Saving Spots: TACKLING LEOPARD POACHING FOR CEREMONIAL ATTIRE IN WESTERN ZAMBIA

Finalist Presentation for the Herman Goldstein Award 2023
31st International Problem-Oriented Policing Conference
Boulder, Colorado, USA
August 2023
Global Biodiversity is in decline

69%

Global decline in monitored vertebrate species from 1970 to 2018

Source: Living Planet Index, 2022, WWF/ZSL
Illegal wildlife trade threatens species with extinction

62%

Decline in species populations in areas affected by wildlife trade

Source: Morton et al., 2021
Wildlife crime harms human well-being

- Depleting natural resources and harming livelihoods
- Increase in armed violence and decline in governance
- Increased biosecurity risks

Wildlife trade is connected to livelihoods, religion and cultural heritage.

40-85% households in rural areas of southern & west Africa consume bushmeat as a source of protein.

Local communities are key stakeholders in preventing Wildlife Crime

- Guardians of wildlife
- Place managers of wilderness areas
- Handlers of potential offenders
Leopards are estimated to have been lost from up to **67%** of their historic African range.

Source: IUCN Red list, 2016.
Poaching for leopard skins and body parts is one of the primary threats in the region.

- Leopard skin trade is fueled by demand for Ceremonial Regalia.
- Nazareth Baptist "Shembe" Church, Zulu, Lozi, Ngoni and Swazi gatherings were identified as key demand sources in southern Africa.
Furs for Life initiative provided a potentially replicable solution

Shembe Church generated an estimated annual demand of 800-1200 authentic leopard skins
Furs for Life initiative provided a potentially replicable solution

Use of synthetic leopard furs increased to 50% from 10% in 2013

Photo: Tristan Dickerson/Panthera
Panthera was requested to form a partnership to resolve a similar problem

The Lozi Senior Chief, His Royal Highness Inyambo Yeta requested a partnership to implement an initiative to tackle ceremonial skin use in Western Zambia

Photo: Gareth Whittington-Jones/Panthera
Kuomboka

Royal Barge

Photo: Harry Vlachos
Which problem?

The SARA Process

Scanning
- Identify and prioritize problems. Choose one specific problem.

Analysis
- Collect and analyze information to determine what drives and facilitates the problem.

Assessment
- Determine the impact of your response and share lessons learned.

Response
- Implement response that reduces drivers and facilitators of problem. Use partnerships to diversify response options.
Target Species

Leopard

Serval

Cheetah

Lion

Large-Spotted Genet

Problem definition:

“Leopard poaching to supply ceremonial attire for Lozi cultural gatherings.”
Analysis
Sources of Information

- Field visits to Kuomboka
- Interviews with key community contacts
- Questionnaire surveys of Lozi paddlers
- Court Monitoring (WCP)
- SMART LE Patrol Data
- Camera-Trap monitoring

- Baseline measures of scale of skin use
- Product-based crime script of poaching and trade
- Skin use and motivations of paddlers
- Information on trafficking incidents
- Poaching incidents in Kafue
- Leopard densities in Kafue
Leopard skin use is highly concentrated in space and time
Majority of prospective paddlers hunted leopards (35%) or purchased skins (32%).

**Wildlife Crime Continuum**

**Stages**
- **Hunt**
- **Process**
- **Transport**
- **Use at Kuomboka**

**Paddler Pathway**
- Poacher-Paddler kills leopard and skins it, transport skin home, processes it and wears it at Kuomboka

**Poacher-trader-paddler Pathway**
- Poacher kills leopard, skins and processes it
  - Trader buys from poacher and transports it to buyer
  - Paddler buys from trader & uses it at Kuomboka
  - Paddler buys direct from poacher, transports and uses it at Kuomboka

**Controls**
- Department of National Parks & Wildlife (DNPW)
- DNPW & LEA
- Litunga & Barotse Royal Establishment
- Supply-side
- Trade/Transit
- Demand-side
Ceremonial skin use is linked to trafficking of leopard skins from Kafue Ecosystem

Demand at Kuomboka

- 32% of the interviewed Lozi paddlers bought skins from traders

Trafficking of Leopard Skins

- 72% of carnivores trafficked are leopards
- 95% of leopard seizures included skins

Poaching at Kafue

- 79% of leopard seizures in W & S Zambia purportedly from Kafue and surrounding areas
- 4 of 6 leopard poaching incidents detected on patrols in Kafue NP involved harvesting of skins
Short lifespan and anticipatory purchasing of authentic skins leads to high demand

• Estimated at least **1000 Lozi men** seek to paddle in the Kuomboka each year

• Skins last for around **4.2 years**

• Estimated **200 to 300 wild cat skin** garments required annually to supply demand for Kuomboka and other ceremonies - leopard skins are the most desired
Influential leadership: Litunga and Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE)
Response
BRE declaration and Heritage furs will reduce desire for authentic skins

Input 1: Set Rules
- Royal decree to use Heritage Furs for Kuomboka
- Potential paddlers are aware of royal decree
- Desire for authentic fur declines

Input 2: Assist Compliance
- Heritage Furs in appropriate quality and quantity, distributed free of cost
- Potential paddlers have access to Heritage Furs
- Potential paddlers are satisfied with Heritage Furs
Reduced desire will result in fewer paddlers buying authentic skins

- Desire for authentic fur declines
- Majority of paddlers wear Heritage Furs
- Number of potential paddlers seeking authentic fur declines
Decline in demand by Lozi paddlers will reduce mortality of leopards at target sites

