



A framework for the Conservation of the Arabian leopard *Panthera pardus nimr*



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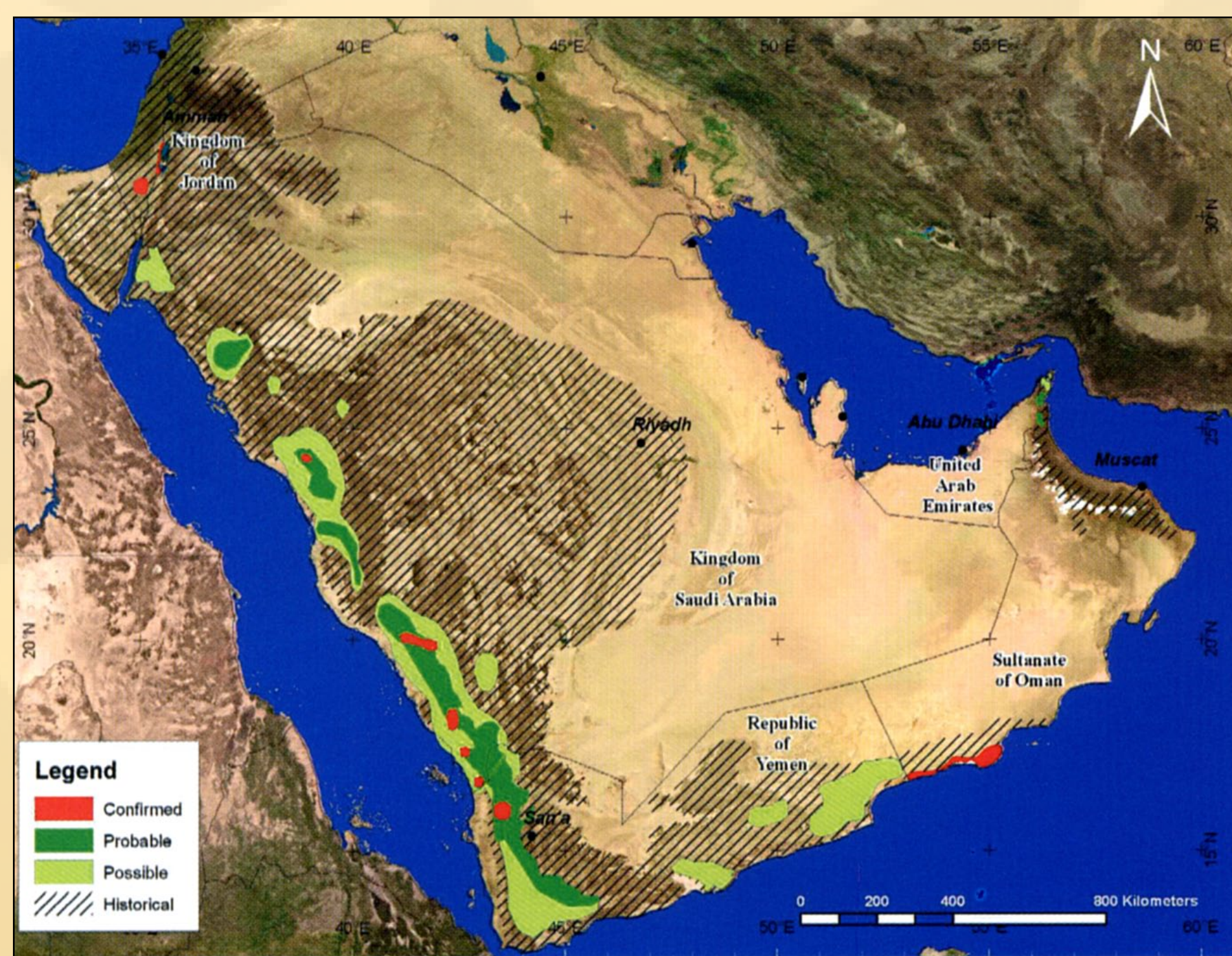
Introduction

The Arabian leopard is critically endangered throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Once occurring throughout the mountains of the Arabian Peninsula, experts have unanimously agreed that the leopard is now in a critical situation. Over the past 100 years it has become increasingly threatened as a result of the depletion of its habitat and prey base and killing by hunters. Current data does not allow population estimation, however, population numbers are thought to be less than 250. The Arabian leopard is listed on the IUCN Red List as critically Endangered with the justification that “population numbers are estimated to number approximately 100 mature individuals, with no population containing more than 50 individuals and the population size showing a declining trend” (www.redlist.org).



