

ASIATIC CHEETAH

Helmut Hemmer has expressed serious concern about the report in CAT NEWS 8 about possible introduction of African cheetah in Turkmenistan in the USSR, where there have been cheetah sightings in recent years. He writes: "Both geographic populations, African and Asiatic, can be distinguished morphologically (see Heptner and Sludski's monograph of USSR mammals). We do not know enough about the differences in the ecology of these forms, nor of the differences in ethophysiology. In fact, we do not know anything about the possible existence of differently co-adapted gene complexes in both populations.

"As long as the existence of at least one breeding pair of Asiatic cheetah in the regions in question cannot be ruled out with certainty, any introduction of African cheetah must be considered as an act, not of nature conservation, but of nature destruction. It is also against basic IUCN principles. Each so-called 'conservationist' who takes part in an animal introduction that may finally result in a population crash and extinction by outcrossing depression due to the mixing of different co-adapted gene complexes, will have a much greater responsibility for such destruction of the world's natural heritage than people who act without biological training and background and for purposes other than for conservation."

Hemmer says that African cheetah never lived in Turkmenistan, and there seems to be no real proof to support the suggestion that there were escapes of African cheetah imported for hunting purposes resulting in hybridisation with the Turkmenian population.