

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



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QUOTAS FOR LEOPARD HUNTING TROPHIES

This document has been submitted by the Republic of Botswana in relation to agenda item 29.2 on *Quotas for leopard hunting trophies*.*

In June 2020, Botswana provided relevant information on the review of its leopard quota for consideration by the Animals Committee published as AC31 Doc. 29.2 Annex 1. On 30 May 2021, a year after the Botswana submission was made, and one day before the onset of the 31st Meeting of the Animals Committee, the Chair of the Animals Committee circulated Document AC31 Inf 17 CONSULTATION BY THE ANIMALS COMMITTEE ON AGENDA ITEM 29.2 QUOTAS FOR LEOPARD HUNTING TROPHIES in which he raised several concerns on the leopard export quota review submitted by Botswana.

The Government of Botswana is surprised by this late submission by the Chair of the Animals Committee and by the tone of the last paragraph of Document AC31 Inf.17 and in the few hours available between the publication of Document AC31 Inf 17 and the discussion of the agenda item on the programme of AC31, it has prepared the attached response to the concerns raised.

In bold text from Document AC31 Inf.17. *In italics the response of Botswana*

Concerning the proposed retention of the quota for leopards from Botswana:

The Animals Committee could not come to a unanimous conclusion. Some members considered that the documentation submitted by Botswana requesting the retention of the quota of 130 leopards raises several questions that would have to be addressed by Botswana before they could recommend the retention of that quota at this level.

The concerns are summarized as follows:

- **In reference to the most recent national population estimate of 4,295 leopards, the quota of 130 animals represents nearly 3% of the total population.**

It is common knowledge that counting leopards, especially covering an entire country, is an almost impossible exercise, which is why very few Range States in the whole world have country-wide field-based population estimates. The estimates in Botswana are minimum guess estimates based mainly on spoor surveys which are known to notoriously underestimate populations, especially in relation to leopards.

* The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.

Notwithstanding, Booth & Chardonnet (2015), recommended a quota percentage for leopard varying from a maximum of 4% of the estimated population (similar to Caro et al. 2009) in Safari Areas to a minimum of 2% in Communal Areas. The CITES export quota of Botswana is within these recommended thresholds, even when considering that the guess-estimate provided by Botswana under-estimates the true population. Consequently, a CITES export quota of 130 leopard would be within the thresholds.

- **This most recent estimate is based on available habitat rather than on actual counts of animals.**

Taking into account that leopards appear to be very successful at adapting to altered natural habitat and settled environments (Nowell & Jackson 1996), we can conservatively estimate a precautionary leopard range in Botswana of approx. 90% of the 580,000 km² of the country. To that extent, the country has leopards even in the outskirts of Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. An actual total count is impossible. It is an unreasonable expectation to require Range States to have actual total counts, especially of a cryptic species such as leopard. Estimates reported in the review are mainly extrapolations. The high adaptivity of leopard let us presume that the species can inhabit the near total extent of the country although in variable densities (Winterbach et al 2020).

- **It is unclear from the proposal what considerations were taken into account to determine what constitutes “good habitat” for leopards.**

See above reply. Leopard adaptability to various habitats has been ignored in this concern.

- **The planned leopard census in 2020 could not be conducted so recent population estimates based on counting of animals are not available.**

Botswana would like to inform the AC that further to the review presented here, the framework of a countrywide survey has been extensively discussed with local and international collaborators over much of 2021, and will be finalized by end of June 2021, with survey starting in the year 2022. The methodology of the survey will include both extensive and intensive surveys through a gap analysis, a regional farmer consultation, surveys in different land use areas, camera trapping to ascertain prey abundance and leopard densities and spoor tracking to ascertain presence/absence. This process will be repeated for multiple sites, across different land-use types and over a 3 year period, to create a comprehensive picture of leopard populations throughout Botswana. This countrywide survey will be the second one in Africa after the one done by Namibia in the past two or three years.

- **The lack of population estimates and no information on prey base, both objectives of the Roadmap for the Conservation of the Leopard in Africa, make it difficult to reach conclusions on cause and effect of some of the points raised in the proposal.**

Botswana uses adaptive management as the basis for its wildlife management actions, guided primarily by the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act (1992) and the Wildlife Policy (2013). Monitoring is the key and any species can be managed without knowing their exact population. This crucial fact seems to be ignored by this specific concern. The reference to the Roadmap is redundant because Botswana is managing this species since decennia in a very successful manner. The Roadmap is not a document that can be quoted at this stage. Furthermore, Botswana is not a Party to CMS and as such cannot endorse nor agree on the fact that leopard are migratory species. The simple dispersal of subadult individuals and the simple fact that they move through international borders cannot be confounded with migration. Leopard can live on a vast prey base (including rodents, reptiles and birds, other than mammalian prey) and in Botswana are even predated fish in the Okavango Delta. Also, data from recent aerial surveys shows that the prey base (including small antelopes) is in satisfactory status.

- **It is unclear from Botswana’s review whether age and sex restrictions on leopards killed will be imposed, which is known to have an important impact on population dynamics.**

Botswana Hunting and Escort Guidelines promote sport hunting of adult male leopard and penalize the hunting of females and young males. On all leopard hunts it is mandatory that a professional hunter (PH) and a Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) Escort Guide are present. It is also mandatory to measure skulls after the

hunt. It is widely known that skulls above 13-14 inches (length + width) are a clear indication of an adult male and the data from Botswana are showing a steady adult age of hunted males. Botswana has a comprehensive database on skull measurements that is also informing quota setting.

