

Letter from the Chairman



If indeed, as Marcus Aurelius once wrote to himself, "one's worth is no greater than their ambitions", Panthera has made its true worth quite evident since its inception in 2006. At that time, Panthera's stated and practical ambition was ultimately nothing less than to save all wild cat species across their ranges, and to do so in a scientifically rigorous and sustainable manner.

This agenda is one which we have executed with a fervid passion. Indeed, in only several years, Panthera has moved to initiate programs across the broadest arc, touching - even redefining - nearly all aspects of felid conservation. Subscribing fully to Edward R. Murrow's observation that "difficulty is the one excuse which history does not accept", our single-minded pursuit remains nothing less than to identify all the key hurdles facing wild cat conservation globally and, in tandem with our strategic partners, to channel efficiently and quickly the financial and intellectual capital required to meet those challenges comprehensively.

So what have we done, practically? In addition to becoming the largest dedicated funder of wild cat conservation globally, Panthera has established the most ambitious and comprehensive species-conservation programs in the wild cat field, including the cutting-edge Tigers Forever program as well as the Himalayan Tiger Corridor, two of the leading efforts to save the largest and most besieged of the big cats; Project Leonardo, which encompasses the first undertaking to staunch the precipitous decline of lions in critical landscapes across the entire African landscape; the Jaguar Corridor, a program that is working to connect jaguar habitats from the top of their range at the Mexican-American border through Mesoamerica all the way down to the end of their range in Northern Argentina; and, the Snow Leopard Initiative, which was launched in Beijing in 2008 with the participation of all dozen range state governments as the first comprehensive project to identify and tackle the major threats facing this elusive species. At a no less impactful scale, Panthera additionally runs two conservation programs on cougars in Wyoming and California; cooperates with the Iranian Ministry of Environment to conserve the last population of Asiatic cheetahs; and has undertaken the most comprehensive project on the African leopard, an effort that has already yielded fruit and resulted in major changes to the legal hunting and persecution of the species.

While Panthera's main focus remains fixed on the largest, most imperiled cats, we are also leading the way on conservation of some of the world's lesser-known and smaller cats via our Small Cat Action Fund (SCAF), a grants program established by Panthera in partnership with the IUCN Cat Specialist Group.

In addition to employing a broad brush with regard to cat conservation, such that "no species is left behind", we have also made a conscious decision not to leave any of the equally key issues of 'sustainability' to chance. As an example of this single-minded approach, Panthera has created an ambitious joint-venture with the American Museum of Natural History in New York to create the world's largest Global Felid Genetics Database as an important adjunct to our efforts to devise the optimal genetic corridors worldwide that are a prerequisite for long-term cat survival.

Another arena in which we have broken the mold of enduring sustainability is in education and training. Confident in the belief that we are helping to reinvigorate a field that has been burdened with discouragement over the last several decades, Panthera is investing aggressively in the human capital required for felid conservation. Having independently created the first global scholarship program for post-graduate research in wild cat studies, an initiative which began with one recipient in 2006 and which has subsequently encompassed 49 recipients in 31 countries, we are now the largest funder of felid-related education in the world. Furthermore, we have expanded our range of activities to capture the entire value chain of career development from training entry-level field wardens through to post-doctoral research grants. A symbol of this commitment is the unique strategic alliance that has been created with Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU). Over the course of the last several years, it is fair to say that Panthera, working in a dynamic partnership with Dr. David MacDonald of WildCRU, has created a number of fully-funded initiatives at Oxford which together comprise the most comprehensive suite of felid-related education programs to be found at any academic institution in the world. Capping off this philosophy of both nurturing and rewarding superior effort, Panthera has established Next Generation and Lifetime Achievement awards for excellence that has raised the profile of cat conservation globally.

