

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

Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Geneva (Switzerland), 17-28 August 2019

## ILLEGAL TRADE IN CHEETAHS: SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This document has been submitted by Kenya and Ethiopia in relation to agenda item 60 on *Illegal trade in cheetahs*.<sup>\*</sup>
2. As range States and Parties adversely affected by illegal trade in cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), we wish to draw the attention of the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to this ongoing trade, which continues to threaten the species' conservation in the wild (e.g. IUCN/SSC 2007; 2012; 2015, SC65 Doc 39 Annex 1, SC70 Doc 43, SC70 Inf 44); and to the critical actions required to address the trade.

Background

3. The cheetah has experienced major reductions in its geographic range over the last century and is now confined to only 9% of its historical range, with a global population estimate of only 7,100 adults and adolescents<sup>1</sup>.
4. Of 17 range States that have developed their own National Conservation Action Plans, 88% (15) either explicitly identified illegal trade in live cheetah or their parts as posing a threat to wild populations or included targeted activities to combat such trade.
5. Concerns of Parties about the impacts of illegal trade in cheetah on wild populations at CITES COP16 (Doc 51) led to a CITES-commissioned study<sup>2</sup> that found that the highest number of reports of illegal trade came from Eastern Africa, particularly Ethiopia and Somalia. This trade was mainly to furnish a demand for exotic pets on the Arabian Peninsula. The study reported 43 live cubs as confiscated in Somalia and Ethiopia between 2011 to 2013, and identified the main transit route as via Somalia to Yemen, and then overland for onward sale in Gulf States. The study concluded that the level of illegal trade 'could be affecting and threatening most wild populations', but identified cheetah populations in the Horn of Africa, because of their proximity to consumer countries in the Middle East, as facing the greatest threat.
6. The impacts of illegal trade in live cheetah are thus likely to be particularly severe on source populations in the Horn of Africa. Less than 300 adult and adolescent cheetahs are thought to survive in small and isolated populations in surveyed areas of this region, and they are extremely vulnerable to any level of trade (see Annex 1). These include the Ethiopian populations in Afar (estimated 11 individuals); Blen-Afar (20 individuals); Ogaden (32 individuals); and Yangudi Rassa (8 individuals); and the border population with Kenya and South Sudan (estimated 191 individuals). The Kenyan population close to the Somali border is

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<sup>\*</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> Durant et al. 2017. The global decline of cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* and what it means for conservation. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science; vol. 114 no. 3 528-533 doi:10.1073/pnas.1611122114. Available from <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/3/528/tab-figures-data>.

<sup>2</sup> See An assessment of the conservation impacts of legal and illegal trade in cheetahs *Acinonyx jubatus* on SC65-39 Rev. 2, Annex 1, section 4. Available from <http://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/65/E-SC65-39.pdf>.

also at high risk. Populations in surrounding areas, particularly in South Sudan and Kenya, are also likely to be threatened by this trade, especially if demand remains high and populations in the Horn of Africa continue to decline.

7. In recognition of the serious threat posed by illegal trade to wild populations of cheetah, an intersessional working group on illegal trade in cheetah was established at the 65<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CITES Standing Committee (SC65), which led to recommendations and Decisions to address the trade (SC66 Doc 32.5, paragraphs 17 and 18; Decisions 17.124-130).

