

THE FAST TRACK

Newsletter of the Global Cheetah Forum



NEWSLETTER 2 NOVEMBER 2005

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.

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FROM THE SECRETARIAT:

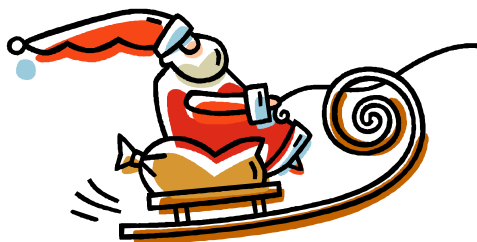
Thank you to all, for the great contributions made this month. The last issue of Fast Track for this year includes as promised, an article from Annie Beckhelling on the piloting of the Anatolian Shepherd guard dog in partnership with De Wildt and Cheetah Outreach in South Africa and an article from Katherine Bell on the Cheetah Outreach / De Wildt / Massey University cub nutrition research. We also received updates from Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia, thank you.

Welcome to all the new members that joined us the later part of this year, please feel free to contact any of the contributing organisations or the secretariat for more information on any of these projects.

Once again a huge thank you to Columbus Zoo for their recent support of the Global Cheetah Forum.

We wish you and family a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year

Brenda Daby and Yolan Friedmann
CBSG Southern Africa
Endangered Wildlife Trust



MARWELL ZIMBABWE TRUST CHEETAH PROJECT UPDATES!



Marwell Zimbabwe Trust is a non-profit conservation research organisation dedicated to collecting, analysing and disseminating information about wildlife in Zimbabwe that will assist the relevant government departments to manage these species more effectively within the country.

It is time to give some feedback about the cheetahs in Zimbabwe! As you all have heard, the situation in Zimbabwe is difficult and very preoccupying at many different levels. However, the past months have been successful for the cheetahs project and particularly for the educational programme. A series of workshops have been organised with the relevant stakeholders (Zimbabwean Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Campfire Programme, Natural Resources, Rural Council, etc) for the farming community and especially for the new farmers, following the land redistribution programme where large scale commercial farms have been converted to small-scale subsistence farms. Different themes are developed such as the importance of predators in the environment, how to protect the livestock from predation, etc. So far, more than 100 farmers from

