

Cheetah Surviving in Iran

There is increasing evidence of cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus* in many parts of Iran where they were not thought to survive, reports Mahmoud Karami of the University of Teheran.

In a letter to Laurie Marker-Kraus, Keeper of the International Cheetah Studbook, Karami said two cheetah were observed on 13 November 1989 in Dashte-Rig, Bahram-e-Gour Protected Area, southwest of Kerman. About 100 wild ass *Equus hemionus*, Dorcas gazelle *Gazella dorcas* and abundant hares *Lepus spp* are found in the area.

Karami said that Abu Talebi, Director General of the Department of Environment of Khorasan Province, which neighbours Afghanistan, reported that there were at least 15 cheetah in the south of the province. One was captured by local people and is held in Mashad Zoo. On the other hand, cheetah are no longer found in northern Khorasan.

Cheetah were also reported from Turan Protected Region, Karami said. He added that it was generally believed in Iran that cheetahs lived on hares outside protected areas. Hares were not hunted, although Islamic law allows, but does not recommend, eating them.

Colin Groves from the Australian National University, who visited Iran recently on an FAO mission to advise on wildlife conservation, saw cheetah footprints and scats while breakfasting

under a pistaccio tree in Bahram-e-Gour Protected Area. In a letter to Peter Jackson he said that prime cheetah habitat near Mashhad had been complete overrun by sheep and goats after the revolution.

During the 1970s there were reports of 250 cheetah in Iran, but Paul Joslin, who was working with the Department of the Environment at the time, believes this was an over-estimate.

Meanwhile, Vladimir Flint, Director of the Soviet Nature Conservation Research Institute, reported that a search of the most likely places for cheetah in Turkmenia produced no sign. He said that cheetah, of which sightings were reported between 1975 and 1983 (CAT NEWS 8), were too rare and scattered too widely.

Flint asked for opinions about his idea to introduce several African cheetahs from the Uzbekistan Breeding Centre. He referred to the question of interbreeding of African and Asiatic cheetahs, adding: *Are Asian and African cheetahs really different subspecies?* In CAT NEWS 8 he said he did not believe there was a difference.

The last three confirmed Asiatic cheetahs *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus* in India were shot around the end of 1947 and the species is considered extinct. A fresh skin was brought to Muscat, Oman, about 1978, but investigations failed to confirm the survival of any in the wild.