#### The illegal trade in cheetahs

8. In line with Decision 17.127 adopted at CoP17 in 2016, a questionnaire was circulated to Parties (E-Notif-2018/058<sup>3</sup>) to gather information relevant to progress on implementing the recommendations of SC66 Doc 32.5 paragraphs 17 and 18. An intersessional working group on cheetah established at SC69 conducted an analysis of questionnaire responses received from 17 Parties, one Non-Party with a competent national authority, and two NGOs (see SC70 Doc. 43, Annex 2). This analysis indicated a number of positive developments, including enactment of new legislation in one consumer country to make private ownership, possession, trade or breeding dangerous animals, including cheetahs, illegal. However, the report also indicated an ongoing illegal trade: *“between 2015 and mid-2018, 13 live cheetahs, 15 cheetah skins, two cheetah skulls, one small piece of a cheetah specimen and two kilograms of unspecified cheetah specimens were seized by authorities.”*
9. Given the perilous state of those cheetah populations that are the source of illegal trade, any ongoing trade in wild cheetah is alarming. However, taken in isolation these figures underestimate the full extent of the trade, since they only include confiscated animals appearing in official records and omit data from many countries, including key primary source countries for trafficked cheetah.
10. Data from other sources provided at SC70<sup>4</sup> indicates a high level of sustained illegal trade during the same time period, with a total of 100 confirmed cases involving 274 live animals and 119 parts. This represents an annual average trade of 78 live cheetahs and 34 parts from a core catchment area thought to support fewer than 300 cheetah. The trade has continued at this high level since this report was produced, with a further 49 live cheetah and 73 parts traded between July 2018 and June 2019 (see Annex 1).
11. Therefore, despite some implementation of recommendations in SC66 Doc 32.5<sup>5</sup> paragraphs 17 and 18, illegal trade in cheetah still occurs at a scale likely to continue to threaten wild populations. This scenario requires an increased and concerted response by source, transit and consumer countries.
12. We are therefore in agreement with the Secretariat’s proposed draft decision 18.AA and the proposed deletion of Decisions 17.124-126 and 129, but have a number of additional recommendations to help increase efforts in combatting cheetah trafficking.

#### Recommendations

13. We recommend that CoP18 adopt the following Decisions.

Directed to: Parties

18.BB Consumer countries should ensure all domestic markets in live cheetah are closed, by the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

18.CC Source, transit and consumer countries should improve detection and effectiveness of law enforcement efforts in preventing the illegal movement of cheetahs across borders, maintain accurate records of all trade violations and prosecutions, and improve collaboration with ICCWC partners and cross border, regional, and interregional authorities.

18.DD Parties whose citizens are implicated in the use of social media platforms to illegally trade in cheetahs should develop intelligence-led investigations leading to prosecution of offenders, and work with these platforms to prevent their misuse by those individuals trafficking in cheetahs. Parties should seek the support of ICCWC agencies in general, and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2018-058.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/70/Inf/E-SC70-Inf-44.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/66/E-SC66-32-05x.pdf>

specifically the point person dedicated to e-commerce aspects of wildlife crime, within the INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore (established for the implementation of Decision 17.93, paragraph d and in support of Resolution Conf.11.3 (Rev. CoP17), paragraph 12 d).

18.EE Source, transit, and consumer Parties should report on their implementation of Decisions 18.BB, 18.CC, and 18.DD, above, to each regular meeting of the Standing Committee and to CoP19;

14. We recommend that CoP18 renew Decisions 17.127, 17.128 and 17.130 as follows:

18.FF (17.127):

Directed to: the Secretariat

The Secretariat shall report to the next and each subsequent regular meeting of the Standing Committee and the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties on progress on all of the recommendations in Standing Committee document SC66 Doc. 32.5, paragraphs 17 and 18, progress by Parties in implementing Decisions 18.BB, 18.CC, and 18.DD, including all confiscations, prosecutions and convictions.

18.GG (17.128)

Directed to: the Standing Committee

The Standing Committee shall make recommendations it deems necessary pursuant to the information provided by the Secretariat under Decision 18.FF, and any other relevant information provided to the Committee

18.HH (17.130)

Directed to: Parties, Others

Donor Parties and other potential donors are encouraged to provide technical and funding support to Parties and the Secretariat for the implementation of the Decisions regarding Illegal trade in cheetahs (Decisions 18.AA - HH), where needed.

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

Eighteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

**SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION ON ILLEGAL TRADE IN CHEETAH (*ACINONYX JUBATUS*)**

This information is being submitted by Kenya and Ethiopia to supplement information submitted as SC70 Inf.44<sup>6</sup> by Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen to SC70 in relation to Illegal Trade in Cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) and relates to CoP18 agenda item 60, sections 11, 12 and 13 on Implementation of recommendations adopted at SC66, SC69 and SC70, and progress to halt illegal trade in cheetahs. The purpose of this document is to assist the Parties in formulating their recommendations and proposed actions on cheetah trafficking at the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of Parties. This document provides updates specific to the information contained in SC70 Inf.44.