Number of potential paddlers seeking authentic fur declines

Decline in targeted poaching of leopards by paddlers

Decline in opportunistic poaching of leopards by paddlers

Decline in leopard skins purchased by paddlers from traders

Reduced market for leopard skins

Decline in targeted and opportunistic poaching by local poachers

Decline in poaching-induced mortality of leopards at targeted sites
Reduced poaching induced mortality will result in increased leopard population

Decline in poaching induced mortality of leopards at targeted sites -> Increased survival of leopards at targeted sites -> Increase in leopard population at targeted sites
Mechanism of Change

**Inputs**
- Royal decree to use Heritage Furs for Kuomboka
- Potential paddlers are aware of royal decree
- Potential paddlers are satisfied with Heritage Furs
- Heritage Furs in appropriate quality and quantity, distributed free of cost

**Desire for authentic fur declines**

**Majority of paddlers wear Heritage Furs**

**Number of potential paddlers seeking authentic fur declines**

**Outputs**
- Decline in targeted poaching of leopards by paddlers
- Decline in opportunistic poaching of leopards by paddlers
- Decline in leopard skins purchased by paddlers from traders

**Outputs**
- Reduced market for leopard skins
- Decline in targeted and opportunistic poaching by local poachers
- Decline in poaching induced mortality of leopards at targeted sites
- Decline in targeted poaching of leopards by paddlers

**Outcomes**
- Increase in leopard population at targeted sites
- Increased survival of leopards at targeted sites
Key implementation challenge

• The covid-19 pandemic created a gap between public launch in 2019 and first use of skins at the Kuomboka in 2022

• The pandemic affected overall engagement with partners & community

Key implementation strength

• Strong endorsement from BRE leadership

• Intervention simultaneously addressed a cultural and conservation need
Assessment
The royal declaration was effective in raising awareness of the Heritage furs

Over 70% of respondents were aware of Heritage Furs across three years
Majority of paddlers were positive towards Heritage furs

68% of respondents had a positive opinion of Heritage Furs

Reasons for positive opinion:
- Conserving Wildlife
- Preserving Culture
- Reduced Effort in Procuring Furs
- Quality of Heritage Furs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-Kuomboka</th>
<th>Post-Kuomboka</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
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<td>2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>2022</td>
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...And most paddlers didn’t desire an authentic leopard skin

Over 60% of respondents did not intend to acquire an authentic skin

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<tr>
<td>Pre-Kuomboka(2020 &amp; 2021)</td>
<td>70%</td>
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<td>70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Kuomboka(2022)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>70%</td>
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Majority of Lozi paddlers used Heritage Furs at Kuomboka in 2022

79% of paddlers were recorded using Heritage Furs in Photographic Survey

61% of paddlers wore Heritage Furs according to Post-Kuomboka Interviews

Photo: Gareth Whittington-Jones/Panthera
Ownership of leopard skins decreased

70% decline in leopard skin ownership

Paddlers were not replacing their old leopard skins
Leopard skin seizures declined after our response

Less than 2.5% of seizures in 2021 were spotted cats despite high anticipated post-pandemic demand
Potential decline in leopard poaching in Kafue National Park

Reported incidents of leopard poaching declined after implementation of Saving Spots

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Court Monitoring Records</th>
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<td>2021</td>
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Covid-19 Pandemic Period

Royal Declaration

2022 Kuomboka
Increase in leopard densities in Greater Kafue Ecosystem occurred after implementation of Saving Spots.
Increase in leopard densities in Greater Kafue Ecosystem occurred after implementation of Saving Spots
Moderators
Less than 20% of interviewed paddlers had a negative opinion of heritage furs
But ....

55% of paddlers with negative opinion of heritage furs hunted for leopard skin

70% of paddlers with negative opinions wish to acquire authentic skins
Flexible skin user

Accept Heritage Fur

• Purchase or inherit skin
• Educated
• Full time job

Adherent skin user

Reject Heritage Fur

• Mostly hunt their own skin
• Intend to acquire new skin
• Poor education
• Mostly unemployed
Conclusion

Do we modify our intervention or devise a new targeted intervention?
Conclusion

The demand-reduction intervention played a key role in successfully reducing the problem.
Conclusion

Endorsement and shared ownership of the intervention by traditional authorities was critical to its implementation
Conclusion

Significant *buy-in* by majority of *users* played a *key role* in *success*
Conclusion

The success of this initiative demonstrates the potential to expand this approach by partnering with other culturo-religious groups across the globe that utilise wild cat skins in ceremonial attire.
Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the following organisations for their generous financing of this project:
Acknowledgments

Special thanks to all our colleagues at Panthera, the Barotseland Royal Establishment, Department of National Parks and Wildlife (Zambia) and WCP for their support and contributions to the case study. Additionally, we are also grateful to the following organisations for their support of this work:

• National Prosecution Authority, Zambia
• Peace Parks Foundation
• Iziko South Africa Museum
• KAZA Secretariat
• LEAD Ranger
• ASU Center for Problem-Oriented Policing
IN MEMORIAM

His Royal Highness Senior Chief Inyambo Yeta

1954 - 2023

His leadership, vision and dedication to wildlife conservation in Western Zambia was key to initiating and sustaining the Saving Spots project and many other initiatives to conserve wildlife and preserve western Zambia's rich cultural heritage.

He will be greatly missed by our team, the conservation fraternity and the Lozi community.
Thank You

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Photo: Aditya Malgaonkar/Panthera