

## THE ASIATIC CHEETAH LIVES ON

The Asiatic cheetah Acinonyx jubatus venaticus still survives in Iran and Soviet Turkmenistan, although its future appears bleak, according to recent reports.

Vladimir Flint, Head of the USSR Nature Conservation Research Institute, has provided the following information from MAMMALS OF NORTHWEST TURKMENIA AND SOUTH USTYURT, A.V. Gorbunov, Kiev 1987, Master's Thesis:

1. October 1975, Turkmenia, Ustyurt, adult observed from 30m.
2. November 1976, Turkmenia, Krasnovodsky Peninsula, adult met at night.
3. August 1982, same place, adult seen at night from 5.
4. January 1983, Turkmenia, Caspian Sea coast, skull and piece of skin found.
5. July 1983, Turkmenia, female with two cubs seen.

The recently published NATURAL HISTORY OF THE USSR by Algirdas Knystautas, (Century Hutchinson, London, 1987) has a photo of a pair of cheetah standing over prey in Ustyurt, which are said to be in "semi-captivity for reintroduction in the wild". There is a 2,200 km<sup>2</sup> desert nature reserve in Ustyurt. Dr Flint says that the cheetah, which are African, were kept there actually for filming and not for reintroduction. However, he believes that reintroduction of African cheetah is the only way to re-establish a population in Turkmenia because the remaining animals in the wild will not survive. He considers that the African and Asian subspecies are already mixed as a result of escapes in past centuries when African cheetah were imported for hunting.

He adds: "I do not believe in the existence of African and Asian subspecies at all! I am not sure anybody can distinguish these subspecies - can you?"

Meanwhile, a biologist at Teheran University plans to survey the status of cheetah in the country. Ten years ago there were said to be about 200 in reserves and 50 outside, but in recent years protection has collapsed, reserves have been invaded by graziers and gazelle, the main cheetah prey, heavily poached. A dead cheetah was found this year in Kavir National Park in central Iran, and a few years ago a female died after capture, reportedly for transport to India, where discussions have been going on about reintroducing cheetah. The last known cheetah in India were three shot together by the Maharajah of Korea in 1947, although some later sightings have been reported.

Cheetah once ranged from Africa through Arabia to India. A fresh skin was brought in to Muscat, Oman, about 1978, but investigations failed to confirm the survival of any in the wild.

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