Background

1. The cheetah has experienced major reductions in its geographic range over the last century and is now confined to just 9% of its historical distributional range.
2. The species, along with African wild dog, has been the target of concerted conservation action by countries in an effort to halt further declines, with 17 range states having put in place national conservation action plans. Countries either explicitly identify illegal trade as posing a threat to cheetah and/or identify activities needed to address illegal trade in 15 (88%) of these plans<sup>7</sup>.
3. Cheetah populations are increasingly small and isolated, making them extremely vulnerable to any trade (see

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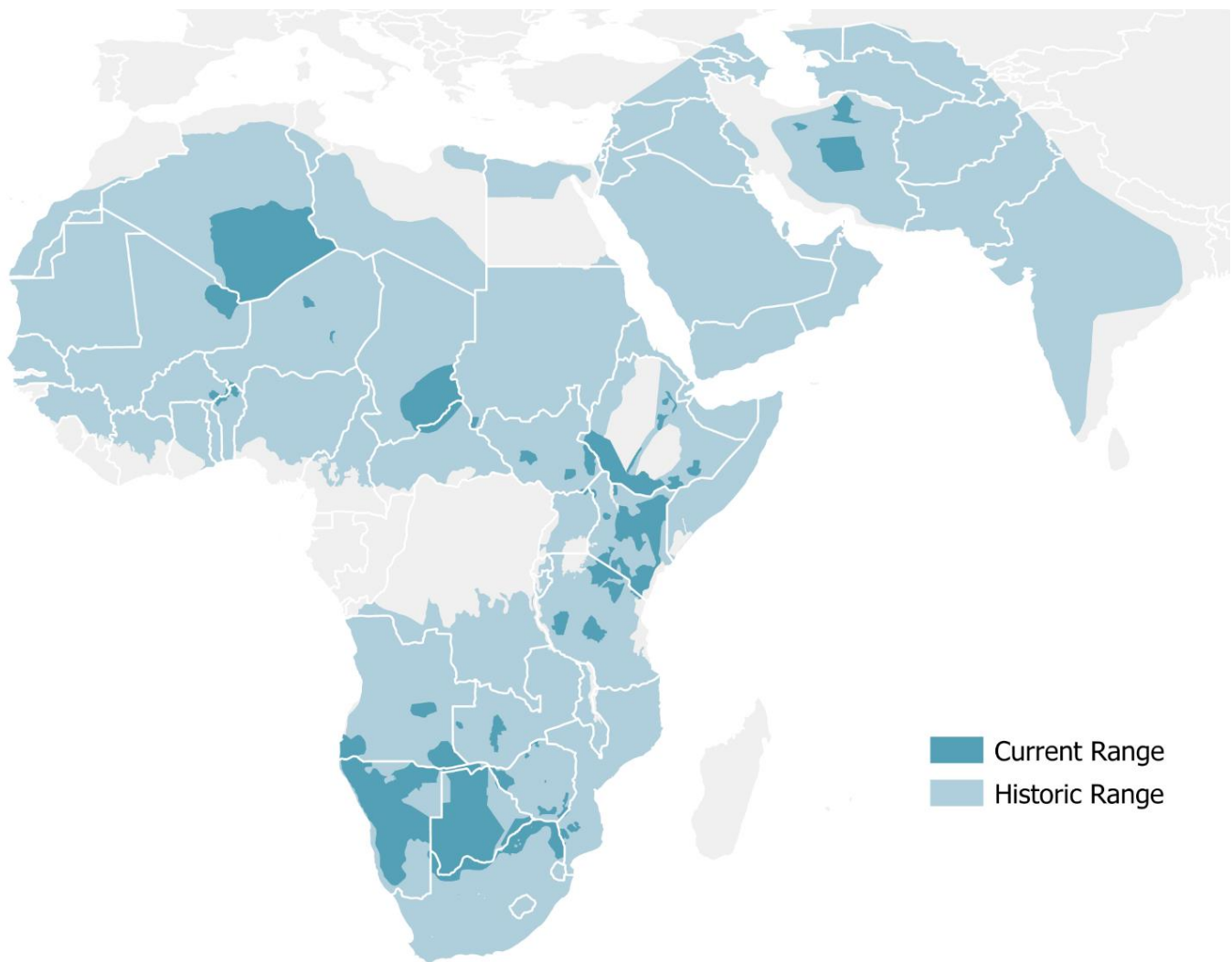
<sup>6</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/70/Inf/E-SC70-Inf-44.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *National Conservation Action Plans for Cheetah and African wild dogs produced in Kenya (2007), Botswana (2007; review 2019), Ethiopia (2010), South Sudan (2009), Zambia (2009; review 2018), Zimbabwe (2009; review 2018), South Africa (2009), Benin (2014), Niger (2012); Chad (2015); Tanzania (2013); Malawi (2011); Namibia (2013); Algeria (2015); Angola (2016); and Burkina Faso (2016) identify trade in live cheetah or their parts as posing a threat to wild populations and/or include targeted activities to combat such trade. Only Zimbabwe (2009; review 2018) and Mozambique (2010) make no such mention of trade, neither is trade in cheetah mentioned in the Strategic Action Plan for Large Conservation in Uganda (2010).*

