Oryx

A future for cheetahs and African wild dogs in Angola

By Pedro Monterroso & Raquel Godinho, 12th February 2020

Angola is a biodiversity hotspot in southern Africa, with 291 known species of native mammals. A war for independence (1961–1974) followed by a civil war (1975–2002) took a heavy toll on its wildlife, primarily through widespread poaching and bushmeat hunting. During this period, several threatened and iconic species underwent severe declines and range contractions, including herbivores such as the giant sable antelope *Hippotragus niger variani*, and carnivores such as the African lion *Panthera leo*, the cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* and the African wild dog *Lycaon pictus*. However, the new-found peace and political willingness to improve knowledge of the country's biodiversity has allowed for the emergence of several initiatives aimed at identifying the status of and threats to Angola's wildlife.

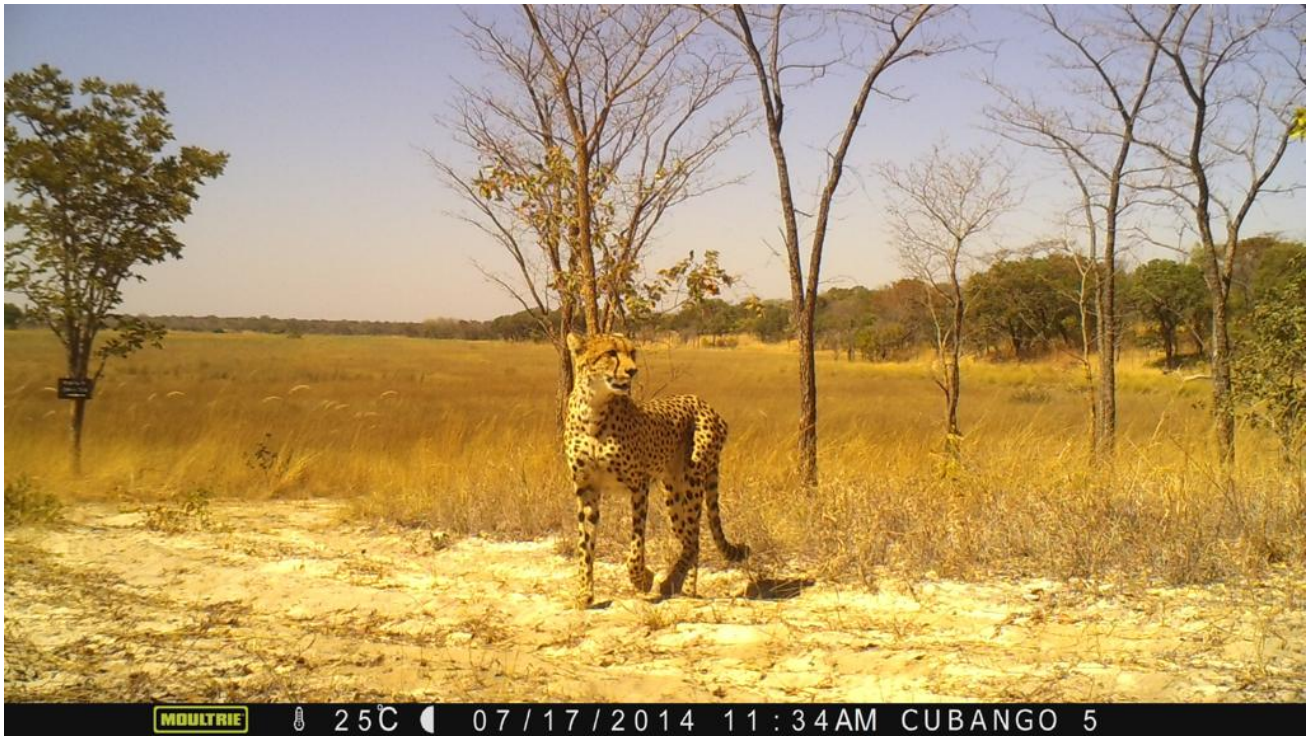
Wild cheetah (Acinonyx jubatus) detected through standardized camera trapping in Cuatir Private Reserve, in March 2019. Photo credits: CIBIO/InBIO-UP

A TwinLab network established between the Research Center in Biodiversity and Genetic Resources

(CIBIO, University of Porto, Portugal), the Higher Institute for Educational Sciences (ISCED-Huíla) in Angola and the University of Namibia (UNAM), fostered by the UNESCO chair ‘Life on Land’ and supported by the Angolan ministry of Environment, provided the appropriate setting to rediscover the wildlife in some of the most remote places in Angola.

Field team heading towards the bush for fieldwork in Bicuar National Park, Huíla Province (Angola). Photo credits: Filipe Rocha

Using camera-traps regularly spaced at 2km intervals across the landscape, we assessed the status of the Endangered African wild dog and Vulnerable cheetah in the Bicuar National Park (Huíla Province) and in Cuatir Private Reserve (western Cuando Cubango province). We complemented our findings by reviewing recent survey reports and observations to provide an update on the species’ status.



Wild cheetah (Acinonyx jubatus) detected through unstructured camera trapping in Cuatir Private Reserve, in July 2014. Photo credits: Stefan Van Wyck

We detected African wild dogs consistently throughout 2017–2018 in Bicuar National Park, and were able to assign 15 individuals to one group and three to another. However, no cheetahs were detected in this Park. In Cuatir Private Reserve, we identified one individual cheetah in 2014, and at least three others during 2017–2018. Groups of African wild dogs were also found in the Reserve in 2015 and 2016.

Group of African wild dogs (Lycaon pictus) detected through direct observation, in June 2018. Photo credits: Milcíades Chicomo

Our results build on other recent surveys by which cheetahs and African wild dogs were recorded outside their previously known range, and therefore suggest that their known ranges should be expanded to include these areas. Furthermore, African wild dogs should be classified as ‘resident’ in Bicuar National Park, as groups with more than 10 individuals have been detected regularly since 2015, and were confirmed to be breeding through multiple observations of cubs. It is likely that other large extents of good quality habitat in Angola also harbour populations of these iconic species, and further monitoring to assess presence and residency status are required.

Wild cheetah (Acinonyx jubatus) detected through standardized camera trapping in Cuatir Private Reserve, in October 2018. Photo credits: CIBIO/InBIO-UP

These findings will support the new political willingness in Angola to invest in wildlife conservation and will help to unlock conservation funding for the cheetah, African wild dog and other carnivores. Given that the majority of the distribution of these two species potentially falls outside protected areas where they are more susceptible to anthropogenic threats, we emphasize the urgency of identifying remnant populations in Angola and quantifying any threats to the species.

Group of African wild dogs (Lycaon pictus) detected through unstructured camera trapping in Cuatir Private, in October 2014. Photo credits: Stefan Van Wyck

The article Updated ranges of the Vulnerable cheetah and Endangered African wild dog in Angola is available in *Oryx—The International Journal of Conservation.*

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