

No place like home: Africa's big cats show postcode preference

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The secret lives of some of Africa's iconic carnivores, including big cats, are revealed in a new study in *Animal Conservation*, today.

The results shed light on how different habitats are used by some of Tanzania's most elusive meat eaters, such as the leopard.

Scientists from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) carried out the largest survey of Tanzania's carnivores, using a novel approach making use of over 400 camera trap locations.

The research reveals that many [species](#), including the leopard, are particularly fussy about where they live, actively avoiding certain areas. Surprisingly, all the species surveyed tended to avoid croplands, suggesting that habitat conversion to agricultural land could have serious implications for carnivore distribution.

"Camera traps provide a fantastic opportunity to gain knowledge on habitat use and spatial distribution of otherwise elusive and poorly known species. This methodology represents a powerful tool that can inform national and site-based wildlife managers and policy makers as well as international agreements on conservation," says Dr Sarah Durant from ZSL.

Until now, many of the species had been under reported because of their nocturnal habits, or because they live in heavily forested areas. The strength of the technique to document habitat preference of elusive species is highlighted by camera trap observations of bushy tailed mongooses - including the first ever records of this species from one of the most visited areas in the country.

These data can also be used to understand how Tanzania's carnivores may respond to habitat

changes caused as a result of environmental change.

"Carnivores are generally thought to be relatively tolerant to land conversion, yet our study suggests that they may be more sensitive to development than previously thought, and that protected areas need to be sufficiently large to ensure that these charismatic animals will roam in Tanzania for the decades to come," says Dr Nathalie Pettorelli from ZSL.

She adds: "All species were affected by rivers and habitat, and the analysis provides important information relevant to the examination of future impacts of climate change."

The project continues to map carnivore distribution across the country, working closely with the wildlife authorities to support local conservationists and to generate information that is used to inform conservation planning.

Source: Wiley-Blackwell

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