A female Arabian leopard with her cubs at the BCEAW

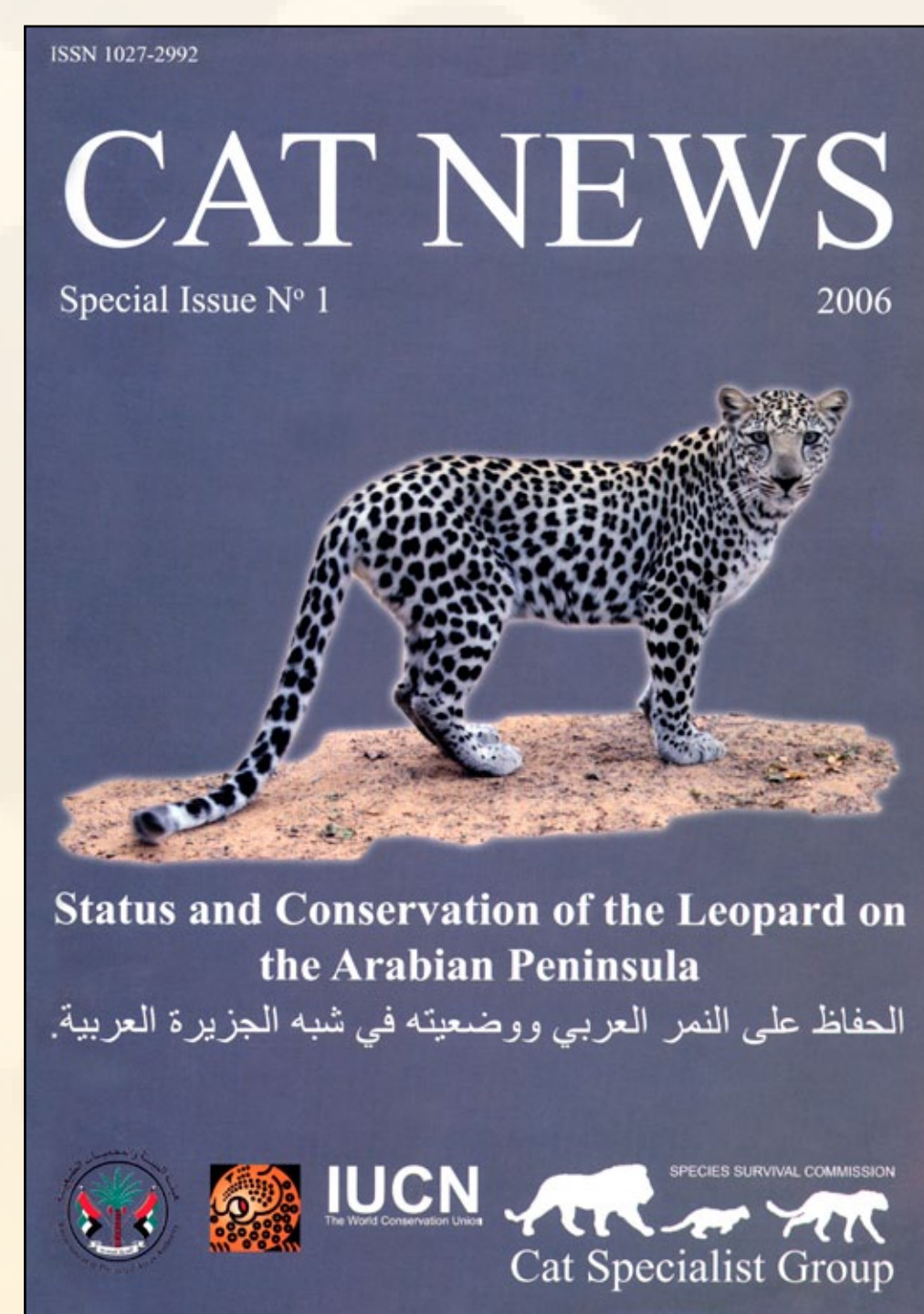
Recent observations are confirmed from only four localities on the Arabian Peninsula: a very small nucleus in the Negev desert, one of unknown size in Wada'a, north of Sana'a, another one of unknown size in Al Nams in south western Saudi Arabia, and the largest in the Dhofar mountains of south Oman.



Former and current distribution information for the leopard on the Arabian Peninsula (Spalton and Hikmani, 2006). Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.

