

THE FAST TRACK

Newsletter of the Global Cheetah Forum



NEWSLETTER 2 JANUARY 2003

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The Global Cheetah Forum was borne out of the 2001 and 2002 Global Cheetah Action Plan workshops held in South Africa. These workshops were held to unite the work being carried out worldwide to conserve cheetah and were collectively attended by 66 participants from 14 countries. The workshops resulted in the development of a Global Action Plan for cheetah conservation as well as the establishment of the GCF. The GCF supports and fosters the development of progressive, collaborative conservation partnerships and facilitates effective communication and information flow between cheetah conservationists worldwide.

ED'S NOTE:

Happy New Year to you all! May 2003 bring you tons of happiness and cheetah conservation success. Whilst we in Southern Africa have been experiencing extremely hot temperatures and a relentless African summer sun which renders one helpless for most of the day, our colleagues in the Northern hemisphere are apparently deep in their woollies and wellies with temps plummeting to the opposite end of the scale! Whether you spent the festive season building snowmen or working on your tan, I hope that it was restful and peaceful – we have a lot of work ahead of us and so your break was necessary!

The final report from the 2002 workshop will be produced in January 2003, after the draft editing process is complete. Once this hits your desk, you will realise what I mean. I do know that many of you are making great progress already and the updates featured in this newsletter represent just some of the projects which are making enormous strides towards achieving their objectives and goals.

Three great steps forward which I would like to mention include firstly the formation of the **GCF logo** (top of the page) which I think is wonderful and of which we can all be proud. Many thanks to the creative team of **The Difference Engine** who designed this for us. Secondly, in November last year, the **Global Cheetah Forum list serve** became fully functional and thanks to Brenda Daly for setting this up for us. Please contact me if you have not registered for this list serve yet. Third and not at all least, I would like to **thank Diana Reuter Twining for her generous support** of the

GCF and its development this far. Diana has ensured that this forum will continue to grow from strength to strength, serving YOU, the keepers and protectors of the cheetah.

On that note, let's get to the news from those who are doing such a wonderful job in their respective projects, to conserve the cheetah.

Many best wishes

Yolan Friedmann
CBSG South Africa
Endangered Wildlife Trust

NEWS FROM THE DE WILDT CHEETAH AND WILDLIFE TRUST (SOUTH AFRICA)



De Wildt proudly announces a new school tour incorporating a range of activities for children. While on a walking trail, visitors will learn about the local indigenous trees and birds and will watch the cheetah, wild dogs and brown hyenas feeding. They will be invited to measure the wingspan of a vulture and length of a cheetah stride, to enter a shelter for newborn cheetah cubs, and to listen to the various sounds that cheetah make. It is hands-on, informative and fun.

WILD CHEETAH PROJECT

Last year was memorable. The project managed to rescue and relocate **forty-seven** cheetahs. The most recent rescue involved a family from the Kalahari – a mother and three cubs. One of the cubs had been caught in a snare and was injured. Regrettably this necessitated the amputation of two toes, something that will probably affect the cub's balance and will make hunting difficult. The mother and other two cubs will be released on a reserve in the Eastern Cape. The De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust expresses its gratitude to the Prince Bernhard Nature Fund which has supported us by contributing to the costs of saving and caring for this special family.

Also during 2002, nine workshops were held involving nearly four hundred farmers. Visits to many farms were undertaken by both the manager of the project, Deon Cilliers, and the field officer based in the Alldays-Messina area, Mark Prangley. Together they have covered some 120 000 kilometres in their campaign to promote cheetah-friendly predator control methods. They encourage farmers to accommodate the presence of wild cheetahs, and those accepting this philosophy are given gate signs which indicate that the farms are cheetah-friendly areas. As a result, about 160 000 hectares are today considered cheetah-friendly habitat.

Mark and Deon were joined recently by Kelly Wilson, a full-time field researcher who will focus her efforts on the Cheetah Census – a campaign called 'Fading Spots'. Kelly has a new Mazda vehicle which was made available to us at an excellent price and was sponsored by Marsha and Emmett Duemke from Denver, Colorado. Kelly's post is sponsored by Columbus Zoo (USA).

The project team now has a microlight which will be used in the census as well as in locating so-called 'problem' cheetahs on farms. Deon and Mark are currently undergoing flight training and will soon have their wings. Another vital part of the team's work will be collaring the cheetah so as to determine the cats' home-range and movements. This aspect of the project has been made possible through the generous sponsorship of KBR, Like Silk, Tracy Hill and Alexandre Pomeroy.

The Fading Spots census began in January with the initial collating of data available in the Limpopo Province. Thereafter, going from farm to farm, further data will be collected by the team and written up by Kelly Wilson.