- It remains unclear, how far the current hunting quotas (the number of specimens allowed to be hunted during a certain hunting season) differ from the proposed export quota. Specifically, information is not provided on spatial allocation of the quotas and on the total hunting quotas, as well as on how frequently and on which basis they are being set and adjusted.

Allocated quotas have always been set at a low, very conservative level and were mostly driven by leopard-livestock conflict in areas outside protected areas or concessions. These quotas are set on an annual basis, collating all available scientific and anecdotal evidence to guide quota setting, and allocated per each Controlled Hunting Area. From 2008 to 2012 quotas ranged from 45 to 22 leopards. In 2021, 50 leopards have been provisionally allocated on quota (see Figure 1).

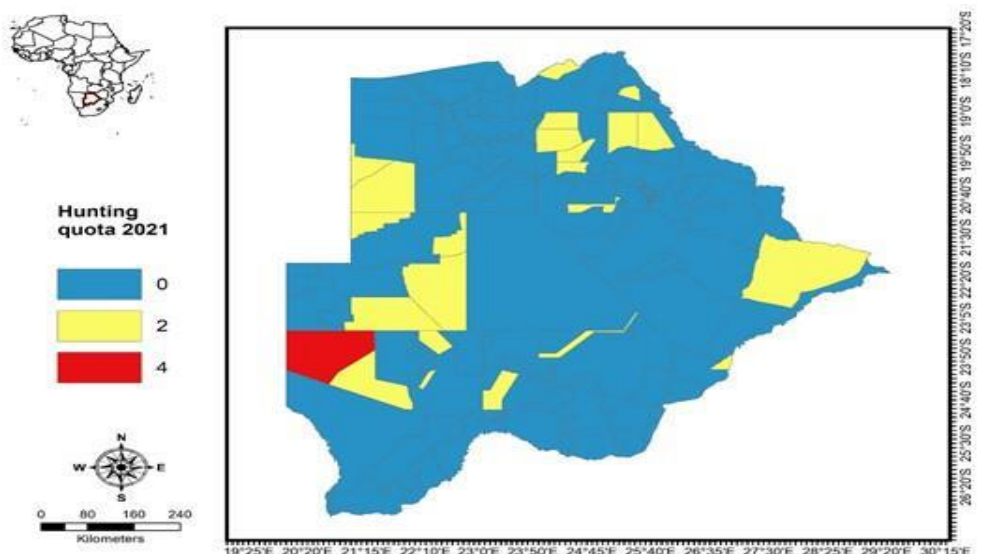


Figure 1 Adaptive Leopard Hunting Quotas 2021

Allocated quotas have always been lower than the CITES quota because it has always been the understanding of Botswana that annual export quota is not a target and there is no need for a CITES quota to be fully used (Resolution Conf. 14.7 (Rev. CoP15)). Internal quotas are set at a very low, conservative level and future quotas will be informed by the upcoming countrywide leopard survey. Offtake quotas are based on a variety of parameters and several monitoring tools such as the Management Oriented Monitoring System (MOMS) and Problem Animal Control (PAC) incidents and skull measurement are utilized in the adaptive quota setting together with data from aerial surveys of prey base.

Leopard hunting has been closed in Botswana since 2012 and re-opened legally in 2019 but in practice only in 2021 due to COVID. Therefore, leopard have not been legally hunted in Botswana for nearly ten years.

Botswana is in the process to draft a new Leopard Management and Action Plan to be completed by the end of 2021, in order to spearhead conservation efforts in the country. The process will entail a series of participatory meetings aiming at capturing the point of view of all stakeholders about leopard conservation needs. Rural communities will be given a special role in transmitting their traditional knowledge on leopard and their aspirations through sustainable resource utilization.

- It is unclear if skulls of trophies are still being measured as further monitoring tool, as the report only shows data until 2007.

The graph presented in our document was only an example. Skull measurement and its analysis will be resumed this year as it is an obligation under Botswana law. The leopard quota review shows that hunting offtakes during the period until 2012 (no leopard quota was allocated in 2013 and the general hunting suspension started in 2014) were sustainable as indicated by a complete database of skull sizes that shows that adult males were the near totality of the offtakes. Hunting has now reopened in Botswana under an adaptive management regime.

- **At the same time, it has been pointed out that with a maximum of 36 exported hunting trophies per year in last 10 years, Botswana has never used more than 28% of the quota (with no trade in the last four years). A further reduction of the quota would therefore not lead to further reduction in trade, but would reduce the revenues for conservation originating from hunting permits issued (as it is not possible to grant more permits than is the actual quota).**

Botswana wishes to maintain its CITES export quota of 130 leopard, and continue to manage its internal quota adaptively.

- **The Animals Committee therefore considers that the information that is provided to justify the retention of the quota lacks scientific rigor. Botswana is invited to address the concerns raised above, to explain the way how they manage the quota and whether they expect their quota to be fully used, and to provide more reliable population data.**

The first part of this paragraph is inappropriate. The responses provided above should address all the concerns raised in Doc AC31 Inf 17.

References

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