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Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

CMS

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

CITES

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AFRICAN LION (*Panthera leo*) COMPARATIVE STUDY

(Prepared by the CITES and CMS Secretariats)

Summary

In partnership with the University of Oxford, and in collaboration with African lion range States, the CITES Secretariat conducted a comparative study on African lion population trends and conservation and management practices (referred to as the African lion comparative study) with financial support provided by Switzerland.

The key findings relevant to the effective regulation of international trade in *Panthera leo* are summarized in the present document and the full report is included in an Annex.

The report was made available as an information document at the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP20; Samarkand, 2025) and was subsequently considered by the Animals Committee at its 34th meeting (AC34; Geneva, 2026). AC34 invited range States of the African Carnivore Initiative (ACI) to consider the findings of the comparative study in the review of the Joint CITES-CMS ACI's Programme of Work (PoW).

Recommended actions:

Range States are invited to:

1. consider the findings of the *Comparative study of African lion population trends and conservation and management practices (African Lion Comparative Study)* when reviewing the PoW of the Joint CITES-CMS ACI; and

2. review the proposed activities incorporated into the draft revised PoW and identify any additional activities needed to address the key findings of the comparative study, as appropriate.

AFRICAN LION (*Panthera leo*) COMPARATIVE STUDY

Background

1. Pursuant to paragraph b) of Decision 19.205 on *African lion (*Panthera leo)*:*

> ***Directed to the Secretariat, in collaboration with African lion range States, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)***
>
> ***19.205*** *Subject to external funding, the Secretariat shall, in collaboration with African lion range States, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and, as appropriate, taking into consideration the joint CITES-CMS African Carnivores Initiative and the* Guidelines for the Conservation of Lions in Africa *in information document CoP18 Inf. 10:*
>
> *b) jointly with the CMS Secretariat, undertake a comparative study of African lion population trends and conservation and management practices, such as lion hunting, within and between countries, including the role, if any, of international trade;*

2. The CITES Secretariat, in partnership with the University of Oxford, and in collaboration with the African lion range States conducted the comparative study on African lion population trends and conservation and management practices (referred to as the African lion comparative study). The study was made possible through the financial support of Switzerland.

Process undertaken to conduct the study

3. The Secretariat organized a meeting of the African lion range States on 3 May 2024 to consult the range States on the proposed approach for the study, sources of information to be used, key research questions, criteria to identify the countries for the comparative assessment of population trends and conservation and management practices, and to invite African lion range States to actively participate in the study. The meeting was facilitated by the Secretariat, and attended by 46 participants, including representatives of the 23 African lion range States[1], the CMS Secretariat and IUCN.

4. The following aspects were raised by the African lion range States during the meeting:

   a) key considerations to inform the comparative study:
      i) different management approaches are successfully delivering lion conservation;
      ii) cross-border protected areas and populations (e.g., the Masai Mara in Kenya and Serengeti in the United Republic of Tanzania), including management practices, monitoring and aspects that could inform policies and management;
      iii) there should not be a bias towards well-studied populations for which there is ample data – the study presents an opportunity to collect up-to-date data held by range States and challenges experienced by range States to fill (at least in part) apparent data gaps;
      iv) overarching policy environment / context and its impact on outcomes taking into consideration that range States have different wildlife management policies;

[1] *Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia.*

b) It was proposed that a questionnaire be prepared and shared with all African lion range States to obtain relevant information and a 'baseline' relating to *inter alia* gaps in data, management challenges, including human-wildlife conflict and opportunities associated with successful conservation methods.

5. The CITES Secretariat subsequently shared the online meeting outcomes with African lion range States, whose input shaped the comparative study's development and subsequent consultations.

6. A questionnaire on African lion hunting, management and conservation was circulated to all African lion range States for completion. The questionnaire, which provided baseline information across all range States, was completed by 19 out of 24 African lion range States[2] (79%): Botswana Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

7. The comparative study was conducted through the investigation of the status of lion populations in the following eight selected landscapes with different management regimes within each of the landscapes:

a) **Bénoué Complex (Cameroon) –** National Parks**;** hunting concessions surrounding the national parks**;** inactive hunting concessions surrounding the national parks.

b) **Maasai Mara (Kenya) –** Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR); conservancies outside Maasai Mara National Reserve**;** non-conserved land surrounding the MMNR.

c) **W-Arly-Pendjari Complex (Niger) –** National Parks**;** hunting reserves within the complex.

d) **Niassa Reserve (Mozambique) –** Niassa Reserve (excluding hunting concessions)**;** hunting concessions within the reserve**;** other concessions within the reserve.

