and staff of the Niokolo Koba NP took place in Senegal by Hans Bauer, Laura Bertola and Philipp Henschel. Plastified sheets were distributed with carnivore track recognition, taking genetic samples from scat and aging of lions.

Similar to Benoue NP the eco-guards were instructed in the use of a digital Bushnell camera trap. A Bushnell camera trap was left with the Conservateur (Mr Mallé Gueye) for experimental use in Niokola Koba NP.

#### Conclusions and follow-up

It is concluded that all three Lion Conservation workshops have been successful and met their initial objectives as follows:

- 1) Through a national Lion conservation action plans after the completion of each workshop in Senegal, Benin and Cameroon.
- 2) Through the training of a large number of eco-guards and other staff after each workshop.
- 3) Through the transfer of Bushnell camera traps for experimental use and the mobilization of rangers per site, trained in large carnivore survey methodology and the use of camera traps and who will conduct a long term monitoring programme on large carnivores.

4) Through an assessment report compiled after the completion of each workshop in Senegal, Benin and Cameroon.

5) Through the adoption and publication of strategies for each study area with a focus on large carnivore conservation.

6) Through the mobilization of two rangers per site, who were trained in large carnivore survey methodology and the use of camera traps and who will conduct a long term monitoring programme on large carnivores.

It is also suggested that this is the first time that conservation efforts for large carnivores have been bundled in the region of West and Central Africa. Until recent conservation efforts were mainly focused on lions, whereas other carnivores received little attention. This initiative definitely resulted in mutual strengthening of conservation efforts in the region.

In addition it is emphasized that this is also the first time since the publication of the Regional Lion Conservation Strategy for West and Central Africa that a concerted effort is made to organize strategic workshops in the three remaining Lion Conservation Units in West and Central Africa.

Observing the threatened status of lions and other large carnivores in the region, with the lion being regionally endangered in West Africa and the African wild dog and cheetah with only some isolated surviving populations left, the need for a new concerted initiative to boost conservation in the region is very urgent.

Researchers and large carnivore conservationists and other stakeholders from several countries outside Benin, Cameroon and Senegal in the region of West and Central Africa participated and discussed various aspects of large carnivore conservation during 2-3 day workshops in Niokolo Koba NP (Senegal), Pendjari NP (Benin) and in Yaounde (Cameroon). In addition, capacity building took place after the workshops, at the training of eco-guards and other staff per site in large carnivore survey methodology and the use of camera traps for long-term monitoring.

Special attention was given to 'governance issues' by the presentation of 'bad practice' (Waza NP, Cameroon) and 'best practice' (Benin) cases.

The subjects addressed during the workshop were diverse, from carnivore-livestock conflicts which is considered to be the highest

Workshop participants in Yaounde, Cameroon (Photo H. de Jongh).



Workshop participants in Yaounde, Cameroon (Photo H. de Jongh).

conservation priority for lions, to large carnivore conservation management and hunting quota.

Throughout West and Central Africa, human settlements and associated agriculture and livestock systems are increasingly expanding into natural savanna regions. Livestock owners may lose part of their stock to carnivores around national parks in the region, although surveys indicate that losses through disease are often more significant. Poaching and poisoning in retaliation to livestock loss has resulted in a significant reduction and fragmentation of large carnivore populations, together with other threats such as a decrease in prey numbers and habitat destruction.

In West and Central Africa, loss of natural habitat and associated declines in herbivore populations have resulted in a significant reduction and fragmentation of large carnivore populations. The increased frequency of conflicts between large carnivores and a growing human population over loss of livestock through depredation, often leading to poaching of carnivores (Tumenta et al. 2010), has further impacted carnivore numbers. As a result, many carnivores have become locally extinct, especially in the region of West and Central Africa. In the West African region, Senegal, Benin and Cameroon still support an important large carnivore community, although scarce population survey data reveal that carnivore numbers have declined drastically (Croes et al. 2011). In the Extreme North Province of Cameroon, livestock predation by lions and other large carnivores is a particularly well-described phenomenon around the Waza National Park (de longh et al. 2005). Livestock owners in this area lose a significant percentage of stock to carnivores on an annual basis and retaliate by killing carnivores (de longh et al. 2005). Knowledge on the occurrence of such conflicts may help conservation action through adoption of mitigation measures, eventually reducing retaliatory killing of carnivores.

During the Benin workshop we have built on the large carnivore survey reported by Henschel et al. (2010) and surveys implemented by Henschel et al. (2014) in the WAP complex funded by the National Geographic Big Cat Initiative.

In contrast to the WAP complex, detailed knowledge is lacking on the status of carnivore-human conflicts around the Faro, Boubba-Ndjidda and Bénoué National Park BNP complex in the North Province of Cameroon and also in Niokolo Koba NP. These com-



Training of eco-guards in Benoue National Park, Cameroon (Photo H. de longh).

plexes support continuous habitat for large carnivores and are therefore of great importance to carnivore conservation. However, acquired data from three GPS/GSM collared lions in the BNP-complex do show, that populated areas around the Park are visited by lions (Croes et al., unpubl. data), indicating a potential for human-lion conflicts.

This project will have an important impact on lion conservation in W and C Africa. With less than 4,000 lions left in the region of West and Central Africa this region is facing a risk of declining lion populations all over its range. The impact of the workshops, through the development of a long term strategy for each Lion Conservation Unit, will have a long lasting impact on the conservation of large carnivores as ambassadors of the savannah ecosystem

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