

THE FAST TRACK

Newsletter of the Global Cheetah Forum



NEWSLETTER 1 MARCH 2004

cbsginfo@wol.co.za / cbsgsa@wol.co.za / fax: + 27 (0) 11 486 1506

The Global Cheetah Forum was born out of the 2001 and 2002 Global Cheetah Action Plan workshops at which 66 participants from 14 countries met to unite the work being carried out worldwide to conserve cheetah. The results included the publication of a Global Cheetah Action Plan and the formation 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.

FROM THE SECRETARIAT :

The first Newsletter for 2004 is crammed with exciting updates and great aerial photographs from a microlight, of two cheetah capturing a steenbuck.

There is feedback on the Cheetah Census Technique Development Workshop and news from the Botswana Cheetah Conservation Jwaneng Research Camp.

We have sent the newsletter in a Adobe PDF format as we have found that Microsoft Word tends to make files too big when including pictures, and in this way we can keep the newsletter interesting without excluding those people that do not have high-speed connectivity.

Enjoy this edition of The Fast Track and please feel free to contact any of the contributing organisations or the secretariat for more information on any of these projects.

Keep your news flowing and happy reading.

Many best wishes

Brenda Daly and Yolán Friedmann
CBSG Southern Africa
Endangered Wildlife Trust

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



NEWS ABOUT ANIMALS AT DE WILDT

During recent analysis of the infant mortality rates of zoos worldwide by Dr Georgia Mason of the department of zoology, Oxford University, some very interesting facts came to light. It was found that in the captive breeding of naturally wide ranging carnivores like Cheetahs, Lions and Polar Bears, over 30% of infants die in the first 30 days after birth. This is the figure for the 'average zoo' – 50% of zoos worldwide are doing better than this – but 50% are doing even worse. Dr Mason requested infant mortality data from De Wildt for the purpose of setting a benchmark for global zoos to aspire to, with regards to cheetah breeding. The analysis parameters were set for infant mortality data over the last 16 years, and De Wildt's statistics emphasized our position as world leader in the field of captive breeding. Over the past 16 years, 407 cubs were born, of which 332 survived past the first 30 days and 324 survived past their first year. The first 30 day survival percentage is 84.02% and the first year survival percentage for the given period is 79.60%. This means that De Wildt exceeds the world average for first month infant cub mortality by 14.02%.

Considering the fact that as much as 60% of all wild born cubs die within the first 6 months of their lives, De Wildt's contribution to the preservation of this endangered feline is invaluable. Great success has also been achieved with our African Wild Dog breeding programme and although the captive breeding of these carnivores is less challenging than cheetah breeding, it is by no means a lesser achievement. Over the same 16 year period of analysis, African Wild Dog pup survival rate for the first 30 days is a whopping 92.08% - undoubtedly achievements that validate our 'bench mark' status.

Education

Byron, De Wildt's first ambassador Cheetah continues to enchant all who meet him. In December many visitors to the centre had a special encounter with him. Donations from these encounters have ensured that 4 Cheetahs in the wild will be rescued from unsure futures to find new homes in protected areas.

The South African lottery have generously donated over R300 000 towards the outreach and education programme currently underway.



News from Cheetah Outreach in the Cape where ambassadors in the making, Graca and Modjaji are being raised is that they are doing extremely well. Both girls make an impact wherever they go and we eagerly await their return to De Wildt. In the meantime to relieve the pressure on Byron, two other young cheetahs have been identified to assist him. Muffin and Madison are making new friends every day and are growing in confidence. We are more convinced than ever that these encounters between visitors and the Cheetahs are helping to change attitudes and to raise awareness of the issues that the free roaming cheetah faces.



Thanks to Annie Beckhelling of Cheetah Outreach for adopting Byron. He has to be the most loved cheetah on earth, with handlers Marilyn, Gaby, and Vanessa showering him with attention. Annie was his first handler and has cemented this position by adopting him.

News from Jubatus

Jubatus is a cheetah reserve owned by the nature conservation trust. Trustees include among others, Howard Buffett, Ann van Dyk and Peter Kinnear.

Jubatus, situated in the Waterberg in the Limpopo province, has as its mission, the conducting of valuable research into free roaming cheetahs, the temporary housing of wild caught cheetah (before relocation), and working in conjunction with De Wildt.

The release of captive born cheetah 'Peter' together with wild caught 'Howard' on 1200ha was Jubatus' first project. Howard and Peter are both extremely healthy. They seem to be developing a behavioural trend that could have far reaching implications in terms of how we monitor them in the future. Ever since November the majority of their kills have been at night and by the time we find the cheetahs in the mornings they have finished and left the carcass. Yolandi Smith, masters student from the University of Pretoria will be conducting a two year study on the two cheetah.

