

CAT

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news





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For joining the Friends of the Cat Group please contact Christine Breitenmoser at ch.breitenmoser@kora.ch

Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

Send contributions and observations to ch.breitenmoser@kora.ch.

Guidelines for authors are available at www.catsg.org/catnews

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Editors: Christine & Urs Breitenmoser
Co-chairs IUCN/SSC
Cat Specialist Group
KORA, Thunstrasse 31, 3074 Muri,
Switzerland
Tel ++41(31) 951 90 20
Fax ++41(31) 951 90 40
<u.breitenmoser@vetsuisse.unibe.ch>
<ch.breitenmoser@kora.ch>

Associate Editors: Keith Richmond
Brian Bertram
Sultana Bashir
Javier Pereira

Cover Photo: Lion pride in Hwange, Zimbabwe
Photo Paul Funston

NICOLAS HEARD¹, FRÉDÉRIC LAUNAY^{1,2} AND JIM SANDERSON*

Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund wild cat funding: an overview

We present a review of all funding provided to wild cat conservation projects by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund since the fund began making donations in mid-2009. Our objectives were to assess the projects which have a felid named as the primary target species, and are to enlighten readers and thus to encourage more proposals covering more species, to increase the quality of proposals, and to encourage work on threatened and overlooked species. In the interest of transparency we provide a list of each species and the amount of funding that has been provided by the fund. We found that from 2009 to April 2014 US\$ 683,583 was provided to 56 wild cat conservation projects. Approximately 69% of the total amount invested supported species or sub-species listed as EN or CR by the IUCN Red List. The most successful proposals were on behalf of leopard and tiger conservation efforts. US\$ 124,000 went to 8 tiger projects, around 18% of cat funds allocated, and US\$ 117,970 to 10 leopard projects, around 17% of funds allocated. Over 78% of all funds went to support conservation efforts for seven big cat species.

2014 marks the 5th anniversary of grant disbursements by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (MbZSCF). The Fund was endowed in October, 2008 by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, with Euro 25m to benefit the conservation of all living things on earth. It began disbursing grants in June 2009, and by the end of 2013 the Fund had provided over US\$ 10m to fund more than 1,000 projects. Following the grants awarded in April 2014, the Fund had disbursed a total of US\$ 10,866,364 to 1,081 projects. Despite this large investment in species conservation, through wise investment decisions the endowment total value has increased to US\$ 33m.

The review board of MbZSCF is made up of leading experts in the conservation world. Michael Maunder, Florida International University, and Russ Mittermeier, Conservation International, serve as international representatives of the Board of Directors, and act as members of the review board. Each review board specialist is responsible for reviewing and recommending for funding certain taxon, but all members of the review board can and often do provide recommendations on proposals beyond their focal areas. For instance, Claude Gascon, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a USA based non-profit, is responsible for reviewing and recommending amphibian proposals; Mike Parr, American Bird Conservancy and AZE, does the same for avian proposals; and I, Jim Sanderson, after joining

the review team in early 2013, review all the wild cat proposals that are a subset of mammal proposals. The review team is responsible for recommending allocation of approximately US\$ 500,000 three times per year to worthy conservation projects. Proposal deadlines are the end of February, June, and October of each year. Reviews are typically held in April, September, and December often in Abu Dhabi or IUCN Headquarters, Gland, Switzerland.

Here we present a review of all wild cat funding provided by MbZSCF since 2009 when the Fund began awarding grants. Our objective is to provide members of the Cat Special Group and others with as much information as is available to encourage more, higher quality, diverse and creative proposals to aid the conservation of all members of the Felidae – large and small.

Funding for wild cats is derived from the total funding available for mammals. Wild cats, like primates, receive a proportion of funding made available to all mammals over which Bill Konstant, International Rhino Fund, presides. The amount made available to wild cats depends on the total amount requested by all proposals involving wild cats.

Cat Conservation Projects Funded

We found that from 2009 to April 2014 US\$ 683,853 has been invested in 56 wild cat conservation projects (Table 1) and the average project received US\$ 12,212.

The summary provided in Table 1 gives a coarse resolution into MbZSCF investments

in wild cat conservation. To better understand where funds were invested consider which species received funding each year (Supporting Online Material Table SOM T1). This data is used based on the primary named species of a given felid project.

Discussion

As is always the case some species received more funding than others. There are many ways to dissect SOM T1 to better understand the issues species conservation faces. We chose three ways to reconsider SOM T1.

- 1) First we divided the Felidae into two groups, big cats and small cats, with an arbitrarily defined split to assign species to each group. For our purposes we chose to group seven species (cheetah, jaguar, leopard, lion, clouded leopard, snow leopard, and tiger) into big cats (NB: The Fund has not given any grants to date for work with puma which would be included in big cats), and the remaining species into small cats. SOM T1 can then be summarized (Fig. 1).
- 2) Second, we compared funding for each IUCN Red List Endangered species without regard for subspecies. Out of the cats awarded grants there are currently five species listed as Endangered by the IUCN Red List: Andean cat, fishing cat, flat-headed cat, snow leopard, and tiger, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that two big cats received almost two-thirds of funding invested in conservation efforts by MbZSCF for endangered cat species. Three small cats received US\$ 92,293 or 29% of funds provided. Two reasons might account for this disparity. Snow leopards and tigers have benefitted from a relatively long history of conservation efforts, and also multiple mature organizations leading conservation efforts. For instance, the 44th annual snow leopard

Table 1. For each year the number of grants, total amount (in US\$) invested, and average amount invested in each cat project are given.

