

## Recent advances in co-ordinated predator management in South Africa



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*There should be no illusion about predation in South Africa - livestock are killed and maimed on a daily basis by predators. In retaliation, predators are killed by various means and, inevitably, non-target animals are also killed.*

Two medium-sized predators, namely black-backed jackal (*Canis mesomelas*) and caracal (*Caracal caracal*) are mostly implicated for the widespread predation. However, considerable losses are also caused among sheep and goats by vagrant domesticated dogs (*Canis familiaris*), especially near towns and cities. Compared to the damage caused by these species, predation by leopard (*Panthera pardus*), brown hyaena (*Parahyaena brunnea*) and cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) also occur, but on a smaller scale and in relatively isolated cases.

There is a paucity of reliable information regarding the impact of predation on livestock and wildlife. Many of the official predator control systems that have been operating in South Africa were either stopped or petered out into non-existence during the early 1990s and, therefore, official recording of predator control activities also became virtually non-existent. In some isolated cases private initiative for predator control was retained, because it has created lucrative business opportunities for some individuals.

Scientific data is mostly lacking, but indications are that predation by black-backed jackal and caracal has spread widely over South Africa and is still on the increase. In view of the lack of scientific data, the reasons for the increased dispersion of these two species are purely speculation. A telephonic survey conducted during 2009 by the University of the Free State among sheep and goat farmers in five provinces, suggests that the annual losses caused by predation are much more than commonly believed. The losses differ between farms, areas and provinces, but it exceeds the annual losses ascribed to stock theft by a considerable margin. Verbal reports also suggest that cattle farmers and wildlife ranchers are increasingly recognizing the negative effects of predation by black-backed jackal and caracal.



Le Roux Fourie

Discussions regarding the losses caused by predation and the efficacy of various methods to manage predators have been well reported. However, activities aimed at controlling predators in South Africa are fragmented and lack co-ordination. Realising this dilemma, the Canis-Caracal Programme was launched in 2004 by ALPRU with the primary goal to boost efforts to resuscitate the dormant, or more aptly described non-existent, co-ordinated system of predator management on a national basis.

### Recent historical events

The authorities are often accused of being unsympathetic towards farmers regarding predation and not viewing their plight seriously. Therefore, it may come as a surprise to know that relatively common agreement was achieved in the early 1990's among important role players in South Africa, including government representatives regarding meaningful solutions for predator management. The question then begs: why did the process fade and were the proposals never implemented? Some answers are to be found as a result of constitutional changes during the early 1990's in South Africa.

On 4 and 5 May 1993 a Problem Animal Control Forum (PACF) was held at Golden Gate in the Eastern Free State. The Forum was well-attended by a wide spectrum of role players, but characteristic of many events during this period in South Africa, records of proceedings were poorly kept, and memories are also failing. However, according to the official Proceedings of the Forum, the four erstwhile Provincial administrations were represented at a very high official level. The official support rendered and participation of senior staff at the PACF is a very good indication of the importance of this initiative.

Indeed, the PACF at Golden Gate was the culmination of a process which brought together the NWGA (National Wool Growers' Association of South Africa), RPO (Red Meat Producers' Organization), Nature Conservation and Administrations of the four provinces, as well as representatives from problem animal control organisations and the Regional Services Councils. Prior to the PACF being convened in May 1993, a National Policy and Strategy for Problem Animal Control in South Africa was formulated by the National Problem Animal Policy Committee (NPAPC). This committee under the able leadership of its Chairman Mr. Peter Kingwill was widely commended for taking the lead in formulating and finalising the Policy on 18 November 1992 in Pretoria.

In his opening address to the Forum at Golden Gate, Mr. Kingwill listed four key areas that were identified by the NPAPC for putting strategies in place, namely: communication, control, training and research and development. At the time it was evident that the days of official problem animal control as carried out for example by "Die Oranje-Vrystaat Vereniging vir die Bestryding van Skadelike Diere", commonly known as Oranjejag, were numbered. Since 1965,

Oranjejag was the only control association in the erstwhile OFS Province. Therefore, in view of the imminent demise of Oranjejag, it was stressed that financing of control organisations remains a significant stumbling block. At least two provincial delegates at the Forum indicated their official acceptance and compliances with the content of the National Policy and Strategy for Problem Animal Control in South Africa.