For more information, please contact Vanessa Bouwer on cheetah@dewildt.org.za

CHEETAH CONSERVATION BOTSWANA (JWANENG RESEARCH CAMP)

Our first research camp has been completed at Jwaneng Game Reserve. They required their resident population of cheetah to be monitored and generously provided us with some equipment and a camp. The monitoring of our first collared cheetah is going very well. We have managed to find her regularly and are gathering data successfully on her home range and habits. Her 4 cubs are doing very well and growing fast. We'll make sure to post some photos on the website very soon!

In November we caught another group. This time 3 adult females. The trap was set up at a waterhole where tracks had been seen. The next day a female cheetah had been caught. Ranging around on the outside were her two companions. Another trap was set up beside the captured cheetah and the next morning the other two had been successfully captured. They were all placed in our holding enclosure until the following morning. The team arrived early the next day and went about anaesthetising the group to take samples, measurements and radio collar one of them. We were very excited to capture a group of females. It is likely they are a mother with 2 young adult daughters. However, on close examination, all three appeared to be of a similar age. We will have to wait for genetics testing to determine their relationship.

Farmer Meetings – Workshop

We attended the first ever workshop organized to discuss predator problems on farmlands. This was organized by Monica Schiess Meyer of the Khutse Leopard Project and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks and attended by predator conservationists and members of the farming community. Despite beginning the workshop on very different sides of the fence, it was very successful. There were talks by each conservationist outlining the different behaviours of predators and alternative methods of control were discussed. By the end we were agreeing on many things and farmers had agreed to work with us on the issue.

Community

We have been fortunate enough to receive a grant from the Global Environment Facility of UNDP. This will allow us to focus on our community programme. We are going out regularly to affected communal farming areas to discuss with them their problems and assist them with

solutions. We are assisted by a local community development volunteer, who we would like to employ full time when funds allow.

Education

We are soon to begin predator talks at Mokolodi Nature Reserve's education centre. We have completed our draft education booklets, which will be distributed once funds are available to print and distribute them.

International Support

The project coordinator Rebecca Klein was invited to attend the Expo for Wildlife Conservation Network in California, US from 8th– 12th October. She made a presentation on the project. Other speakers included: Dr Jane Goodall, Dr Douglas Ian Hamilton of Save the Elephants, Dr Laurie Marker of Cheetah Conservation Fund, Dr Claudio Silerro of the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme amongst others. So we were very pleased to have been chosen to take part!!! It was a great opportunity to raise awareness of the project and meet some very well established conservationists.

For more information, please contact Rebecca Klein, Project Coordinator, Cheetah Conservation Botswana, Mokolodi Wildlife Foundation, Email: cheetah@mokolodi.com

STUDIES OF CHEETAH REPRODUCTIVE PHYSIOLOGY

Studies of Cheetah Reproductive Physiology and Developing a Genome Resource Bank for Namibia

During the past year, Dr. Adrienne Crosier, Josephine Henghali and the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) staff conducted a total of 69 semen collection procedures on cheetahs. This project is a partnership between CCF and the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park where Dr. Crosier is a post-doctoral fellow under the supervision of David Wildt and Budhan Pukazhenth. Studies emphasize learning more about the physiology of reproduction as well as developing field-friendly methods of sperm collection and freezing. Of the semen samples studied this past year, 20 were conducted on animals that had been recently trapped on farmland and brought to CCF for biomedical assessment and translocation. Additionally, 17 of the cheetah collections conducted last year were on animals maintained at other captive facilities in Namibia. The reproductive physiology team also

had the opportunity to conduct semen collections on five captive lions maintained on neighbouring farms. The Genome Resource Bank at CCF now contains 116 total sperm samples representing cheetah, lions and leopards.

During 2003, significant advances were made in cheetah sperm cryopreservation. Current procedures for semen freezing routinely allow the recovery of over 40% sperm with good motility characteristics and intact acrosomal membranes. Data from this study will be presented by Dr. Crosier at the upcoming 37th annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Reproduction to be held in Vancouver, BC, Canada. A manuscript entitled "Effect of Glycerol Exposure and Temperature at Glycerol Addition on Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) Sperm Cryopreservation" has been submitted for publication. This paper is the result of a year-long study based on improving the quality of cryopreserved cheetah sperm. In addition, the investigation into the unique seminal quality of Namibian cheetah has examined over 150 semen samples and documented variations in sperm concentration, motility characteristics as well as, morphology.