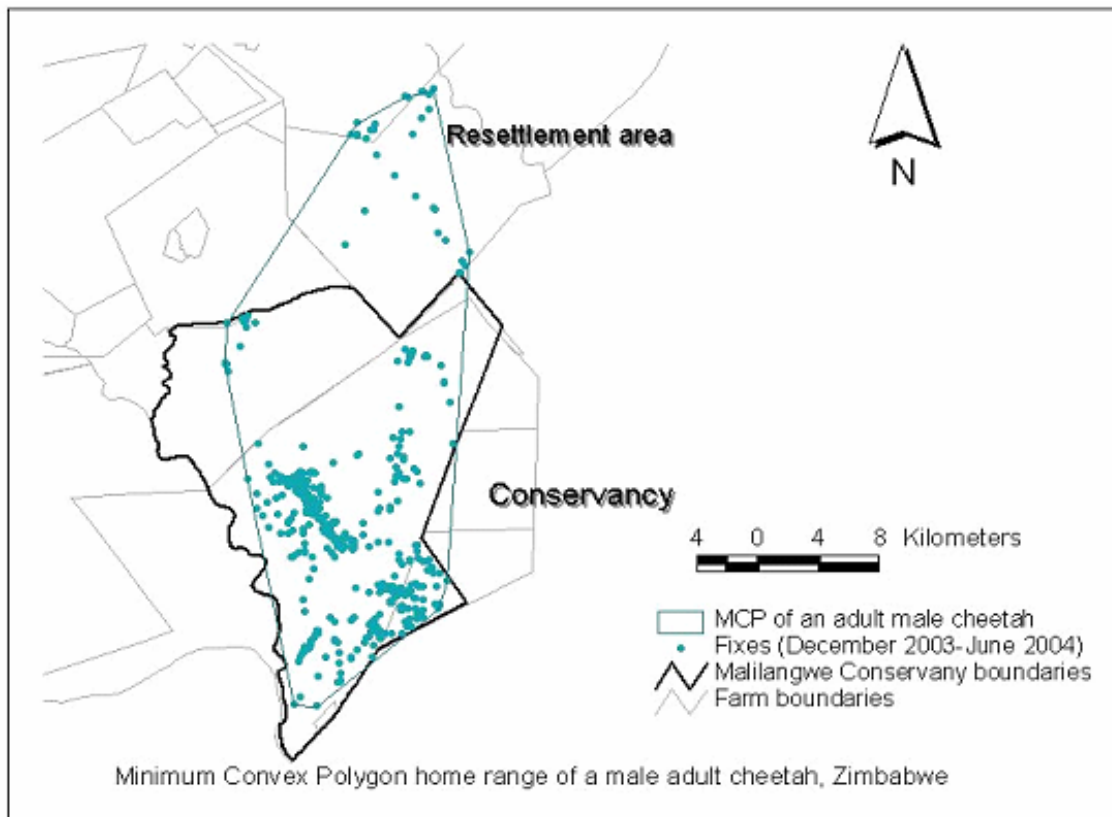


Figure1: 100% MCP of an adult male cheetah, collared for a period of 6 months in well as Malilangwe Conservancy, Zimbabwe

Matabeleland South Province have attended the workshops and regular follow-ups are conducted.

Secondly, the educational material, 'Living with Cheetah: Project for Upper primary School, A teachers' manual' has been distributed to the primary schools of Bulilima and Mangwe Districts. To this point, 135 rural schools have received the schoolbook and more than 170 teachers have been trained, during specific workshops, to use this supplementary tool. In addition, a sample of pupils from Grade 6 and 7 (n=61) were interviewed to assess the level of knowledge on cheetahs before the use of the Cheetah book. Basically, very few pupils have already seen a cheetah (9.8%), which is mainly why they don't like them. In addition, there is great scope to improve the general knowledge among school pupils and it amply demonstrates the value of the Cheetah book in these schools. Of course, there is still a long way to go to on the education point of view, and the project will continue to develop the programme to the other districts in the cheetah range.

In order to investigate the distribution and status of the cheetah, we started the interviews in Matabeleland South Province, which was historically a cheetahs' hotspot in terms of presence and conflict with farmers. Land users as

stakeholders are asked around 50 questions including the farm description (land and livestock), wildlife situation and trends (predators and preys) and livestock losses. At this stage, it is too early to draw any firm conclusions. However, initial feedback indicates a general decrease in wildlife due to high poaching activities. Concerning the cheetahs in particular, in the district surveyed so far (different wards of Bulilima and Mangwe Districts), conflicts with cheetah do not seem important and the areas where cheetahs have been seen or spoor reported are very limited.



Workshop for the Primary Schools Teachers Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe

One male cheetah was collared last year (12 December 2003 to 15 June 2004) with a GPS collar (Lotek®, GPS_3300), in Malilangwe Conservancy, in the South Lowveld. The collar was equipped with a drop-off unit that enables us to retrieve the collar at the end of the data recording. After technical problems with the download unit, the positions of the animal could finally be retrieved. A total of 992 fixes were recorded. Figure 1 represents the different fixes as well as the MCP (Minimum Convex Polygon) home range of 452.6km². This collared cheetah spent 9 consecutive days outside of the Conservancy, on farms where new settlement occurred recently. Further analysis of the data is currently underway to determine core areas of activities and habitat use in relation to the different land-use types.

I take this opportunity to say a big thank you for the support we received and without whom nothing could have happened: H. G. Buffet Foundation; Sea World and Bush Gardens Conservation Fund; San Antonio Zoo; Whitley Wildlife Trust; Colchester Zoo and Malilangwe Conservancy.