4. Table 1 and Figure 1). The currently known cheetah populations in the Horn of Africa, close to the Somali border, suffer the strongest impacts of the illegal trade in live cubs as pets to the Middle East. These include the Ethiopian populations in Afar (estimated 11 individuals); Blen-Afar (20 individuals); Ogaden (32 individuals); and Yangudi Rassa (8 individuals), all of which are highly vulnerable to the impacts of even the smallest trade. The border population with Kenya and South Sudan is slightly higher, with an estimated 191 individuals, but still remains extremely vulnerable to even low levels of trade. The section of the Kenyan and Tanzanian population closest to the Somali border is also at high risk. Populations in south Turkana in Kenya (36 individuals); Kidepo in Uganda through to southern South Sudan and northwestern Kenya (19 individuals); and the South Sudan populations in Badingilo National Park (85 individuals); Radom National Park (68 individuals); and Southern National Park (147 individuals) are also vulnerable, especially as cheetahs become increasingly scarce in areas closest to the smuggling routes through Somalia. In total, less than 300 cheetahs are estimated to remain in the Horn of Africa and its borderlands, with a further 355 cheetah in South Sudan and northern Kenya likely to become increasingly vulnerable to this trade.

**Table 1: Regional summary of currently known cheetah distributional range and populations (from Durant et al., 2017).**

Area Name	Countries	Resident range km <sup>2</sup>	Population size
<b>Africa</b>			
Southern Africa 6 country polygon	Angola/Botswana/ Mozambique/Namibia/ South Africa/Zambia	1,212,179	4,021
Moxico	Angola	25.717	26
Pandmatenaa/Hwanae/Victoria Falls	Botswana/Zimbabwe	25.926	50
Banhine	Mozambique	7.266	10
Malilandawe/Save/Gonarezhou	Mozambique/Zimbabwe	9.922	46
Kafue	Zambia	26.222	65
Liuwa	Zambia	3.170	20
Bubvana-Nuanetsi-Bubve	Zimbabwe	8.816	40
Zambezi vallev	Zimbabwe	3.612	12
Matusadona	Zimbabwe	1.422	3
Midlands Rhino Conservancy	Zimbabwe	318	4
<b>Subtotal southern Africa</b>		<b>1,324,570</b>	<b>4,297</b>
Afar	Ethiopia	4.480	11
Blen-Afar	Ethiopia	8.170	20
Ooaden	Ethiopia	12.605	32
Yanaudi Rassa	Ethiopia	3.046	8
Kenya/Ethiopia/South Sudan	Ethiopia/Kenya/South Sudan	191,180	191
South Turkana	Kenya	3.580	36
Kidepo/S South Sudan/NW Kenya	Kenya/South	6.694	19
Serengeti/Mara/Tsavov	Kenya/Tanzania	280.114	1.362
Badindilo NP	South Sudan	8.517	85
Radom NP	South Sudan	6.821	68
Southern NP	South Sudan	14.680	147
Ruaha ecosystem	Tanzania	30.820	200
Maasai Steppe	Tanzania	20.409	51
Katavi-Uoalla	Tanzania	23.955	60
<b>Subtotal eastern Africa</b>		<b>615,071</b>	<b>2,290</b>
Adrar des Ifodhas/Ahaagar/Aiier & Mali	Algeria/Mali	762.871	191
WAP	Benin/ Burkina	25.345	25
CAR/Chad	CAR/Chad	238.234	238
Termit Massif	Niaer	2.820	1
Air-T	Niaer	8.052	2
<b>Subtotal western, central and</b>		<b>1,037,322</b>	<b>457</b>
<b>Total African</b>		<b>2,976,963</b>	<b>7,044</b>
<b>Asia</b>			
Central and Eastern Landscapes	Iran	107.566	20
Northern Landscape	Iran	33.445	22
Kavir	Iran	5.856	1
<b>Total Asia</b>		<b>146,867</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Total global</b>		<b>3,123,830</b>	<b>7,087</b>