Year	Number	Total	Average
2009	11	202,772	18,434
2010	11	165,647	15,059
2011	7	87,000	12,429
2012	7	61,500	8,786
2013	17	138,774	8,163
April 2014	3	28,160	9,387
Total	56	683,853	12,212

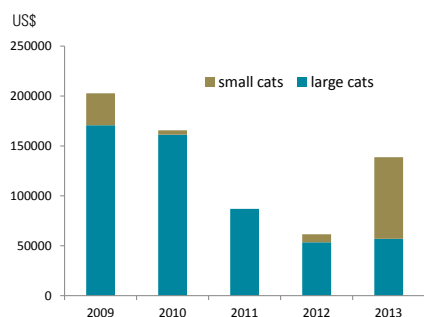


Fig. 1. Funding allocated for large cats (cheetah, jaguar, leopard, lion, clouded leopard – both species, snow leopard and tiger, 38 projects) and small cats (all other species, 18 projects) 2009-2013.

conservation symposium was held in 2013. The Alliance Gato Andino (Andean Cat Alliance) was founded in 2006. The Fishing Cat Working Group was created in 2011 but as yet has not had its inaugural international meeting. No such coordinated efforts exist on behalf of other endangered small

cats, though such organizations are dearly needed. Sadly, if a fraction of the financial largess enjoyed by snow leopard and tiger conservation efforts suddenly became available to support small cat conservation efforts, the institutions and people would have to be created and identified, respectively, to coordinate long overdue conservation efforts. Infrastructure does not exist across the range countries to support conservation efforts for these species. Because of widespread loss of lowland wetland habitats in peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra, and Borneo due to the unmitigated expansion of oil palm plantations, illegal logging and gold mining along and in waterways, the flat-headed cat might well become the next Critically Endangered member of the Felidae (the Iberian lynx now holds this dubious distinction). For the flat-headed cat however the issue is not the loss of prey but the irreplaceable loss of habitat, a far more serious concern.

Table 2. 26 proposals were awarded US\$ 317,283 on behalf of conservation efforts for all five IUCN Red List Endangered cat species (EN). Tiger conservation efforts were the beneficiary of almost 40% of that amount.

Species	Number funded	Total	%	Average
Andean cat (EN)	4	48,820	15.4	12,205
Fishing cat (EN)	5	33,448	10.5	6,690
Flat-headed cat (EN)	2	9,971	2.7	4,985
Snow leopard (EN)	7	74,044	23.3	10,578
Tiger (EN)	8	124,000	39.0	15,500
Total	26	317,283		12,359

Table 3. Big cat grants divided into sub-species level where appropriate.

Species	(Sub) species	IUCN Red List	Number funded	Total (US\$)	Average (US\$)
Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>	VU	2	35,000	17,500
	<i>A. j. hecki</i>	CR	1	15,000	15,000
	<i>A. j. venaticus</i>	CR	1	24,991	24,991
Mainland clouded leopard	<i>Neofelis nebulosa</i>	VU	2	17,500	8,750
Sunda clouded leopard	<i>Neofelis diardi</i>	VU	1	21,678	21,678
Jaguar	<i>Panthera onca</i>	NT	3	46,781	15,594
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	NT	0		
	<i>P. p. nimr</i>	CR	2	35,000	17,500
	<i>P. p. melas</i>	CR	1	8,650	8,650
	<i>P. p. saxicolor</i>	EN	7	74,320	11,797
Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>	VU	3	60,000	20,000
Snow leopard	<i>Panthera uncia</i>	EN	7	74,044	10,578
Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>				
	<i>P. t. altaica</i>	EN	4	85,000	21,250
	<i>P. t. jacksoni</i>	EN	1	10,000	10,000
	<i>P. t. amoyensis</i>	CR	1	4,000	4,000
	<i>P. t. sumatrae</i>	CR	2	25,000	12,500

3) Thirdly we looked at big cat sub-species as shown in Table 3.

This table shows that of the 38 grants given to big cats, 27 were for species or sub-species listed as EN or CR, amounting to US\$ 356,005, or 66% of the big cat total. Furthermore, it shows that many of the grants provided to big cat conservation projects were to support sub-species which are more endangered than the full species. Fifteen of the 38 grants provided to big cats fall into this category, for a total of US\$ 186,961. This is particularly the case for leopard projects.

Conclusion

Our results are by no means comprehensive. There are many ways to dissect and analyze the data we presented, ways we encourage our colleagues to pursue. The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund has played and will continue to play a significant role in species conservation efforts. From 2009-April 2014 more than US\$ 680,000 has been invested in wild cat conservation efforts. Conservation efforts on behalf of seven big cats and in particular for two IUCN Red List Endangered species, snow leopard and tiger, have greatly benefitted as have to a lesser extent four small cat species. This might be due to the long history and well-developed infrastructure supporting conservation efforts on behalf of these two large charismatic members of the Felidae. MbZSCF disperses funds on the basis of need and the quality of proposals received. We hope that by providing detailed insight into what species have been funded and the amounts projects have received, MbZSCF has become more transparent to cat conservationists. We also hope that other granting institutions will follow MbZSCF's lead with similar transparency in these pages in the future. Only through full transparency and co-operation can granting institutions claim to put species conservation efforts ahead of their own self interests.

Supporting Online Material Table T1 is available at www.catsg.org/catnews

¹ Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Abu Dhabi, UAE

² IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

³ Small Wild Cat Conservation Foundation, 1510 S Bascom Ave Apt 7, Campbell, CA 95008, USA

*<gato_andino@yahoo.com>