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NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

If you would like to contribute to this newsletter, please send your contributions to brendad@ewt.org.za

SUPPORTERS OF GCF

Columbus Zoo
North American Cheetah Species Survival Plan
Saint Louis Zoo
AZA Conservation Endorsement Fund
Endangered Wildlife Trust



NEW MEMBERS TO THE GLOBAL CHEETAH FORUM INCLUDE:

Sultana Bashir, Sultana is the Regional Technical Advisor for Biodiversity (South and West Asia & the Pacific), before taking up her current position she worked as a Field Project Manager in the Serengeti between 2001 and 2004 for the Serengeti Cheetah Project.

Deborah Wettlaufer, Deborah and her husband worked at Cheetah Outreach in Cape Town for 4 years before moving to Kenya. They hope to create greater awareness of the plight of the cheetah among Kenyan children as well as local people in the Laikipia area.

Leona Graham, Leona serves as the Cheetah Conservation Fund's International Liaison Officer (Programme Director) and would like to like to keep in touch with all issues related to cheetah conservation.

Pascal Mésochina, Pascal is a Field Manager for the Zoological Society of Paris and has worked on captive breeding of Arabian leopard (Saudi Arabia from 2001 to 2004).

Berzins Rachel, Berzins is a member of the Zoological Society of Paris and is involved in a project devoted to the conservation of cheetahs in Benin (in the Pendjari National Park) for which Pascal Mesochina is responsible. Details on this project will be available in the first edition of Fast Track 2006.

Maxime Roulet, Maxime is a student from Switzerland developing a project on the ecology, health status and genetics of cheetah in South Africa.

Julien Fattebert, Julien is also a student from Switzerland developing a project on the ecology, health status and genetics of cheetah in South Africa.

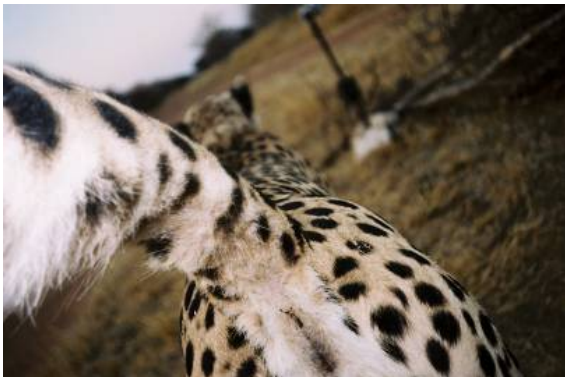
The GCF secretariat is currently held by the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) Southern Africa and the Endangered Wildlife Trust, South Africa. The features in this newsletter represent the various GCF members and their projects and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the GCF secretariat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

**WILD CHEETAH PROGRAMME AT DE
WILDT CHEETAH AND WILDLIFE
TRUST**



CAMERA TRAPPING

The camera trapping is going well and we have been getting some wonderful photos of cheetahs and of course – other animals! We had a troop of vervet monkeys messing with the cameras as well as a group of banded mongoose climbing all over the camera!



RANGE USE STUDIES

We have now been monitoring a coalition of two males for almost 5 months using a GSM/Cell phone collar. The results are incredible! The cheetahs range has expanded immensely and if it were not for this collar, we would never have known that the cheetahs were using a certain area as it was so far away! The collar is set to obtain a location once a day and it is functioning really well and I regularly get sms's from the cheetahs with their new locations included. It is also a wonderful tool for conflict resolution with landowners as you can show them exactly where the cheetahs were on a specific day and tell them how often the cheetahs are on their property.

We will be aiming at replacing all our VHF collars with cell collars in the near future.

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NEWS FROM (NAMIBIA)

CHEETAHS CAPTURED ON FARMLAND: TO RELEASE OR NOT TO RELEASE

Article by Bonnie Schumann, CCF and Carla Conradie, Africat

The Africat Foundation (south of Otjiwarongo) and the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF - east of Otjiwarongo) regularly receive calls from farmers to collect cheetahs captured in trap cages. The farming community has a keen interest in what happens to these cats once they are removed from the area.