**Figure 1: Current and historic distributional range of cheetah (from Durant et al. 2017). Note that current range represents sites where there has been recent (within the last 10 years) evidence of a resident (i.e. breeding) population of cheetah (details available from Durant et al. 2017).**

5. An inter-sessional working group on illegal cheetah trade established by SC69 compiled an analysis of responses received from Parties who responded to a questionnaire (Notification 2018/058<sup>8</sup>) and is appended to SC70 Doc. 43 (Annex 2). In its assessment of this analysis, the Secretariat states that, “*Although there is some illegal international trade in cheetahs, the available information suggests that this remains limited*”. However, based on the best information available on current population size in the region, we caution that any illegal trade that targets the small and vulnerable populations closest to the smuggling routes will increase their risk of extinction.
6. Furthermore, as the Secretariat notes in SC70 Doc. 43, their conclusion on limited trade is based on figures provided by national CITES authorities or approved by them. The Secretariat also included data from a compilation of the 2016 annual illegal trade data on cheetahs, submitted by Parties to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). When combining the data from both sources, the document states that, “*between 2015 and mid-2018, 13 live cheetahs, 15 cheetah skins, two cheetah skulls, one small piece of a cheetah specimen and two kilograms of unspecified cheetah specimens were seized by authorities.*”
7. Although the aforementioned questionnaire survey (E-Notif-2018/058) was a worthwhile exercise in trying to establish the extent of implementation by Parties of Decision 17.127, the numbers of confiscated cheetah contained therein is unlikely to represent the full extent of the trade and should not be the sole basis for assessing the scale and significance of illegal trade in cheetah. A study commissioned by CITES

<sup>8</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2018-058.pdf>



in 2013 demonstrated that the level of illegal cheetah trade is likely to be substantially higher than CITES reported confiscations. A subsequent analysis estimated at least 61% of known cases of illegal trade in cheetahs are not intercepted by authorities<sup>9</sup>.