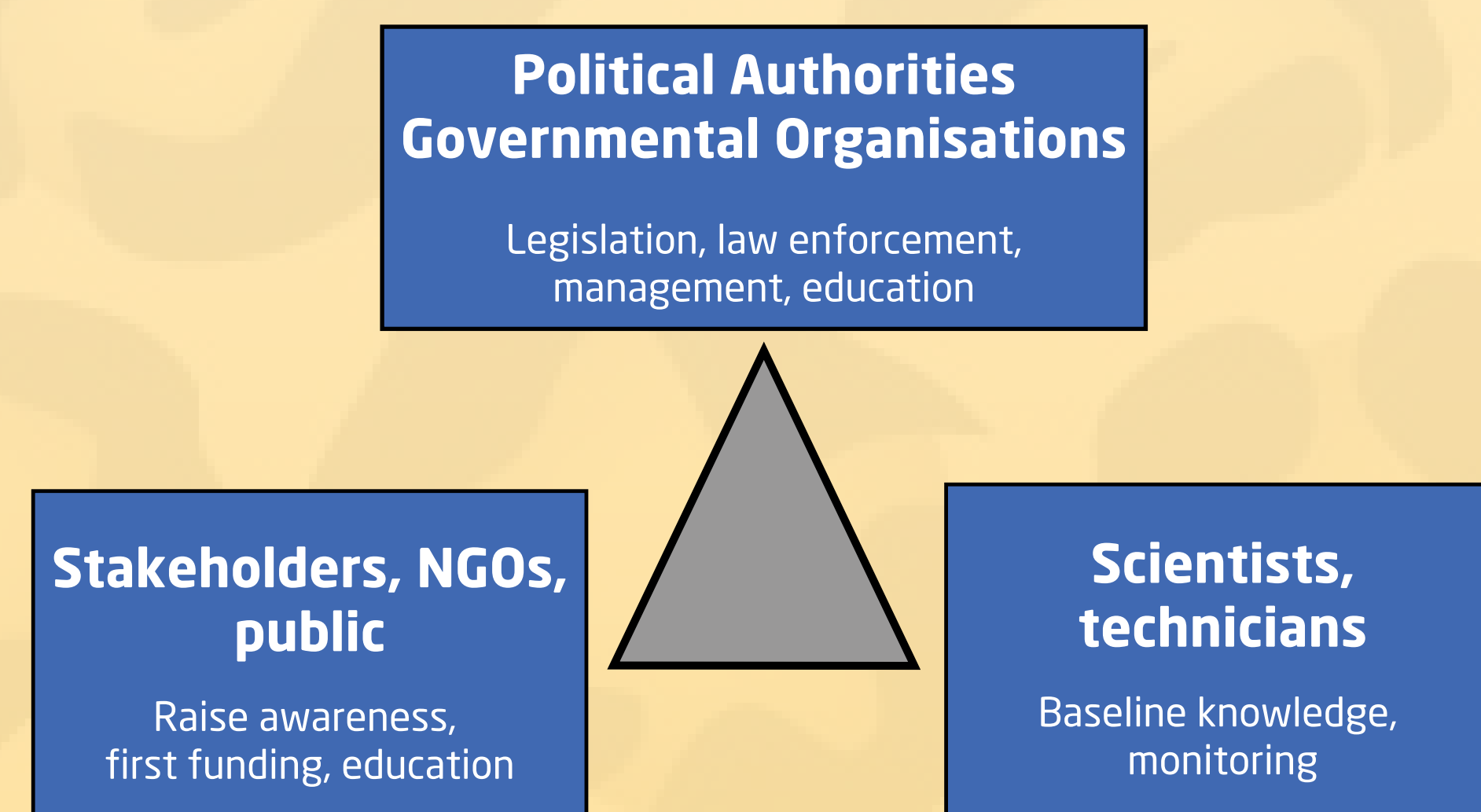
Urgent conservation action is required to ensure the survival of the Arabian leopard in a rapidly decreasing and highly fragmented mountain habitat. The regional captive breeding program, co-ordinated by the BCEAW, Sharjah plays an important role in the continued existence of the Arabian leopard. The ultimate goal, however, is its preservation in the wild and to this end a sensible conservation action plan is required.

According to the IUCN's Species Survival Commission (SSC), a species conservation strategy is a blue print for saving a species across all or part of its range (IUCN/SSC 2008). A strategy assesses problems and makes recommendation at the range level. The SSC further states that a conservation strategy should contain a status review, visions and goals for saving the species, objectives for achieving those goals and actions that will accomplish those objectives. A range-wide status review was compiled and published in 2006 as a special edition of the Cat News, the quarterly journal of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group. The status reports provide critical baseline information for the next steps in planning, which are 1) the development of a range-wide strategy plan and 2) country based action plans.