Farmland captures typically take place at so called "play trees", along fence lines, or in the veld using live bait. Captures may be made as a result of a loss, as a preventative measure, or simply because cheetah activity was seen. Captures very rarely take place at a kraal and virtually never in the same time frame as an actual loss. Cheetahs almost never return to a kill, so captures are seldom directly associated with a specific loss, as is more commonly the case with leopards.

Each of these factors plays a crucial role in determining the fate of captured cheetahs and both organisations take several criteria into consideration when deciding whether or not these animals are candidates for release, or a life in captivity.

Place and Time of Capture

Where and when a cheetah is captured is usually a good indication as to whether the actual cheetah that may have been causing livestock losses has been caught. A cheetah captured inside a kraal is more likely to be the problem than a cheetah captured at a playtree, because multiple individuals with overlapping home ranges, and transient youngsters, visit the play trees. Cheetahs captured at play trees are considered releasable because this indiscriminate capture does not target specific conflict animals, but rather any cheetah passing through.

The time period between capture in relation to when problems occurred is also important when determining whether the right predator has been caught. Most captures occur days or even weeks after a loss. Intensive research using radio telemetry (for nine years) has shown that cheetahs are virtually never found on the same farm from one week to the next. One exception to this rule would be females who have cubs

younger than eight weeks old. As home ranges overlap and individuals travel vast distances (the average cheetah home range is 1 500km²) a significant time lapse between livestock loss and capture most often excludes the likelihood of it being the culprit that has been caught.

Reason for Capture

The circumstances under which a cat has been caught are also taken into consideration, including whether actual livestock or game losses have occurred, or if the capture is a preventative measure carried out in anticipation of losses. Cheetahs caught for the latter reason are considered releasable.

Cheetahs caught taking livestock fall into two categories: Habitual or opportunistic livestock killers. Based on case histories of individual animals over the years, it would appear that some individual cheetahs may develop habitual livestock killing behaviour, where they will go as far as climbing into kraals to target livestock despite close proximity to humans or even the presence of dogs in the kraal. Where suspected habitual livestock killers are identified (e.g. caught at kraal) every effort is made to get these animals relocated to non-livestock areas such as reserves. Failing this, they may end up in captivity.

Other individuals have been recorded moving through calving herds or in close proximity to livestock and ignoring them. Opportunistic behaviour entails a predator taking livestock on occasion, but not actively seeking out livestock in preference to hunting game. Cheetahs caught taking game in game camps, although causing economic losses, are considered releasable, as they are taking natural prey.

Age and Overall Health

Cheetahs under the age of sixteen months are considered non-releasable without an adult. Following rehabilitation as adults, cheetahs that have been orphaned at an early age could be released into controlled situations such as reserves. Where a cheetah's condition is such that survival in the wild is no longer possible, i.e. old cheetahs (dentition and physical condition are used as indicators), it is considered to be non-releasable. Cheetahs are not considered releasable when they have been injured to such an extent that, even with medical intervention, the injuries would handicap the animal's ability to hunt.

Cheetahs that are habituated to or imprinted on humans are not considered suitable for farmland

release, but would be considered for release into reserves situations.

Procedures for Release of Cheetahs Caught on Farms

Both CCF and AfriCat carry out full biomedical and health examinations on cheetahs before they are released, and all animals are marked with eartags and/or transponders. Every effort is made to persuade farmers who have captured cheetah to allow them to be released at the capture location. In cases where animals deemed to be releasable are removed from a farm, permission is obtained from the farmer for their release. No cheetahs are released onto private farmland without the permission of the landowner and cheetahs are not released onto public roads.

