



Furs for Life

Saving Africa's Leopards



A SPECIES UNDER THREAT

Leopards are among the most persecuted wild cats in the world. Across southern Africa, large numbers of leopards are poached for their skins which are then used to create ceremonial garments for some of the region's cultural and religious groups. Data collected by Panthera scientists suggest that up to 800 leopards are killed each year to fuel the demand for their skins. To put this in perspective, South Africa only has an estimated 4000-5000 leopards. The pressure on the region's leopard population is unsustainable. Without urgent action, leopards, already facing dramatic population declines across much of Africa, could face extinction.

A CREATIVE SOLUTION

In 2013, Panthera initiated the Furs For Life program, focusing on reducing demand for real leopard skins among the huge and growing membership of the Nazareth Baptist (Shembe) Church. Working with Shembe leadership and digital designers, Panthera created high quality, affordable, synthetic leopard fur capes known as "Heritage Furs" to replace the real fur capes used in Shembe ceremonies. Thanks to the support of the Shembe leaders, the Heritage Furs are gaining increased acceptance as viable alternatives. Surveys undertaken at Shembe gatherings indicate that the provision of Heritage Furs has already reduced demand for real leopard skins by 50%, preventing hundreds of leopard deaths each year. The program has been heralded by CNN, National Geographic and others as an innovative conservation solution that respects local culture.

SAVING SPOTS IN ZAMBIA

With the success of the Furs For Life program, Panthera has expanded the concept to tackle the demand for leopard skins among other large, organized groups in the region. In August 2019, Panthera and the Barotse Royal Establishment of the Lozi people of western Zambia joined forces to launch Saving Spots, the first expansion project under the Furs For Life program. The Saving Spots project provides custom-designed Heritage Furs to replace the real leopard, serval and lion furs used in Lozi cultural ceremonies, namely the annual Kuomboka Festival. Two hundred synthetic fur skirts and 200 lion mane-trimmed headpieces were distributed to festival participants at the project's launch.

Furs For Life projects are supported by ongoing science-based conservation actions, including:

- Camera-trap surveys which are used to monitor regional leopard population trends
- Genetic forensic studies used to identify poaching hotspots
- Close collaboration with local governments on conservation policy reforms to ensure sustainable and ethical management practices

The Furs For Life program and the Saving Spots project are made possible with generous support from Peace Parks Foundation and Cartier.

EACH HERITAGE FUR SAVES A LIFE

For \$30 you can save a leopard's life by funding the production of one Heritage Fur. Leopards pose a rare conservation opportunity: the chance to proactively protect a species before recovery becomes too difficult and costly to implement. Visit panthera.org and support Furs For Life.

Cover: Shembe dancers wearing synthetic fur capes provided by Furs For Life. Top: Leopard fur. Right (top to bottom): A snared leopard; Young Shembe wearing their Heritage Furs; Heritage Furs being presented to the King of the Barotse Royal Establishment of the Lozi people.

Leopard Status

VU

Leopards are currently listed as **Vulnerable** on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

