

2nd African Lion Working Group Meeting
10-11 February 2012
Etosha National Park, Namibia

Final Communiqué

The **African Lion Working Group (ALWG)**, www.african-lion.org, is dedicated to all aspects of conservation, research, and management of free-ranging lion populations in Africa. The ALWG meeting in Etosha was attended by 30 members and a number of observers (Namibian authorities, media and park staff). The first day consisted largely of presentations on various relevant topics as defined in online forum discussions beforehand. The second day consisted of group discussion, facilitated by David Macdonald. Minutes were taken by Hanlie Winterbach, Jonathan Scott and Hans Bauer. The ALWG delegates endorsed the following synopsis:

Synergy between groups

The ALWG acknowledges that the lion is an emblematic and charismatic species with its own intrinsic value, but most members view the importance of their actions at a larger scale, i.e. large carnivore guild and/or biodiversity in general. ALWG thus supports an interdisciplinary understanding of conservation and embraces the concepts of umbrella, keystone, flagship and indicator species and encourages the use of the lion to gain leverage with decision makers for biodiversity conservation in Africa.

Financial instruments

The lion conservation community need to find the most effective ways to both make and spend money for lion conservation, finance is a crucial driver (although non-monetary motivations are sometimes at least equally important). Innovative financial instruments can play an important role in conservation (e.g., carbon credits, insurance, corporate contributions). Since lion conservation is expensive, ALWG can act as platform for information exchange in this field.

Land use planning

Considering that habitat encroachment is still a primary threat to lions, attention was given to land use planning as an instrument to mitigate this threat by increasing transparency and by explicitly looking for synergies where possible and making sensible trade-offs between all legitimate forms of land use, including wildlife, agro-industry, subsistence and mining.

After discussing some element of good practice, the delegates emphasised the importance of increasing lion-related benefits and mitigation/compensation in case of land conversion.

Translocation

Translocation of large carnivores is often based on good intentions, but with little or no idea of the impact on translocated animals or source populations. Simply moving the problem along with the animal to another area is not sufficient argument for translocation. Proactive mitigation strategies may be more effective; concentrate efforts first on changing the perception, understanding and attitude of farmers towards predators and coexistence, and finding innovative solutions to address conflict. The IUCN has policy documents on their website regarding translocation and guidelines for re-introduction, with three revised position statements. The group agreed that ALWG will do a synthesis of available data on translocation attempts of large carnivores together with a systematic review of the literature and published this information in a scientific journal.

Captive breeding

Captive breeding of lions in South Africa is now a huge industry and this will have regional, continental and global effects – some of them possibly devastating. In the general context of conservation biology,

captive lion breeding is not useful as lions can breed *in situ* perfectly well if threats are mitigated. While captive breeding can be potentially useful for preserving a species' genetic diversity, it was felt that the captive breeding that South African breeders are presently undertaking is not conducive to deliver that goal.

Canned lion hunting

Delegates agreed that canned lion hunting has direct and indirect relevance to conservation of wild lions; consensus was that it is unattractive no matter how it is regulated and it should actively be discouraged. Delegates felt it is not out of place for conservationists to take a moral stance against canned lion hunting, since ethics run through everything we do.

CITES uplisting of lions to Appendix 1

The discussion on this point avoided an unfruitful moral pro/con hunting debate but looked at practical implications. The majority of delegates felt that well-regulated hunting could potentially contribute to lion and habitat conservation, but at present such a contribution is thought to be insufficiently substantiated. The IUCN lion conservation strategies have also been insufficiently implemented and, short of a formal evaluation, consensus was that goals are not being met at all. The merits and problems of up-listing were discussed as follows:

1. Uplisting would appear attractive as it aims at reducing international trade, while allowing for well-regulated trophy hunting.
2. However, due to domestic legislation of the USA, an unintended effect of uplisting might be an import ban on trophies to the US, thus potentially reducing demand for lion trophy hunts. The trophy hunting industry claims that this will have an adverse effect on economic viability which may lead to conversion of large tracts of natural land currently used for hunting (and benefitting biodiversity conservation) to agriculture.
3. Uplisting of lions will demand better monitoring of lion populations and non-detrimental finding reports for export permits. However, it would also mean pressure for more funds for range countries for lion population monitoring programmes.
4. A relatively limited number of lions is hunted for trophies, a far larger numbers of lions get killed for other reasons.
5. Range countries might turn to captive breeding because these animals will be on Appendix 2 and in doing so fuel the canned hunting industry. Use of lion body parts and associated local and international trade is not trophy related, but may further stimulate captive breeding and canned hunting.
6. Uplisting, or split-listing of West & Central Africa lions, will not address the main problems faced by lions in that region, such as local trade, poaching and conflict with people.

As ALWG members value the arguments above differently there is no unanimous stand by this group in relation of CITES uplisting of lions, but there is unanimity that these are the main issues on which to focus the discussion.

West and Central African Regional Strategy

The lion conservation strategies are available, but implementation on the ground has lost momentum. In order to offer effective lion conservation the W&C Africa regional strategy needs to move forward, and national action plans put in place, possibly in conjunction with current efforts on African wild dog and cheetah in the region.

Closing

The group thanked Sarel van der Merwe as a dedicated chairman of ALWG, and Tammy Hoth for her hard work to organise the meeting. Delegates are grateful to the Namibian authorities, and especially management of Etosha National Park, for hosting this event.