

# Gamete Recovery from a Namibian Cheetah

**The death of an endangered animal is always a tragic loss, often made worse by the potential negative effect on an already depleted gene pool. Modern developments in reproductive science may have found a few solutions however and projects like Gamete Recovery International offer new hope, proving that the cycle of life is bigger than we thought.**

The death of a wild cheetah recently in Namibia was such a tragic loss, as this young free-ranging male was in the prime of his life and represented a valuable source of genetic material, with a vital role to play in the maintenance of genetic diversity and therefore, the future survival of his species. But this cheetah's genetic legacy lives on today, due to a unique conservation project making use of exciting developments in reproductive technology and conservation biology.

Funded by Mondi Recycling, Gamete Recovery International (GRI) is a pro-

gramme coordinated by the Wildlife Breeding Resource Centre (WBRC), a working group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) in South Africa. Applying the latest developments in human and domestic animal reproduction to wildlife species, with a view to broadening gene pools and preventing extinction, the WBRC is developing methods of extracting viable genetic material (sperm and egg-cells) from recently dead animals.

The cheetah which died in Namibia in October represented the first transfer of viable reproductive material from a dead animal across South African borders and therefore, a breakthrough for this project. Less than 12 hours after the animal's death the material was processed by WBRC staff and 15 straws of sperm were frozen, each straw representing one dose needed to artificially inseminate a female. This material is now safely stored in the WBRC's gene bank and may one day result in the birth of cubs, fathered by an animal who died many years before.

The GRI programme was established in order to develop partnerships with zoos,

breeding centres and other institutions who may gain access to material from wild animals which die. In this way, material from species like black and white rhino, cheetah, black-footed cats and a number of rare antelope species has been collected and processed. Once frozen, this material remains viable indefinitely and may be used for transfer back into a recipient of the same species at any time. Through this programme, the WBRC has also developed a DNA bank for wildlife, which houses material from over 35 wildlife species.

This particular event would not have happened but for the input of Bonnie Schoeman and Laurie Marker-Kraus of the Cheetah Conservation Fund (Namibia), Dr. Ulf Tubbesing (Namibia), DHL Namibia and Louise Watson at DHL South Africa, Mondi Recycling and WBRC staff (South Africa).

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For more information on how to participate in this project please contact us:

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