The CCF research team also hosted Miss Catherine Hughes and Miss Ilse Bezuidenhout from the Wildlife Biology Research Center, Johannesburg, South Africa in February 2004. During this visit, they received training in cheetah semen collection, cryopreservation and shared information on collection and storage of biological samples.

CCF NAMIBIA

Dr. Laurie Marker Visits Iran

CCF Director, Dr. Laurie Marker, travelled to Iran in January 2004 to attend the International Workshop on the Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah. The workshop served as an opportunity to examine past efforts, assess the current status of the species, and plan long-term conservation strategies with stakeholders throughout the cheetah's Iranian range. Current estimates place the cheetah population in Iran at 50 to 60 individuals.

CCF Hosts International Applied Environmental Education Course

In January 2004, CCF welcomed teachers and science professionals from around the world, as they hosted a two-week International Applied Environmental Education course at their facility near Otjiwarongo. Sponsored in cooperation with The Smithsonian Institution, the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), Environmental

Education and Conservation Global (EECG) and Wilderness Safaris, the course focused on natural resource issues and applications to solving environmental problems. The course included presentations by guest teachers from the United States, a field trip to Etosha National Park, hands-on activities, as well as a variety of individual and group projects.

CCF Publishes New Student Activity Guides

CCF, in a partnership with the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, recently printed 15,000 copies of "Meet the Cheetah," an activity guide for lower primary students, and 28,000 copies of "Voice For Cheetah," for upper primary students. They will serve as another tool used by CCF and the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden to educate youth on the importance of cheetah. The guides will be distributed to students in the United States and Namibia.

Cheetah Conservation Fund
(T) +264 (0)67 306225
(F) +264 (0)67 306247
Email: cheeta@iafrica.com.na

NATIONAL CHEETAH MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME (SOUTH AFRICA)



WILD CHEETAH PROJECT

Radio Collared Cheetah Shot in Cage

The De Wildt Wild Cheetah project captured and collared a male cheetah on 19 July 2003 on Atherstone Collaborative Nature Reserve in the Thabazimbi district of the Limpopo province of South Africa. Atherstone Nature Reserve is a conservancy that is owned jointly by the state and private owners. It is managed like a typical game ranch; they hunt during winter and remove excess game by culling and live capture. The boundary fence is electrified, but not predator proofed, and privately owned cattle and game ranches surround the reserve. Cheetahs move between these ranches with ease and many landowners believe that the nature reserve acts as a source for cheetahs. The collaring of this cheetah presented a wonderful opportunity to test the claims of landowners. This cheetah was the first cheetah collared as part of the De Wildt Wild Cheetah Project Census.

The cheetah was called Norman after Norman Atherstone who used to own part of the reserve and donated it to conservation after his death. Norman was fitted with a radio collar and blood, tissue and hair samples were taken for bio-banking. The staff on the reserve got the opportunity to touch the cheetah and look at his feet and teeth. Norman was left to recover in the capture cage and we returned a few hours later to release him.



Staff on Atherstone Nature Reserve get up close to Norman

One of the local farmers Nico Nel, who acts as a representative for the farmers of the district on the National Cheetah Management Programme, joined us to open Norman's cage. After briefly pausing to evaluate his surroundings, Norman came tearing out of the cage and disappeared into the thick bush. Shortly after this, Norman's radio collar stopped working, a huge disappointment.



Nico Nel opens the cage for Norman while Deon Cilliers watches

We have photographed him from remote triggered cameras set up in the area, and found his tracks

going past the trap cages on several occasions, but Norman was not going into the cage!



Then just before Christmas Kelly Wilson of the project got a call from a neighbouring farmer saying that they had caught a collared cheetah on his uncle's farm. We suspected that the cat was Norman as the other cheetahs collared in the area are a coalition of two males. We debated all the options available to us. The farmer was unable to get hold of his uncle who lives in Pretoria. First prize would be to replace the collar and re-release Norman, but the uncle is not happy about cheetahs on his farm. We decided that Kelly would meet the farmer first thing the following morning and we could either re-release Norman or take him away for relocation. It all depended on the attitude of the farmer.

Then about an hour later, the farmer called back to say that he had got hold of his uncle. Unfortunately, the uncle had shot Norman in the cage. He had left the radio collar in the store for me to collect and had the carcass on the back of his vehicle on his way to the taxidermist in Pretoria.

The end of a long story is that the South African Police Services confiscated the carcass and a case has been opened against the uncle. The case was presented to the public prosecutor early this month. Now we are just playing the waiting game. When Kelly spoke to the farmer on the phone and asked him if he knew about the project and the possible compensation for cheetahs, he said that he did, but that it was not about money. He said that when he saw the cat he was so angry that he shot it.