Not content, however, to fund field work, coalition-building and awareness, we have been willing to act unilaterally to secure key ecosystems when the opportunity has presented itself. Our Strategic Lands Initiative, one of the largest private efforts of its kind, has already secured vast stretches of critical habitat connecting protected areas in the Brazilian and Paraguayan Pantanal. Dr. Rafael Hoogesteijn, one of the field's most noted authorities, is leading cutting edge jaguar research on cattle ranches in the Pantanal, while simultaneously merging local ranching expertise and the best practices in carnivore/cattle conflict. In so doing, all realms of eco-friendly animal husbandry are being addressed and model ranches are being created on these properties which will serve as new paradigms for puma and jaguar-friendly approaches to cattle management.

Perhaps the best proof of Panthera's catalytic impact is the caliber of the people it has attracted to its banner. We are fortunate to have one of the world's greatest tiger and jaguar experts Dr. Alan Rabinowitz steering the way in his position of CEO. Dr. Luke Hunter is the President and Dr. George Schaller, an iconic figure in the world of conservation is Vice President of Panthera. Having devised and executed many of the programs in our portfolio, to describe their levels of expertise as being "perfect" for the task would be a vast understatement. Joining their ranks, Dr. Tom McCarthy, the world's leading authority on snow leopards, serves as Panthera's Snow

Leopard Program Executive Director, and Dr. Howard Quigley, one of the Americas' greatest cat specialists, is our Jaguar Program Executive Director. At flank speed, Panthera's cadre of professionals and advisors has grown to encompass an unparalleled concentration of accomplishment and experience. The Directors of Panthera's Lion and Tiger Programs are Dr. Guy Balme and Dr. Joe Smith respectively, both of whom were Kaplan Scholars, and prove Panthera's model of cultivation, and bringing on board, the best of breed.

As part of its ongoing commitment to the highest level of transparency and best practices, Panthera has created the Cat Advisory Council, a major milestone in felid conservation. Chaired by Dr. George Schaller, with Dr. Alan Rabinowitz and Dr. Luke Hunter as Co-Chairs, the Council itself is an honor roll of many of the world's senior cat conservationists, men and women whose legendary cat-like independence of spirit has coalesced into a common ambition. Their collaboration speaks volumes not just for their collective goodwill but for the importance which they attach to Panthera's vision...and their desire to play a meaningful role in realizing it.

Fully cognizant of the fact that conservation is an undertaking that requires the "buy-in" of numerous elements of society, in the spring of 2010 Panthera established a Conservation Council as an expert advisory board that contributes to the direction of the organization and the implementation of Panthera's mission. The Council, which is chaired by the award-winning actress Glenn Close, and consists of an impressive roster of members drawn from business, politics and the media, provides Panthera with actionable advice and guidance on fundamental topics relevant to the growth and the development of the organization. Already the Conservation Council has helped Panthera increase our influence on public policy, raise exposure to the media, and foster a diverse network of partners, cooperators and allies that can assist with our mission.

While still one of conservation's newer names, Panthera's genuine progress to date has been extraordinary, reinforcing a growing perception that our group represents one of the boldest and most exciting forces to emerge in wild cat conservation. The joy that I have been given in working with my colleagues to build this movement is one of the greatest privileges of my life...and participation in Panthera's mission is an opportunity that I would urge upon anyone so inclined to make a real impact on saving not only the world's cats, but the vast ecosystems that support them.

We offer a platform for people who share our passion to get involved, to make a difference and to be a part of our model which is advancing the most comprehensive and effective strategies in wildlife conservation. Moreover, our donor community is directly linked to our field staff and global partners. One of the unique aspects of our organizations is that we can offer you, our supporters, something which very few philanthropic organizations can provide. As a consequence of my wife, Daphne, and my funding for all of Panthera's overhead and administrative costs, Panthera can pledge that every dollar you donate goes straight into the field for programs. We wish to thank the numerous individuals and organizations that have contributed to Panthera to help accomplish its mission.

It is said that to do a good deed for a wild animal is twice-blessed, for the beneficiary has no means of expressing its gratitude. To those who have always wondered how they might best serve the wider world, wildlife conservation is, at its core, one of the purest forms of giving. If you can, join us. At the end of the day, as my family, colleagues and I have found to our own immense satisfaction, Churchill put it best: "We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give".

Thomas S. Kaplan

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