

# Report: Bushmeat pushes Southern African species to the brink

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A recent report says illegal hunting of wildlife in South African Development Community (SADC) states can lead to the eradication of many species across extensive areas and even complete ecological collapse.

Africa's iconic large carnivores, such as cheetah, lion, leopard, and [wild dog](#), are particularly vulnerable to this practice, either because they are caught in the bycatch from unselective methods such as snaring, or due to loss of prey. The report says that the scale and severity of the threat is such that, without urgent intervention, one of SADC's most valuable resources will be lost across vast areas of the region.

The report: "Illegal hunting and the bush-meat trade in [savanna](#) africa: drivers, impacts, and solutions to address the problem" is authored by Panthera, Zoological Society of London, and [Wildlife Conservation Society](#).

SADC [wildlife](#) agencies are beginning to tackle this looming conservation crisis. At a two-day meeting in Johannesburg last week, heads of wildlife agencies and other representatives of government, supported by IUCN (East and Southern Africa Region), UNDP, FAO, community organizations, and conservation NGOs unanimously agreed on the urgency of tackling the practice of illegal bushmeat extraction. SADC member states represented at the workshop included Mozambique (current chair country); Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The groups at the workshop noted that current rates of bushmeat extraction are unsustainable and can lead to local extinctions and the collapse of ecosystems. They also noted that many poor and marginalized communities depend on the contribution wildlife makes to their food security, and called for support from the development community in helping to curb illegal hunting and bushmeat trade.

Sustainable management of wildlife can make significant contributions to the food security of rural communities and to local and national economies such as through tourism and community-based natural resource management initiatives. In Namibia, for example, well-regulated hunting results in a total of 26 million metric tons of legal, sustainably harvested game meat traded every year.

Where illegal hunting is rampant, trophy-hunting tourism concessions earn as little as 4 percent of what they could if hunting was regulated.

Dr. Rene Czudek from the FAO Subregional Office (SADC), who hosted the workshop said: "There is an urgent need to search for viable solutions that will ensure the sustainable use of SADC's world renowned wildlife resources while contributing to the development of poor rural communities."

Mr. Nyambe Nyambe from the SADC Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources Directorate applauded the parties for drawing the attention of SADC to such an important issue, and noted that SADC aims to protect wildlife and their habitats and promote sustainable use of natural resources. He called on all stakeholders to work together to move this process forward .

It was acknowledged at the workshop that illegal bushmeat extraction and the methods used to hunt wildlife impact heavily on key species that need our protection.

Dr. Sarah Durant of ZSL/WCS, said: "The continued survival of cheetah across large tracts of their range in the SADC region depends on finding ways to ensure that bushmeat extraction is sustainable."

Adding to this, Dr. Netty Purchase of ZSL/WCS, said: "Most cheetahs and African wild dogs occur outside protected areas, coexisting with people and their livestock, and are very vulnerable to snaring and the loss of their wild prey."

Dr. Peter Lindsey from Panthera said: "The unique diversity and density of wildlife in SADC countries has potential to create significant economic and social benefits for the people of the region. However, these assets are severely threatened by [illegal hunting](#) and the bushmeat trade."

The participants developed a set of guiding principles needed to address bushmeat extraction in the SADC region. They called on SADC to commit to these principles to avert the impending conservation crisis. Failure will not only have dire consequences for biodiversity conservation but will also lead to the collapse of an ecosystem service upon which many of the region's most vulnerable communities depend.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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