This sad event had however given new insight into the farming community in the area. All the farmers that we have spoken to about the shooting say that the farmer should be given the maximum sentence possible and that shooting an animal in a cage is unacceptable. One farmer even said that farmers are always asking for

research into various factors that affect their farming, now they have a research project and everyone should support it.

For more info, contact Kelly Wilson on wcmp@dewildt.org.za

MORE NEWS FEEDBACK FROM THE DE WILDT WILD CHEETAH PROJECT

A report back on collared cheetah in the Dwaalboom area of Limpopo Province.

The De Wildt Wild Cheetah Project was fortunate to capture, collar and release a coalition of two cheetah males on a private farm in the Dwaalboom area of Limpopo Province. The farm is used for game ranching with the breeding of rare and expensive game such as sable antelope in electrified game fenced camps a priority.

The two males were captured at a scent marking post (concrete block) and released at the same spot. Both males were collared with radio telemetry collars.

These two cheetah have given the Wild Cheetah Project an insight into the habits of wild cheetah in intensive game and stock farming areas.

They spend a lot of their time on private game ranches as well as on an adjacent Conservancy. Their range is currently approximately 31000 ha. It has been found that they move up to 16 kilometers per day, mainly between 09h00 and 16h00. To date they have only killed game species (impala, ostrich, steenbuck and kudu) and have shown no interest in the cattle that graze on some of the farms in their range.

They are been tracked with a microlight aircraft as the fences around the small game ranches make it impractical to find them on the ground with telemetry. The microlight has proved to be a very valuable tool for the monitoring of these cheetahs.

Enclosed find photographs of the two capturing a steenbuck. We watched the kill from the air and the cheetahs are not at all worried about the microlight. The hunt appeared to be totally opportunistic.



The cheetahs were walking down a fence line early in the morning and the steenbok was standing in the bush on the side of the fence line firebreak. The cheetahs did not appear to be hunting and had caught an ostrich the morning before. The steenbok did not seem aware of the cheetahs and when the cheetahs saw it, one of them pounced on it. The other cheetah watched relaxed as the first cheetah killed the steenbok but showed no interest in joining the feast.

For more info, contact Kelly Wilson on wcmp@dewildt.org.za

CHEETAH CENSUS TECHNIQUE DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

As mentioned in the last edition of Fast Track, the American Zoo Association's Conservation Endowment Fund and the St. Louis Zoo have agreed to sponsor the proposed Cheetah Census Technique Development workshop, highlighted as a critical need by the Census Group in both the 2001 and 2002 Global Cheetah Action Plan workshops.

The workshop planning has made good progress and the workshop will be held over the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of June 2004, with participants arriving on the 31st of May and departing on the 4th of June. The

venue will be Ndutu Safari Lodge, in the heart of the Serengeti Plain, at the head of Olduvai Gorge, beside a small lake set in beautiful acacia woodland, with the mighty backdrop of the Ngorongoro Crater highlands. Sarah Durant of the London Zoological Society is hosting and co-organizing the workshop with CBSG Southern Africa, the current GCF secretariat.

Again we are grateful to the CEF, and in particular Dusty Lombardi and Jack Grisham, as well as the St. Louis Zoo and Steve Bircher for their help and support in getting the resources together for this vital workshop, the outcomes of which will make an enormous impact on our ability to conserve wild cheetah for years to come.

The workshop planning is still underway and formal announcements will be made in the next week. Therefore, please do not contact the GCF secretariat for more info just yet, it will be made available shortly.



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.

Please keep 'em coming so that we are sure to include you!

Brenda Daly
Yolan Friedmann
Conservation Breeding Specialist
Group Southern Africa,
Endangered Wildlife Trust

GCF secretariat:
cbgsa@wol.co.za / cbginfo@wol.co.za + 27 (0)
11 486 1102 / fax: + 27 (0) 11 486 1506

NEW FLASH!!!!!!

Botswana cheetah needs a favour!

Date: Sat, 6 Mar 2004

If anyone has a spare satellite collar available, it will be replaced. The reason is that two cheetah brothers have been caught and the farmer has agreed that they can be released back onto his land but only if monitored on a regular basis. At present there are only VHF collars available, an order has been placed for 2 satellite collars (Sirtrack) but these will take 6 weeks to arrive and keeping the two brothers in captivity for this long is torture.

Cheetah Conservation Botswana.
Email: sanctuary@mokolodi.com

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

NEW MEMBERS TO THE GLOBAL CHEETAH FORUM INCLUDE:

Kathy Starr, Kathy is Carnivore keeper at the Perth Zoo, Western Australia.