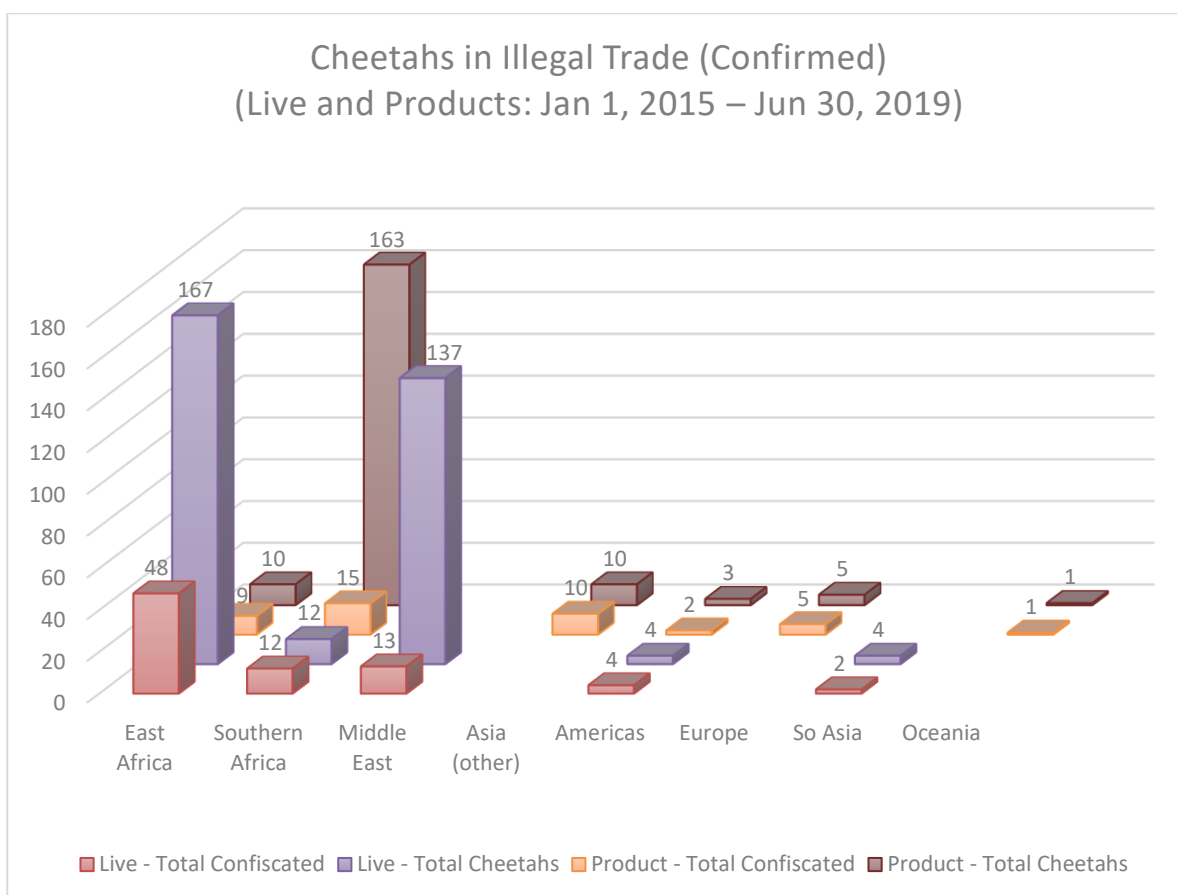
6. For the same period covered by the data presented in SC70 Doc. 43 (Jan 2015-June 2018), a non-governmental organization (Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF)) has recorded 100 confirmed cases of illegal cheetah trade involving 393 animals or products (274 live cheetahs and 119 products, e.g., skins, skulls) that were not reported to CITES. **From July 2018 to June 2019, an additional 22 confirmed cases involving at least 122 units (49 live cheetahs; ~73 products) have been recorded, while an additional case involving 5-8 live cheetahs was under investigation at the time of this update. With this update, the total number of cheetahs specimens in the trade between January 2015 and May 2019 rose to 516 (324 live; ~192 products).**
7. Comparing the data on SC70 Inf. 44 through June 2018, **there was an increase in confiscations, from 25% to 45.5%, most of which is attributable northern Somalia, where 26 live cheetahs have been seized since July 2018.** There are now 121 confiscated cheetahs or products in 55 cases on record, representing 44.3% of 124 cases and 23.4% of all 516 cheetahs/products on record (see Figure 2 below). The 32 confiscated cheetahs and products reported in SC70 Doc. 43 represent 26.9% of 119 confiscated cheetahs and products on record, and 6.2% of the total 513 cheetahs or products known from all sources to have been illegally traded during the reviewed period.
8. The CITES-commissioned study<sup>10</sup> identified Eastern Africa as the region with the most records of illegal cheetah trade and identified the demand for exotic pets in the Arabian Peninsula as the driver of this trade. The study also highlighted that Eastern Africa is the region in which wild cheetah populations are likely to be most negatively impacted by illegal trade. The study identified Ethiopia and Somalia as those countries most impacted by the trade and reported 43 live cubs confiscated in Somaliland (2011-2013). Somalia was identified as the main transit route for cheetahs from Eastern Africa to the Middle East.
9. Kenya and Ethiopia believe that, far from being “limited”, illegal international trade continues to be a significant and urgent threat to wild populations of cheetahs. We have received information from Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) concerning 25 cheetah cubs that have been rescued from illegal trade and are currently being cared for by some NGOs in Somaliland. We have also been provided with information by **CCF that identified 612 advertisements, posted by users mainly situated in Gulf Cooperation Council States, on online marketplaces and social media offering at least 900 cheetahs for sale during the same period of January 2015 and June 2019.** This raises the concern that, not only does the trade pose an immediate threat to the small vulnerable populations of cheetah closest to the smuggling routes, but this trade may continue to expand, threatening populations in neighboring countries and beyond, as wild cheetahs become increasingly scarce

