

## Cheetahs and Tourism: Sad News from the Serengeti

**O**n 24th July 2003, a female cheetah with seven small cubs was surrounded by 15 tourist vehicles in a sandpit south of Seronera in Serengeti National Park. Vehicles came within a foot of the cheetahs, who were resting under the shade of a tree in the pit. Terrified by the noise of engines and voices, two cubs ran away from the vehicles into tall grass. An hour later, one cub returned, but the other cub was never seen again, although the pit was later closed to visitors. Without its mother for protection, the cub was probably killed by lions or hyenas in the night.

In the days that followed, the mother cheetah would not leave the sandpit area, despite the presence of lions, including one near fatal encounter. Instead, she kept calling and searching the area for her missing cub, putting her remain-

ing cubs and herself at greater risk. Two days later another cub disappeared.

With the help of Tanzanian authorities, the Serengeti Cheetah Project is trying to make sure that such unfortunate incidents do not occur again by increasing awareness about cheetahs among tourists and driver-guides. Cheetahs are more easily disturbed by large numbers of cars and people than other species of big cat, especially as they usually hunt by day. The project is producing posters to encourage 'Cheetah Friendly' viewing practices, and asking visitors to help prevent such things from happening again by following a few simple guidelines when they come across cheetahs. The posters will be displayed at park gates, the Visitor Unit and lodges. Leaflets with the same information will also be distributed to visitors and will be available at the Carnivore Unit.

While cheetahs do have special needs, there is also a need for improving visitor behaviour around all wildlife in the park. Any thoughts and suggestions on these issues are welcomed by the Serengeti Cheetah Project at <cheetah@habari.co.tz>.

(Tanzania Carnivore Project Newsletter.  
<<http://www.habari.co.tz/carnivores/>>)