

Myers N. Status of the leopard and cheetah in Africa.

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Abstract: Status of the leopard and cheetah in Africa. This paper presents findings from a two year survey. Africa is no longer the last great empty continent: the human population is expanding more rapidly than that of any other region on earth. The cheetah depends on specific biotopes which have more open areas - the same that will continue to suffer at the hands of increased livestock industry and subsistence agriculture. As a marginal predator which relies on certain types of prey, the cheetah often requires a much larger area to survive than the tiger or leopard.

STATUS OF THE LEOPARD AND CHEETAH IN AFRICA

Norman Myers

The great cats of Africa have received a good deal of attention in recent years. This applies especially to the leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), two large spotted cats whose skins have been in much demand for the international fur trade. As a consequence of fears for their status, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (I.U.C.N.) with funds from the I.U.C.N./World Wildlife Fund (W.W.F.) Joint Projects and the International Fur Trader's Federation (I.F.T.F.), decided an investigation was needed. The survey was directed at status, distribution, numbers, and other pertinent aspects of conserving these two felids. This paper presents findings from the two year survey.

Without going too far into the concepts of endangerment, it is important to recognize that most species of major mammal life in Africa are undergoing progressive depletion. In the face of human populations with their expanding numbers and expanding aspirations, this process is likely to continue at accelerating rates into the foreseeable future. The point of issue is not whether the numbers of leopard and cheetah are declining, but whether they are declining faster than would be expected given the constraints under which wildlife communities now exist in emergent Africa. This is no longer the last great empty continent; the populace is expanding more rapidly than that of any other region on earth, and, given the exceptionally broad base to the population pyramid, the implosion of human numbers will be more difficult to defuse than anywhere else on earth. In Kenya, for example, the average fertility rate is 7.6. Even more significant, the rate is still rising, even though Kenya was the first country of black Africa to institute an official family planning program. The Population Council of New York estimates that birth control programs would have to be increased ten times in order to achieve a reduction in fertility rates--and that would not start until after an interval of ten years.

Africa is also by far the most impoverished region on earth. In fact, Africans are conscious of a second "developing gap" opening up, this one between Africa and the rest of the Third World. The prospect

Myers argues that what is important in evaluating status is the rate at which a species is declining relative to the constraints under which wildlife exists in a man-dominated world. In Africa, these constraints are heavy, with human population numbers accelerating faster in parts of black Africa than anywhere else in the world. Not only are human numbers exploding, the continent as a whole is the most impoverished. Subsistence agriculture will eat up the last wilderness, and I predict, the parks and reserves of many underdeveloped countries as inflation and standards of living decline in the western world, leading to a decreased incentive from tourism.

Myers found that leopards deserve a better status than previously supposed in that they are so adaptable and such generalists. In the huge Congo Basin, an area not touched to any degree by the fur trade, the density of leopard may run as high as one per square mile. On the other hand, he points out that no matter how impressive the adaptiveness of the leopard might appear, it has been virtually eliminated already from northern and most of southern Africa. Myers sees greater hope over the coming two decades for the leopard than for many larger mammals of Africa; however, the growing use of pesticides, poisons and coyote "getters" may render considerable destruction. As will be seen from Visser's report, several countries are already using indiscriminate poisons in the same manner that the U.S. did in the last twenty years.

The corruption Myers has found in the channels of the fur trade gives a pessimistic hope for the cooperation of furriers internationally in conservation schemes, and, of course, the 1973 discovery of illicit smuggling into the U.S., at levels nearly equal to the pre-ban era, reinforces his view that it will take tremendous, perhaps economically unfeasible, scrutiny to advance a controlled, legitimate fur trade.

As for the cheetah, Myers sees quite a different future. The cheetah depends on specific biotopes which have more open areas--the same areas that will continue to suffer at the hands of increased livestock industry and subsistence agriculture. As a marginal predator which relies on certain types of prey, the cheetah often requires a much larger area to survive than the tiger or leopard. Many existing reserves may not be large enough to sustain a viable population year-round. The African-wide estimate indicates that by 1980 there may be as few as 5,000 cheetahs.