

7th Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia

Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

19–22 February 2006

Report and pictures Urs Breitenmoser

Since 2000, the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife has organised workshops for the conservation of the fauna of Arabia, generously supported by H. H. Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed al Qassimi, ruler of Sharjah. The yearly meeting has grown to be a widely recognised forum for nature conservation on the Arabian Peninsula. The workshop tent in the desert sand in front of the Breeding Centre has become the place where conservationists of all Arab countries and international experts meet each February. Several IUCN/SSC specialist groups are involved in the process, including the Cat Specialist Group, which has been permanently represented since the first meeting.



Arabian leopard at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah. *Panthera pardus nimr* is listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List.

The status of all cats inhabiting the peninsula was assessed in recent years, but the main focus has always been the Arabian leopard (*Panthera pardus nimr*), listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List. In 2003, the Arabian Leopard Working Group – with 21 participants in this year's meeting – decided to compile the available knowledge in country-based status reports. The update at this year's workshop has confirmed that the situation of the Arabian leopard is not encouraging. Once roaming through all mountain ranges and forested areas of the Arabian Peninsula from the Hajar mountains in the east to the Sabar mountains in the south to the Jordan valley and the Negev desert in the north-west, the distribution area is nowadays extremely fragmented. Only three confirmed nuclei remain: a very small occurrence in the Negev desert, a nuclei of unknown size in the Wa'ada mountains north of Sana'a, and the largest and best-preserved population in the Dhofar mountains in south Oman, probably stretching into eastern Yemen. Several spots in the Al-Hijaz mountains of Saudi Arabia and in Yemen with known occurrence in the 1980s and early 1990s, but no recent observations remain to be surveyed. All available information indicates that less than 200 leopards remain in the wild. A conservation breeding programme co-ordinated by the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah secures the survival of the Arabian leopard in captivity and provides stock for possible restocking or reintroduction.



Abdulaziz Al Midfa, director of Sharjah's Environment & Protected Area Authority opening the 2006 Conservation Workshop for the Arabian Fauna at the Conservation Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife.

The inventory work is now in its final state; at this year's meeting, the Group discussed final adjustments to the status report. The country reports and two general chapters will be published as a special issue of *Cat News* as a common product of Sharjah's Environment and Protected Area Authority and



Dr David Mallon leading the discussion on the status of the Arabian leopard at the Conservation Workshop for the Fauna of Arabia in Sharjah, February 2006.



Dr Andrew Spalton explaining the status and distribution of the Arabian leopard in Oman, the country with the largest remaining population and the only one well preserved and monitored.

the Cat Specialist Group, printed and distributed by the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife. The status reports provide baseline information for the development of on-the-ground conservation activities. The plan is to first draft a range-wide conservation strategy to be submitted to the national authorities for endorsement, and then, based on the general strategy, to develop specific action plans for each country. The conservation strategy should be developed in a participative approach including the experts, the institutions of the range countries responsible for wildlife conservation and protected areas, and representatives of interest groups. The Arabian Leopard Working Group concluded that the best opportunity for such a workshop would be the 2007 Sharjah meeting and has submitted a respective proposal to the ruler of Sharjah.