These comments were made in 1993. So why was little done to address the issues? Again, some answers may be found in geopolitical events that played out since in South Africa.

In April 1994 South Africa experienced a dramatic constitutional change with the birth of its nine new provinces and the inevitable creation of nine provincial governments. Thus, the much talked about scenario of 1-plus-9 were created, namely a national department and nine provincial departments for most state functions. In this regard refer to the two groupings with a direct effect on livestock farmers and wildlife ranchers, namely the national departments of agriculture and environmental affairs, each with nine provincial departments. Amidst the inevitable rearrangement and redeployment of national and provincial governments and officials, the recommendations of the Forum simply faded. It is even doubted whether most current officials are aware of the existence of the PACF that was held in 1993? Older generations and especially farmers may recall the important role played by organised agriculture in the processes that gave birth to the Forum.

In the search for records and publications on predator management in South Africa, a copy of the proceedings of the PACF at Golden Gate was obtained from the late Mr. Hannes Stadler of CapeNature. The broad context of discussions at the Forum was guessed, but it was still gratifying to note the similarity with the broad initiative of the Canis-Caracal Programme. The style in which the document was written in 1993 and the current line of thought may differ slightly. However, after 15 years the objective remains the same, namely the development of a system to reduce the impact of predation in a meaningful way in the long-term.

### Non-lethal and lethal methods

In the past it was officially recognised that predators were impacting severely on livestock in South Africa and, therefore, official systems of compensation (bounties or incentives) were implemented in an effort to control predators. During the 1960's to early 1990's a large number of hunting clubs were actively engaged in controlling problem animals (so-called vermin or "ongediertes") in many parts of South Africa.

South Africa has a long history of human-predator conflict, therefore, it is not surprising that many farmers view "a dead predator" as the only "good predator." Nevertheless and to be realistic, in human-dominated landscapes such as rural South Africa where people with livestock and game co-exist with predators there will at best, only be an uneasy tolerance. However, the total cost of predator control activities to biodiversity and the negative impact of predation on the livestock and wildlife ranching industries call for renewed efforts to improve the current status of predator management.

Domestic animals exhibit little effective evasive or anti-predator flight behaviour. It has been argued that selective breeding and protection have made them particularly vulnerable to predators. In short, domestication has effectively bred the "wildness" out of these animals. Contrary to views held by some, it is common practice for farmers to apply predator control to curb predation on livestock: non-lethal methods are used to deter predators, but lethal methods are also used to kill predators, with inevitable collateral effects of non-target species being killed.



Compared to the limited scientific information on the ecology of black-backed jackal and caracal, large volumes of information are available on equipment and techniques to control predators. A review of the information on the available non-lethal and lethal methods shows that each method has its own appeal or aversion and especially the lethal methods require specific knowledge and skills to be applied effectively. It should also be noted that many lethal methods are not target specific.

It is a misconception that any single non-lethal or lethal method provides a final solution to stop predation. Targeting predator species in a blanket or wipe-out approach is equally futile, because it has not succeeded in the past, specifically in the case of black-backed jackal. A combination of non-lethal options should be the first line of defence to deter or exclude predators. However, it must be accepted that lethal options to kill predators humanely will still be required in specific scenarios as the last line of defence in predator management. The goal should be to reduce the impact of predation by increasing the target specificity of methods. Calls for a balanced approach in predator management are not novel; it was officially advocated by scientists in the 1980's. As discussed previously the initiative was shelved because it was overtaken by more pressing events and priorities in the 1990's.

### Risks affecting the livestock and wildlife ranching industries

Geographically the majority of South Africa is devoted to two important economic pillars, namely livestock and wildlife ranching. Both industries are impacted negatively by periodic droughts and the losses incurred by stock theft and predators. Actions to reduce the effects of droughts are common. It is also commonplace on farms to manage the risks of stock theft and predators.

Although some changes have been noted, subtle differences still exist in the approach of authorities regarding the following:

- Stock theft is a criminal offence and handled by the respective organs of state, with the active participation of organised agriculture, specifically the producer organisations.
- Drought is viewed as a natural phenomenon and official drought aid is given; mostly it is too little and too late to really render much needed relief.
- Predators is an important component of wildlife and biodiversity and authorities are perceived to be more inclined to protect the wild animals rather than offering real help to manage the impact of predation.

