

Myers N. 1976 Jul 23. For the Leopard's Lovers, Good News. For the Cheetah's, Bad. New York Times;A21.

Keywords: 1Afr/Acinonyx jubatus/cheetah/leopard/livestock damage/Panthera pardus/status

Abstract: In this newspaper article of 1976, the cheetah is described to be in "poor shape" in Africa. Because of its ecological and behavioural characteristics, the cheetah is confined in the main to savanna grassland and only a few parks and reserves contain significant numbers.

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For the Leopard's Lovers, Good News. For the Cheetah's, Bad.

By Norman Myers

OXFORD, England—The leopard in Africa is alive and moderately well, but the cheetah is in poor shape.

The leopard can exist in every ecological zone of Africa south of the Sahara, from semi-deserts to forests. In savannah grasslands, however, that form a focus for Africa's livestock

industry, the leopard is rapidly being eliminated. Stockmen are growing more inclined than ever to believe a cow or a sheep should end up on somebody's plate rather than down some predator's throat.

But even if leopards disappear from most savannah lands, at least 100,000 and perhaps many more should survive in forests and woodlands that look likely to remain relatively undis-

turbed by human activities for some years to come. This is not to suggest that the leopard is a prospering species. Through the attention of poachers and stockmen, it has been all but extirpated from at least half the countries of Africa. In only five countries at most, notably the lowland forest countries including huge Zaïre, is the leopard maintaining anything like substantial numbers.

By contrast, the cheetah is confined in the main to savannah grasslands. Only a few parks and reserves contain significant numbers of cheetah, 3,000 at most. Almost certainly, Africa now contains fewer than 25,000 cheetah, possibly fewer than 10,000. Whatever the figure, it is probably only half as many as in 1960, and it will surely be cut in half within another five years unless new conservation measures can be introduced.

Unlike the leopard, which often lives right up against man's estate if not within it, the cheetah, being among the most timid of Africa's wild creatures, does not want to know of man's intrusion in its living space. Further, the cheetah is often robbed of its kills by other carnivores, even until it starves.

Being lightly built, it runs the risk

of damage if it tries to fight back.

Whereas a leopard can survive with a paw missing, a slight injury to a cheetah's lanky limbs can slow its super-swift pursuit of tomorrow's prey.

Moreover, the cheetah would get along far better if it were not losing 1,000 hides a year to the salons of Paris, Rome and Tokyo.

By contrast, the leopard has been able to sustain the depredations of the international fur trade during the last few years without such severe setback to its continent-wide prospects as has been feared—though the trade is inefficient and wasteful to an absurd degree from both economic and ecological standards.

The cheetah's principal problem lies in the conflict of its way of life with the growing livestock industry in developing Africa, which, just as much as conservation, must remain a viable activity.

The well-wisher of the cheetah in America and Europe has no more monopoly of right in this situation than the citizen of savannah Africa who is furthering his legitimate self-interests.

The same would-be protector of the cheetah is probably inclined to look

for meat in his local supermarket at the most "reasonable" price. If he likes the look of African beef, he wants it as cheap as beef from competitive sources. He may thus be encouraging the African rancher—albeit unwittingly but significantly nonetheless—to eliminate an important source of waste in his stock-rearing operations in the form of wild predators, of which the easiest to kill is the cheetah.

One possibility for resolving the situation is to enable the international community to express its convictions on behalf of the cheetah. If the cheetah does in fact "belong" to mankind, rather than to just a few nations of emergent Africa, what can everybody do about it?

Well, they can either put up or shut up. Making good the livestock losses in the half-dozen countries with large cheetah populations would cost between a quarter and a half a million dollars in compensation each year. The rich-world conservationist may not wish to be hit in his pocketbook as well as his philosophies, but he should make up his mind where his priorities lie: a martini or two more than last year, or survival for the cheetah?

A specific choice of that sort would be an advance over the present situation, in which people beat their breasts over the cheetah's plight but find little opportunity to do much about it.

Norman Myers, a consultant in conservation, recently undertook a two-year survey of the leopard and cheetah throughout Africa south of the Sahara on behalf of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the World Wildlife Fund.

