

Project Update: January 2008

Community Monitoring Program

Five new community scouts from four villages were identified by traditional leaders and trained by SRN employees with assistance from Niassa Carnivore Project (NCP). Five existing scouts compiled annual reports and problems with current reporting forms (human-wildlife conflict, special species sightings) were addressed. All community scouts were presented with certificates at the end of the workshop and provided with caps, T-shirts and backpacks.

Main goals 2008: Train and support a further 5-6 community scouts from 5 villages. Initiate monitoring of conflict events by Health Clinics. Mentor SRN employees and provide further skills training.

Identify and implement practical mitigation methods

Three incidents have confirmed a trade in leopard skins inside NNR: a snare set specifically for leopards was discovered, a snared leopard severely wounded a poacher before being killed and 2 leopard skin trophies were stolen from a hunting concession. To date we have records of five lions inadvertently snared in the last three years. No direct conflict with lions has been recorded in Niassa villages since April 2007; however the peak conflict period is January to March. A male lion, originally collared in 2005 is currently regularly visiting Mbamba village croplands presumably in search of prey such as warthogs.

Main Goals: Fit GPS collars to lions frequenting village and monitor movements. Use camera traps to assess timing and frequency of visits to fields by lion prey species in peak conflict period. Initiate in-depth questionnaire survey to collect detailed information on carnivore attacks since 2000, compile preliminary list of carnivore conflict mitigation methods already in use in NNR, support and guide R. Branco (Mozambican vet) in domestic dog project (registry of domestic dogs in NNR, vaccination of current dog population) and initiate removal of dog population.

Targeted Ecological Research

Through call-up surveys and remote camera trapping, 22 lions were visually identified in the intensive study area (1000 km²; 0.02 individuals / km²). Two lionesses from two prides were collared with VHF collars and collars were replaced on two lions first marked in 2005. No adult male lions over the age of six have been identified in the study area over the last two years. Two male leopards were caught and collared using drop door cage traps. Preliminary data on the home ranges has been collected. Blood and skin samples have been taken from all immobilized cats and will be analysed for disease markers. Remote camera trapping was initiated with 30 camera traps (15 camera stations at 1 km intervals for 42 days) set in riparian habitat. 28 mammal species were recorded including 12 carnivore species. Using camera traps, opportunistic observation and trapping a minimum of six individual leopards have been identified in an intensive study area of 30 km². Capture and radiomarking experience was provided to R. Branco, a newly qualified Mozambican Vet who will be working in NNR.

Main Goals: Use camera trapping to compare leopard density in different habitats (sport hunting vs. non hunted areas), radio-mark at least 3 lions and 3 leopards with GPS collars, complete call-up survey for lion and spotted hyaena throughout NNR to compare with 2005 data and provide staff training. Provide 3 months field research and surveying experience to A. Jorge (SRN Employee. Mozambican graduate)

Trophy Monitoring and Hunting Guidelines

All operators provided with lion kits for 2007 hunting season (datasheets, camera, maps) as well as detailed guidelines on how to age lions in Niassa. Leopard questionnaires (location, number of baits, condition and measurements of animal) distributed for each sport hunted leopard. All hunting concessions were visited in November: all trophies (15 leopard; 8 lion) measured and aged (tooth wear, size, condition, mane development, nose colour, pulp cavity x-rays) and questionnaires (8) and leopard trophies (17) were measured and aged. Results (currently being analysed) will be used to set 2008 quotas and regulations. Two female leopards and 4 lions under the minimum age of six were taken as trophies; at least 5 lion hunts were unsuccessful as no suitable lions were seen. Two young male lions radio collared since 2005 were re-collared and nose colour, teeth wear and mane development recorded to validate visual aging cues.

Main Goals: Results of trophy monitoring presented to Operators and SRN with recommendations and new regulations, annual trophy monitoring, develop initial visual aging cues for aging and sexing leopards from ecological research and preliminary SRN leopard hunting regulations.