### Stepping up activities from 2008

Since 2005 the Canis-Caracal Programme advocated that efforts will succeed if predators such as black-backed jackal and caracal are viewed and managed as a national priority. The government and farmers are equal partners with specific responsibilities:

- The organs of state are responsible for policy, co-ordination,

training, extension, research, and monitoring. However, they must refrain from dominating the scene.

- The livestock farmers and wildlife ranchers are responsible to safeguard their animals and controlling predators.

Realising the growing impact of predation, the NPAPC engaged actively with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) during 2008. As a result the process gained momentum when role players attended a meeting convened by DEAT in January 2009. Previously several NGO's have engaged with the NPAPC, but now a range of groupings with divergent viewpoints, often at a 180 degree tangent, entered the process. The ensuing debates in the printed press, the radio and TV may have created more discord than synergy.

There is a paucity of scientific information regarding the efficacy of predator management based on large scale experience in livestock farming and wildlife ranching areas. However, some non-lethal methods have positive but only short-term effects. Predators quickly learn how to outwit the non-lethal devices, for example the mauling of sheep and goats from the rear (with their abdominal cavities gaping and entrails trailing) when these animals have been fitted with livestock protection collars. Increasingly cases are also noted where cattle are badly mauled by black-backed jackal when females are going down to calf. In a travesty of common sense and gross insensitivity towards the plight of livestock farmers, a chorus of voices is ascribing this to poor management and care for livestock by the farmers.



Lambs fitted with livestock protection collars

### Specialist predator hunters

What should be done? The solution is simple: reverse the tide of predation and reduce the impact on the livestock and wildlife ranching industries! The country can not afford the huge cost to the economy. The envisaged "system of co-ordinated predator management", must learn from scientific and practical experiences in the field and apply it as best practices.

There are far too few specialist predator hunters operating in South Africa. Their skills and experiences are critical to earn a livelihood. Therefore, specialist predator hunters are not keen to share hard earned competencies. Again, why should they be expected to share it, considering the personal investment of resources and hardship in acquiring these skills and knowledge? However, because time is of essence, some form of incentive must be found to engage this human

resource and apply their expertise by way of skills transfer (education and training) for the common good of the country.

### The process during 2009

During the course of 2009 Norms and Standards for the Management of Damage-Causing Animals in South Africa were drafted under the auspices of DEAT. The process was biased and during discussions and in all the submissions it was maintained that the environmental and agricultural departments must both participate in developing a co-ordinated system for managing damage-causing animals. These efforts succeeded and culminated in a meeting on 28 September 2009 with the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF).

Despite objections voiced by the livestock and wildlife industries and ALPRU regarding the impracticality of some of the proposed norms and standards, a final almost unilateral approach was adopted by someone in environmental affairs in drafting a document which would have dire consequences if implemented unchecked. This caused serious mistrust.

Fortunately this "mishap" halted the process and provided an opportunity for the livestock and wildlife industries to engage as equal partner with the two departments, through the Forum for Damage Causing Animals. This Forum was founded on 2 July 2009 by the livestock and wildlife ranching industries. Assurances were given recently by DAFF that agriculture is on board. By assuming its responsibility regarding food security and playing a meaningful role in the deliberations, this will hopefully address most of the shortcomings that have characterised the previous process. The process will continue in 2010.

### The way forward

Assuming the process will proceed without further major mishap, there is a need to reflect on basic elements that have been overlooked. The Norms and Standards for the Management of Damage-Causing Animals in South Africa will set the policy framework for the relevant Minister or Ministers to promulgate the necessary Regulations. However, the latter will just be another document.

The two documents will lay the ground rules of how, what and where things can be done, but neither document will change much at the farm level regarding the activities to manage predators in the livestock and wildlife industries. It can be assumed that livestock and wildlife will still be predated and predators will be deterred or killed within the framework set by the Regulations. It will be a continuation of the current status regarding predator management and no drastic reduction in the impact of predation is envisaged.

By continuing to do things in the same way, different results cannot be expected. It means the co-ordinated system of predator management must be supported by meaningful extension, training, research, coordination and monitoring. These activities or elements will not come about by it self, but will have to be spearheaded, developed, implemented, and managed.

An important question begging an answer from the partners (as discussed previously) is quite simple: how, when, where and by whom will these matters be addressed?

Answers to these questions are needed sooner rather than later.

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