We are extremely grateful to the donors and friends who make the Wild Cheetah Project possible: The Howard G. Buffett Foundation, Tracy Hill, the Mazda Wildlife Fund, The Prince Bernhard Nature Fund, KBR (Rod Kyle), Christine

and Barry Janks, Marsha and Emmett Duemke, Like Silk, The Columbus Zoo, John and Kay Pohlman, Alexandre Pomeroy, George Pilko, Fulbright and Jaworski, Airborne Express and Sasol.

RESEARCH

De Wildt in a joint venture with the Nature Conservation Trust have acquired 5000 Ha of land in the Waterberg area and established the Jubatus Reserve. The objectives of this venture are to assist game farmers who wish to introduce cheetahs onto their farms. This will be done by determining the minimum land size required to sustain a coalition of 2 male cheetah over a period of two years. Two sub-adult animals (one captive born) were released into 1000 Ha in August 2002 and have been monitored on a daily basis by Conservationist Noleen Venter.

Although still in the initial stages much has been observed as to the cheetah's hunting techniques and their adaptation to a free roaming situation. This year a further 1000 Ha will be fenced, into which 2 adult wild caught males will be released.

For more info, contact Vanessa Bower: +27 (0) 12 5041278 / www.dewildt.org.za

SPERM BIOLOGY AND CRYOPRESERVATION IN THE NAMIBIAN CHEETAH (USA AND NAMIBIA)

David E. Wildt, Adrienne Crosier, Budhan Pukazhenti, Josephine Henghali and Laurie Marker.

The Smithsonian National Zoological Park (SNZP) and the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) have had a research, training and educational partnership for more than a decade, with much of the research having focused on the biomedical uniqueness of cheetah. During the past year, new studies were initiated on sperm biology and cryopreservation. To improve project efficiency, the SNZP committed to the full-time deployment of a post-doctoral fellow, Dr. Adrienne Crosier, to CCF. Adrienne's fellowship and travel are being generously supported by the White Oak Conservation Center, Ned and Diana Twining, Philip Osborne and British Airways. Project funds also are being provided by the Sisley Endowment (Smithsonian), Women's Committee of the Smithsonian, the Morris Animal Foundation and the White Oak Conservation Centre to develop and equip a gamete laboratory at CCF.

Cryopreserved biomaterials (including gametes, tissue and blood products) are a valuable resource for basic and applied research as well as

for conservation. For example, cheetah in Namibia probably represent the last free-ranging population of the species that is free of feline immunodeficiency disease. Thus, having stored sperm serves as a reservoir of healthy genetic material - an insurance policy for the wild. In the future, such frozen sperm can also be used to introduce new genetic material into isolated *ex situ* populations, thereby preventing the need to remove animals from nature to support zoo populations. Working with the North American Cheetah Species Survival Plan, led by Jack Grisham, three pregnancies using frozen sperm for artificial insemination were established and live young produced.

Cheetah sperm biology also is interesting from a scholarly perspective. The male routinely ejaculates high proportions (>70%) of pleiomorphic (malformed) sperm per ejaculate, which do not participate in fertilisation. Because the male normally produces few total normal, motile spermatozoa, the species appears to be highly efficient at fertilising eggs *in vivo* with the availability of only a few motile, normal spermatozoa. We are working to identify ideal sperm cryopreservation protocols that are 'field-friendly' and have application to the sometimes harsh temperatures of Namibia. The overall aim of the current SNZP/CCF collaboration is to better understand the sensitivities and responses of the unique cheetah spermatozoon to cryopreservation and thawing. We are also photographically documenting different types of sperm forms found in the Namibian populations as reference material.

In 2001, the Cheetah Global Forum identified systematic banking of cheetah biomaterials (including sperm) as a priority. Since then, we have focused on comparative semen cryopreservation methods and have discovered improved and simpler ways to freeze cheetah sperm. Simultaneously, we have conducted 86 reproductive examinations on male cheetah at CCF and other farms in Namibia. 42 Cheetah sperm samples have been frozen for storage in the Namibian Genome Resource Bank at CCF. This includes samples from recently wild-caught cheetah brought to CCF for short periods before re-release (n = 6). Data from two recent studies were presented in October 2002 by Drs. Crosier and Pukazhenti at the 9th International Spermatology Conference in Cape Town.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

Ann van Dyk, Director of the De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Centre was awarded the Chancellor's Medal from the University of Pretoria for her outstanding efforts to conserve cheetah.

NATIONAL CHEETAH MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME (SOUTH AFRICA)



The NCMP, established in 2000, focuses on free roaming cheetah which occur naturally on farmlands in South Africa. The NCMP works hand-in-hand with the farming communities, as cheetah survival on farmlands depends on the farmers. The objective is to develop a conservation plan to ensure the conservation of cheetah, while taking into account the plight of the farmers.

