

Revision of Cheetah Status in Zimbabwe

Safari hunting of cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* is likely to be authorised in revised wildlife legislation in Zimbabwe, according to ZIMBABWE WILDLIFE, the journal of the Wildlife Society.

The change is an attempt to deal with the conflicting problems of livestock predation by cheetah and longterm conservation. Cheetah will be given a new "Restricted" status instead of being "Specially Protected" in a revision of the 1975 Parks and Wild Life Act.

Hunting of "Restricted Species" will be permitted if the Minister "is satisfied that the hunting is not contrary to the interest of the conservation of the species or animal concerned."

ZIMBABWE WILDLIFE states: "The changing of the cheetah's status from Specially Protected to Restricted is likely to be one of the more controversial aspects of the revised legisla-

tion. Many people perceive cheetah as highly endangered both locally and elsewhere. However, there are indications that its numbers are increasing, and it has been implicated in many cases of stock theft, especially in southern Zimbabwe. Numerous cheetah are killed each year in terms of the present section 37 of the Act (which authorises the Minister to permit taking of a Specially Protected species), but no commercial use can be made of them.

"The Wildlife Producers recently requested that cheetah should be taken off the Specially Protected list 'in areas where they are problematical' - thus enabling problem animals to be shot by trophy hunters in return for payment. One ecologist has also recommended that the species should be removed from the list for conservation reasons. Rather than protect the cheetah in

specific areas, the committee decided to recommend Restricted status for cheetah throughout the country, so enabling government to control and monitor their status and use."

The 1975 law has been under review by a committee of ecologists, who have proposed the new "Restricted Species" listing to cover species which do not satisfy criteria for special protection, but which the state would like to control and monitor by issue of permits.

Permits to take Specially Protected species would only be issued for scientific or educational purposes; to provide specimens for zoos or museums; for captive breeding, export or restocking, management or control; or the protection of human life or property. The catchall phrase "and any other purpose

which..." would be removed.

The 1975 act made wildlife the property of the landowner (including government authorities) on which it lived. ZIMBABWE WILDLIFE says that, instead of resulting in the slaughter of wildlife, as many had feared, the legislation promoted the perception of wild animals as economically valuable, usually through game ranching and the sale of hunting safaris. Safeguards were provided for animals that might be threatened, such as the cheetah, by declaring them "Specially Protected".

(A review of the cheetah situation in Zimbabwe by Viv Wilson, now Chairman of the Parks Board, appeared in CAT NEWS 8)