Farmers who allow the release of trapped cheetahs are provided with information including weight, age, ear tag numbers and general release locations. The names of farmers who permit CCF and AfriCat to release cheetahs are held in confidence, and neighbours are not notified of these releases. This allows farmers who support cheetah conservation to participate without incurring the animosity of neighbours with differing beliefs. This policy is considered equitable, since farmers who shoot cheetahs indiscriminately do not obtain permission from their neighbours before doing so, even though such shooting creates disruptions of wild populations well beyond the boundaries of a single farm.

As the value of biodiversity to the survival of all life forms on earth becomes more clearly understood, the importance of the role of predators needs to be accepted, so that we can move on and figure out how to live together. Living with predators is never going to be easy but it can be done, as is being demonstrated by many Namibian farmers. Removing cheetahs buys some time for the farmer and the cat, but ultimately, the key to human/predator conflict resolution lies in sound livestock and wildlife management.

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CHEETAH CUB NUTRITION STUDIES: A PARTNERSHIP PROJECT BETWEEN DE WILDT CHEETAH AND WILDLIFE TRUST, CHEETAH OUTREACH AND MASSEY UNIVERSITY.

In 2004, Cheetah Outreach and De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust entrusted the rearing of 10 cheetah cubs to Katherine (Kat) Bell, a PhD student and qualified veterinary nurse, from Massey University (New Zealand). The success of last years project has seen it turn into an annual event with 8 more cubs being flown (courtesy of British Airways) down from De Wildt to Cheetah Outreach in the Cape this year.



All cubs involved in the project are destined to become education ambassadors and as such require hand rearing from 3 weeks of age. Hand rearing is necessary in order for the cubs to grow up without their instinctive fear of humans. The result of such strong association with their human handlers is the establishment of that vital bond between handler and cheetah. The partnership between handler and cheetah is central to the ethos of Cheetah Outreach's and De Wildt's highly successful, hands-on education programmes.

But these three organisations took this hand-rearing period as a further opportunity to document important nutritional and growth/developmental processes in the cubs. As part of her PhD studies in feline nutrition (domestic and non-domestic cats), Kat conducted non-invasive research with the cubs under her care and the results of her findings are due to be published within the next twelve months. Kat's PhD work is investigating the impact of dietary isoflavones (a component of soya protein commonly incorporated in commercial diets prepared for domestic cats and zoo carnivores) on the health of domestic and non-domestic felids. Dietary isoflavones are known in human medicine for their role in preventing osteoporosis, reducing cholesterol, cancer prevention and the treatment of menopausal symptoms. However, research also indicates that the oestrogenic effects of isoflavones may also impart deleterious effects on some tissues.

Very little research has been conducted in regards to isoflavone consumption by any felid species, yet the potential exists for zoo cheetahs consuming commercially prepared diets containing soy to experience physiological perturbations (either beneficial or not). However, before conclusions can be drawn as to the potential physiological impact that these dietary components may have, we must establish firstly the degree of isoflavone exposure encountered by zoo felids and secondly the extent to which these isoflavones are absorbed and metabolised by zoo felids.

One of the milk replacer formulas commonly utilised by South African zoos when hand-rearing wild felids was analysed by Kat's laboratory in New Zealand to contain significant levels of these isoflavones. Since this diet provides a complete and balanced diet to growing cubs (according to domestic cat requirements) and has been successfully used by a number of other facilities, the opportunity existed to determine the capacity of cheetah cubs to absorb and metabolise the dietary isoflavones present in the milk replacer. Kat collected urine samples from each cub and analysed these to determine the quantity of isoflavones present, which represents a minimum estimate for isoflavone bioavailability in this species although other routes of excretion are likely to exist. The results of this study, in combination with dietary analyses and comparable studies in adult cheetahs are expected to be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed, international journal in early 2006.



Additionally, Kat has so far collected detailed daily data describing the metabolisable energy intake, growth rates, and medical history of 18 cubs as well as conducting digestibility and stool quality trials (comparing commercially prepared diets with supplemented meat diets as well as two different milk replacer formulas) in 10 cubs.