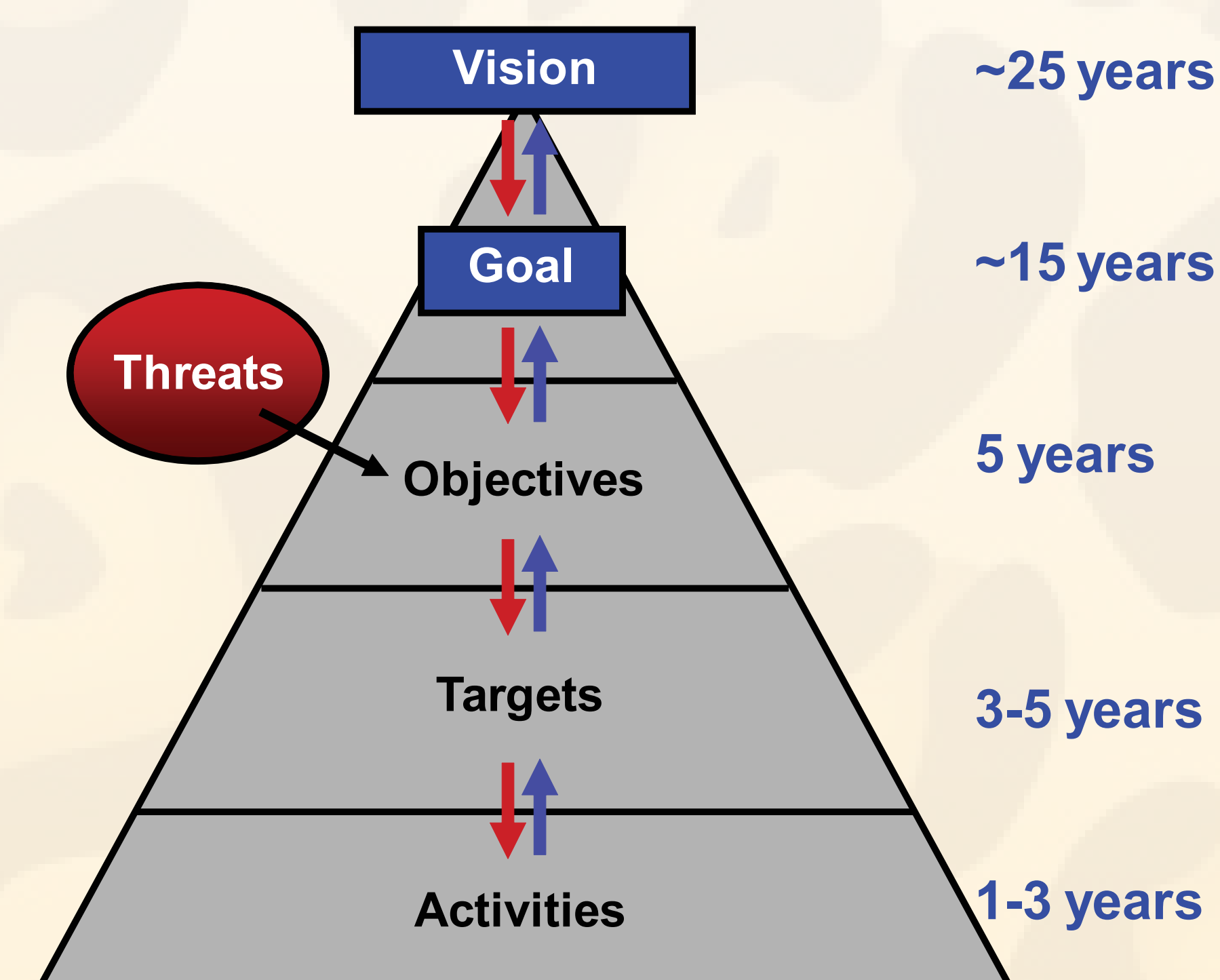


Steps in Conservation Planning

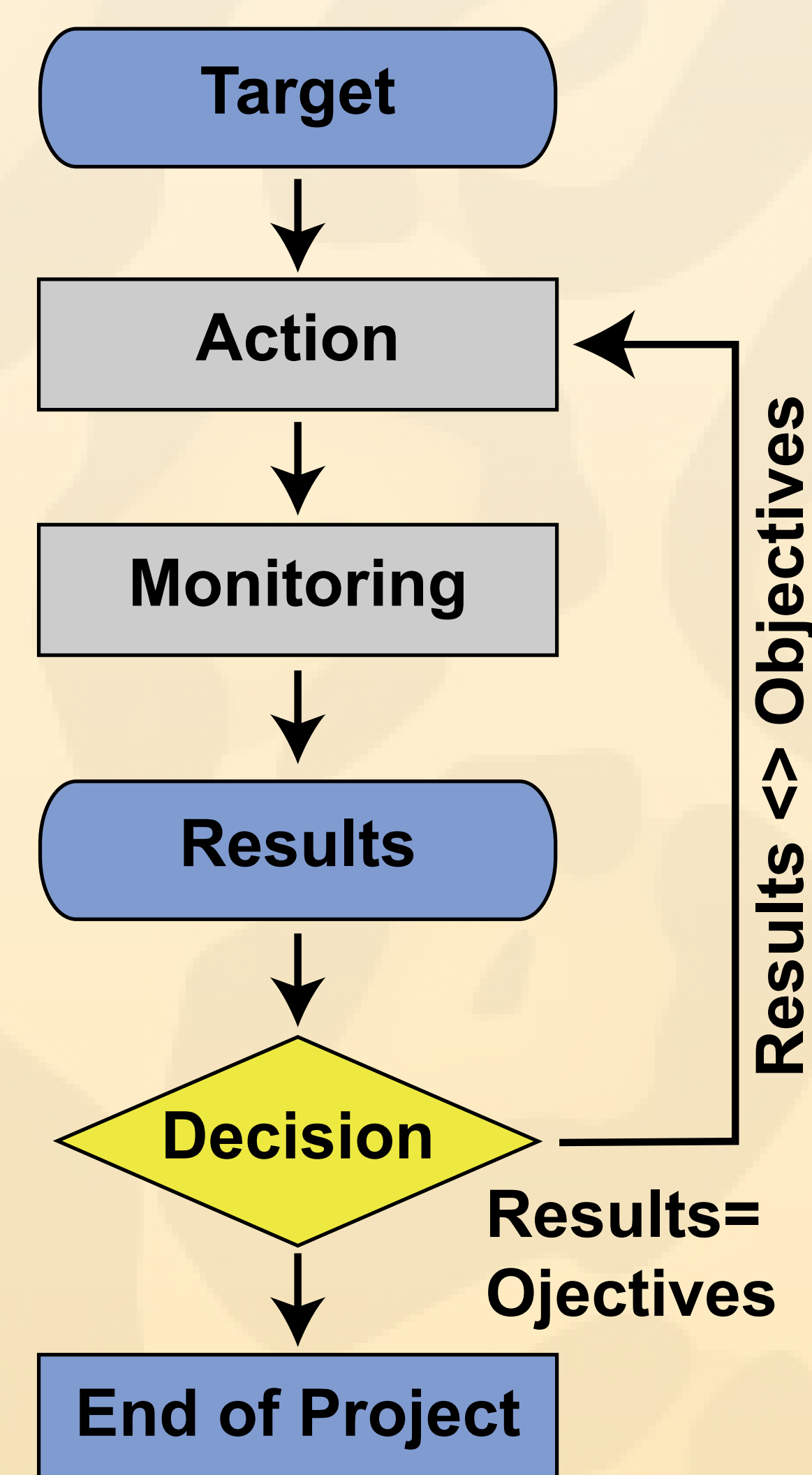
Successful strategic conservation planning requires a strong partnership between the partners of the “triangle of conservation”. The institutions at each of the corners play important but different roles that require co-ordination. The partnership agreement, general goals and common activities are settled in a range-wide conservation strategy, which provides guidance for on-the-ground activities.



The strategy is developed in a participative process using a logistic framework approach involving all partners of the “triangle”. The logframe defines range-wide goals, objectives, and actions and it is a binding agreement for the development of more specific action plans for each range country. The strategy report has been published and now demands the urgent development of action plans in the fight to save the Arabian leopard.



Monitoring of the plan implementation is crucial for the control of success and the adaptive management of any conservation program.



The development of strategies and plans will not save the leopard on its own but action in the field will. Some of the problems identified and the solutions recommended should take place or at least be co-ordinated at the range level, such as the captive breeding programme. Others – like international trade or management of protected areas across international borders – will have to be coordinated between neighboring countries. Many of the objectives, targets and activities listed in the range wide Conservation Strategy will need to be implemented at the national level. To do this, each range country should develop a National Action Plan, following the principles and recommendations laid out in the Conservation Strategy.

Conclusion

The Arabian leopard as the top predator of the peninsula will serve as a flagship and umbrella species. Partnership agreements, strategic planning, implementation and monitoring could become a model case for many other important co-operative conservation programs on the Arabian Peninsula.

References

- IUCN/SSC. 2008. Strategic Planning for Species Conservation: A Handbook. Version 1.0. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN Species Survival Commission. 104pp.
- Breitenmoser U, Mallon D. and Breitenmoser-Würsten C. 2006. A framework for the Conservation of the Arabian leopard: in Cat New Special Issue 1. IUCN Cat Specialist Group.