e) **Ruaha-Rungwa (United Republic of Tanzania) –** Ruaha National Park; village land around Ruaha National Park; Rungwa hunting blocks.

f) **Kruger (South Africa) –** Kruger National Park; private reserves adjoining Kruger National Park (with trophy hunting)**;** private reserves adjoining Kruger National Park (without trophy hunting).

g) **Luangwa (Zambia) –** Luangwa National Park; Game Management Areas surrounding the National Park**;** Village land outside of the Park.

h) **Hwange (Zimbabwe) –** Hwange National Park**;** hunting blocks surrounding the National Park; village land surrounding the National Park.

8. This comparative study was survey-based and considered the impact of habitat loss and fragmentation, threats to the species, income streams for actors at the specific sites in the respective landscapes referred to in paragraph 7, conservation actions needed, the importance of trophy hunting and photo-tourism, and outcomes if trophy hunting were to stop. Similar data were also collected for individual sites with different management regimes within each of those landscapes.

[2] *There are 24 African lion range States (based on the African Lion Database): Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.*

9. The draft *African lion Comparative Study* (available in English only) was shared with the range States, the CMS Secretariat and the Chairs of the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group on 5 December 2024 and on 6 January 2025, with a request to provide inputs on or before 24 January 2025 and 14 February 2025.

Final report of the study

10. The final report of the *African lion Comparative Study* was made available as an information document at the CITES CoP20 (CoP20 Inf. 9). Pursuant to paragraph c) of Decision 19.205 (Rev. CoP20) the Secretariat shared the final report on the comparative study with the Animals Committee for review (document AC34 Doc. 31).

11. The executive summary outlines the key findings of the comparative study provided in Annex to the present document. The following key findings relevant to the effective regulation of international trade in the species were emphasized in the report considered by Animals Committee at its 34th meeting (AC34; Geneva, 2026). These findings may also be relevant for consideration by ACI range States when reviewing the ACI PoW:

    a) The most frequently reported perceived threat to African lion populations by range States was human-lion conflict, including retaliatory killing, followed by illegal killing or poaching for parts, and habitat loss and/or fragmentation.

    b) The most frequently reported data gap for lions and lion management was national population estimates and trends for the species; knowledge of the most appropriate methods to use for surveys; and data on mortalities, including retaliatory killing.

    c) The most frequently reported challenge to doing population surveys for lions was limited technical expertise and capacity to undertake these surveys and an associated lack of training. This was followed by a lack of financial resources to undertake such surveys, and a lack of equipment and technical resources to complete such surveys.

    d) Eight of the responding range States felt that import bans of trophies would be negative for lion conservation, while six felt it would be positive for lion conservation, with a clear difference between countries which currently permit legal lion hunting, and those which do not.

    e) In terms of the comparative analysis of eight selected landscapes (landscapes with a range of management models):

        i) Human-lion conflict, bushmeat poaching, and livestock expansion are perceived as the most common major threats to lion populations in these landscapes (each being identified as major threats in 57% of the surveyed countries).

        ii) Though trophy hunting was not reported as a key threat by any State, it was cited as a minor threat for populations in two countries. It is important to ensure that regulations are as effective as possible, with systems such as adaptive age-based quotas, which have been used successfully in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The age limits on trophy hunted animals reported here were sometimes as young as 5, but the best available evidence suggests a minimum of 6 years and ideally a minimum of 8 years where populations face various anthropogenic pressures. Therefore, it could be worth examining and revisiting the age regulations where relevant.

12. The Animals Committee (AC34 SR) invited range States of the ACI to consider the findings of the comparative study in the review of the *Guidelines for the Conservation of Lions in Africa*, as well as the review of the Joint CITES-CMS African Carnivore Initiative's Programme of Work; and agreed that the key findings of the study relating to the need to undertake national population surveys of African lion to inform estimates and trends, to enhance knowledge of the most appropriate survey methodologies, and to strengthen capacity to conduct surveys, should be taken into consideration in the implementation of Decision 19.208 (Rev. CoP20) and the review of the Joint CITES-CMS African Carnivore Initiative's Programme of Work.

Recommendations

13. ACI Range States are invited to:

    a) consider the findings of the *Comparative study of African lion population trends and conservation and management practices (African lion Comparative Study)* when reviewing the PoW of the Joint CITES-CMS ACI; and

    b) review the proposed activities incorporated into the draft revised PoW and identify any additional activities needed to address the key findings of the comparative study, as appropriate.