The NCMP has taken gigantic steps forward and has become a major role-player in cheetah conservation in South Africa. This would not be possible without constant input from all role-players including farmers. 2003 is expected to be groundbreaking year for cheetah conservation in South Africa especially with the planned census spearheaded by De Wildt Cheetah Trust.

RECENT RELOCATIONS BY THE NCMP:

Due to the excellent cooperation with the farming community, the NCMP has been able to relocate cheetah to two more reserves during the past two months. 5 Cheetah (2 bonded males, 3 females) were recently relocated into Thanda Private Game Reserve near Hluhluwe in Kwazulu Natal and a further 3 cheetah (2 males and 1 female) are en route to Riverbend Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape. The NCMP has also supplemented the current cheetah population of Shambala Private Reserve (2 males and 1 female) in the Limpopo Province with a further 2 bonded cheetah males.

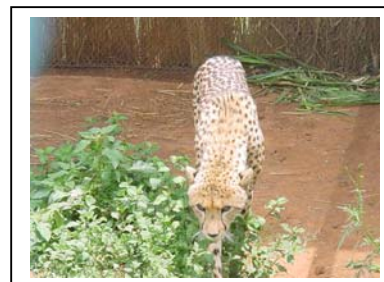


Figure 1: Female cheetah and cubs earmarked for release at Shamwari

THREAT OF TRADE IN WILD CHEETAH !

During recent field operations, NCMP field officers picked up indications of an ongoing trade in wild

free roaming cheetah. This is worrying as it may mean that cheetah are being indiscriminately captured by some farmers and sold to wildlife dealers. These cheetahs are then resold to the highest bidder. Wild cheetah may be ending up in obscure captive conditions and ultimately ending up as trophies or being exported as captive bred animals. It has also been noted that some wild cheetah are sold to certain wildlife dealers who export cheetah skins.

The cheetah is classified as endangered according to the IUCN and wild cheetah are listed as an appendix 1 species under CITES. SA does not have a quota for the export of wild cheetah to other countries.

The NCMP does not support the free-market trade in wild cheetah, as we believe that it is not sustainable over the long-term taking the current estimated population of 600 individuals in cognizance. We cannot support a free-market trade which may cause the extinction of cheetah in SA. Wildlife dealers who participate in the illegal purchase of wild cheetah from farmers are having a negative impact on the current cheetah population in SA. This may result in an indefinite ban on the legal sustainable utilization of cheetah in SA, which would certainly have a negative effect on the tolerance of farmers towards cheetah present on the farmlands.

The NCMP believes that the only short-term solution for farmers to get rid of "problem" cheetah is to make these cheetah available for relocation. The NCMP has developed a compensation scheme specifically for this and farmers are urged to make use of it.

For more info, contact: Deon Cilliers: + 27 (0) 12 546 0403, ncmp@dewildt.org.za

CONGRATULATIONS!!!
To Laurie Marker, Director of Cheetah Conservation Fund in Namibia for obtaining her PhD!!!!

The GCF secretariat is currently held by the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) South Africa and the Endangered Wildlife Trust, in South Africa. The features in this newsletter represent the various GCF members and their projects and do not necessarily represent the GCF secretariat or the editor of this newsletter.

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MOKOLODI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY (BOTSWANA)

Cheetah Conservation in Botswana is moving into the New Year very positively as we now have everything in place to become fully operational. Finally we have some much needed funding from Fauna and Flora International, the Rufford Foundation and Tusk Trust, which has made it possible for us to begin in 2003.

We will be starting our farm survey this month, which entails going out and gathering data on the cheetah's status and distribution and focusing on where they come into conflict with livestock farmers. We will also be relocating 'problem' animals, but only when absolutely necessary. We will be primarily encouraging the use of non-lethal methods of predator control and livestock management. In this regard, if anyone has information sheets on different methods which have been used successfully, please send it to us at sanctuary@mokolodi.com. We are compiling a booklet to distribute and would appreciate some case studies from other projects. Thanks to all for encouragement and advice and we look forward to working together with everyone.

Rebecca Klein
MOKOLODI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

NEWS FLASH!!!!

Thanks to Jack Grisham for this notice:

Thanks to the efforts of Ellen Dierenfeld, Bronx Zoo and the assistance of Lance Miller, Disney's Animal Kingdom, the 1993 Special Issue of **Zoo Biology**, Volume 12 number 1, is now on line at the AZA Felid TAG website. You can access the Felid TAG website at: www.felidtag.org

The special volume is listed in the column to the left under Special Cheetah Issue. Hopefully this will be a useful reference for all cheetah researchers.

In Closing

Thank-you to all those who support and further the interests of cheetah worldwide. I look forward to receiving your updates for the next edition.

Yolan Friedmann
Conservation Breeding Specialist Group South Africa, Endangered Wildlife Trust