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<sup>9</sup> *Tricorache, P., Nowell, K., Wirth, G. Mitchell, N., Boast, L.K. and Marker, L. (2018). Pets and pelts: understanding and combating poaching and trafficking in cheetahs. In L. Marker, L.K. Boast & A. Schmidt-Küntzel (Eds.), Biodiversity of the World: Cheetahs: Biology and Conservation (pp. 191 – 203). San Diego: Elsevier. Available from <http://www.felidae.org/Tricorache%20et%20al%202017.pdf>.*

<sup>10</sup> See *An assessment of the conservation impacts of legal and illegal trade in cheetahs *Acinonyx jubatus* on SC65-39 Rev. 2, Annex 1, section 4. Available from <http://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/65/E-SC65-39.pdf>.*





**Figure 2. Total cheetah in illegal trade and confiscations between Jan 1, 2015 and Jun 30, 2019 (CCF unpublished data, 2019).**

Table 2 below is a comparison summary of data included in document [SC70 Doc.43](#) and confirmed data<sup>11</sup> compiled by CCF. Numbers in parenthesis denote 32 confiscations reported in SC70 Doc. 43 from data supplied by four Parties through the questionnaires and illegal trade report data compiled by the UNODC for 2016. Without parentheses, the table shows a total of 121 confiscated cheetah or products, which represents a detection rate of 23.4% when compared to 516 cheetahs or cheetah products in the trade. The remaining 395 cheetahs or products (76.6%) are undetected cases. If a possible additional 265 cheetahs are included<sup>4</sup>, then this detection rate would be even lower, at 15.5%.

Region	Live		Products		Total in Trade	Total Confiscated
	Total	Confiscated	Total	Confiscated		
Southern Africa	12	12 (4)	163	15 (13)	175	27 (17)
East Africa	167	48	10	9	177	57
Middle East	137	13 (9)	-	-	137	13 (9)
Asia (other)	-	-	10	10	10	10
Americas	4	4	3	2 (2)	7	6 (2)
Europe	-	-	5	5 (4)	5	5 (4)
Southeast Asia	4	2	-	-	4	2

<sup>11</sup> Although the illegal nature of the trade makes it difficult to obtain information, CCF sources 39% of its data from its direct involvement in work to combat the illegal cheetah trade. CCF's other sources are: official channels (CITES, governments and government/NGO partnerships.): 28%; partner NGOs and field reports (e.g., veterinarians, cheetah owners/buyers): 28%; and media articles: 9%. Within these sources, reports are checked for veracity through interviews, online searches for official records, digital evidence (video, images). Only data that are confirmed via two such independent sources of evidence are included in this document. An additional 37 cases involving at least 265 cheetahs, while likely to be verified, are excluded from these data for lack of additional verification.

Oceania		-	1	1	1	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>79 (13)</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>42 (19)</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>121 (32)</b>

**Table 2. Comparison summary of data compiled by CCF. Numbers in parenthesis denote confiscations reported in the CITES document SC70 Doc. 43 from data supplied by four Parties through the questionnaires and illegal trade report data compiled by the UNODC for 2016.**