

New evidence of critically-endangered cat

The first camera-trap photographs of the critically endangered Northwest African or Saharan cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus hecki*) in Algeria have been recorded by scientists led by ZSL and Office du Parc National de l'Ahaggar (OPNA).



Cheetah photographed in the Algerian Sahara (Photo Farid Belbachir/ZSL/OPNA)

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The photographs were taken as part of the first systematic camera trap survey across the central Sahara, covering an area of 2,800 km². The survey identified four different Saharan cheetahs using spot patterns unique to each individual.

"The Saharan cheetah is critically endangered, yet virtually nothing is known about the

population, so this new evidence, and the ongoing research work, is hugely significant," said Dr Sarah Durant, Zoological Society of London Senior Research Fellow.

Farid Belbachir, who is implementing the field survey, adds: "This is an incredibly rare and elusive subspecies of cheetah and current population estimates, which stand at less than

250 mature individuals, are based on guesswork. This study is helping us to turn a corner in our understanding, providing us with information about population numbers, movement and ecology."

The Northwest African cheetah is found over the Sahara desert and savannas of North and West Africa, respectively, including Algeria, Niger, Mali, Benin, Burkina-Faso and Togo. The populations are very fragmented and small, with the biggest thought to be found in Algeria.

The ongoing surveys in the region will also work with the local Tuareg pastoralist community to find out more about the ecology of the cheetah and identify threats to it.

The research was undertaken by the Zoological Society of London, Office du Parc National de l'Ahaggar (OPNA) and Université de Béjaïa, with support from WCS and Panthera. Dr Luke Hunter, Panthera's Executive Director, said, "This is very exciting news. The photos are the first new data on this endangered sub-species, which also represent months of hard work by a very talented Algerian scientist and his team. Panthera is delighted to support Farid as part of our Kaplan Graduate Awards Program."

The species as a whole has just been put on Appendix I on the Convention of Migratory Species, at the request of Algeria with support from other parties. This affords protection of the species from all signatory countries.