

# Asiatic Cheetah Cub Recovered From a Poacher in Iran

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**A** male Asiatic cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* cub has been brought into captivity after being illegally removed from the wild by a sheep herder in Khar Touran National Park, Semnan Province, Iran.

The cub was recovered by the Iranian Department of Environment (DoE) after being contacted by a local landowner, Reza Koshki who had convinced the herder to hand over the cheetah and was caring for it at his farm in Mazinan village near the national park. Apparently, the herder was in the park on motorbike when he saw a female cheetah with two cubs in the distance. He pursued them until one cub collapsed from exhaustion and he subdued it, keeping it chained in his house for 14 days before Mr Koshki intervened. Fortunately the cub was uninjured in the process.

Reza Koshki and his son Amir are well known in the area as great supporters of conservation. The Koshki family run a successful business in Tehran, and provides the salaries of two game guards working at a nearby protected area as well as assisting local schools with conservation projects. In learning of the cub, Mr Koshki dissuaded the poacher of his intent to sell it and explained the significant penalties to poaching a cheetah, which include hefty fines and jail sentences. The DoE is investigating the incident and may lay charges on the man.

There is little evidence for a significant market for cheetah cubs in Iran or the region, except for opportunistic confiscations such as this incident. Evidently, the poacher had no plan in mind when he ran down the cub except that he thought it was valuable. This is the first known incident since 2003 of local people killing or poaching cheetahs from the wild though it is probable that other incidents have occurred without coming to the attention of authorities.

The cub was transported on January 15 to the Pardisan Eco-Park in Tehran which formerly held the female cheetah, Marita, recovered under similar circumstances from a village near Bafgh



**Fig. 1.** Stephane Ostrowski (foreground, left) Houman Jowkar (foreground, right) and the staff of EcoPardisan Park examine the cub Koshki (Photo L. Hunter).

Protected Area, Yazd Province in 1994. She died in 2003 and the young male, named Koshki, is the only known Asiatic cheetah currently in captivity. Unfortunately, at only 7-8 months old (at January 2008), he is too young to release into the wild, though the possibility exists of a phased rehabilitation when he matures. Iran's extensive protected area system includes some enclosed areas with very high densities of prey species and no other large carnivores where it might be feasible to release Koshki in a controlled experiment to assess his ability to survive in the wild. With only an estimated 60 – 100 cheetahs remaining in the wild, the ideal objective would be to eventually return him to Khar Touran National Park in the hope that he contributes to the critically endangered population. Rehabilitation of young cheetahs has had limited success in Africa where it is known to be a long-term and difficult prospect which, in this case, may ultimately prove infeasible. For the foreseeable future, Koshki's home is a large wooded enclosure with heated night-quarters on the grounds of Pardisan Park. The young cheetah has been given a full health examination by the staff of Pardisan and Dr Stephane Ostrowski (Fig. 1, 2) and, aside from

the inevitable stress of capture and captivity, is in excellent health.

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**Fig. 2.** Young male Asiatic cheetah Koshki (Photo L. Hunter).