Energy intake and growth rate data will be compiled to determine metabolisable energy requirements for cheetah cubs during the first 4 months of life. Inappropriate metabolisable energy intake has been linked with a number of health concerns, with both long and short-term impacts. Currently, facilities tend to utilise previous experience as well as research related to domestic cats to determine ideal energy intake for growing cheetahs. However, Kat hopes to produce a cheetah-specific "recipe" for growth in cheetah cubs which will allow facilities to more precisely control growth in hand-reared cubs.

Cheetah Outreach and De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust are grateful to the support of British Airways and Cathay Pacific in providing air travel for our valuable cubs and for Kat's passage from New Zealand. Cubs are reared at a purpose-designed facility, built with the help of Eikendal Wine Estate and Mr Robert Haas.

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RESTORING THE BALANCE



Jedi, Thabazimbi, South Africa

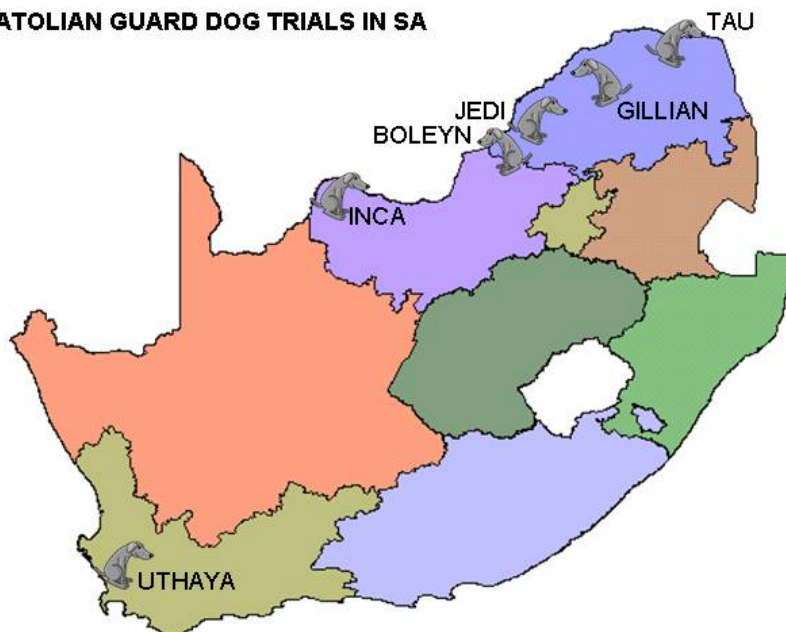
An unprotected, abundant source of food (sheep or goats) provides predators with an easily accessible resource which they do not need to hunt. This food source will encourage predators to a farm and assist in increased successful breeding, resulting in the growth of predator populations. Cheetah being diurnal hunters are many times sighted by farmers and inappropriately blamed for all livestock loss, resulting in many being trapped for removal. De Wildt's Wild Cheetah Management Programme (WCMP) has to date successfully trapped and relocated 80 cheetahs at risk on farmlands into more suitable environments, but now seeks innovative methods of non-lethal predator control.

Traditional methods of control such as indiscriminate poisoning, hunting and trapping often results in the removal of more beneficial animal such as bat-eared fox, aardvark and raptors and non target predators such as leopard and brown hyena.

A Turkish breed, the Anatolian Shepherd was bred to protect livestock from wolves and bears. Today these impressive dogs are bred and reared by Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) to serve the farmers of Namibia. Given to farmers at 6 weeks of age, the dogs are raised exclusively with the flock, instinctively protecting them from a variety of predators including cheetah. By deterring predators, this important working relationship removes the need for farmers to trap and shoot this endangered cat.

As a result of the successful Namibian initiative, a trial programme has been launched by De Wildt's WCMP and Cheetah Outreach, to introduce the Anatolian to serve the farmers of South Africa. To give this trial the best possible chance of success farmers were carefully selected and given an information booklet outlining introduction and management strategies for their dogs, collated from CCF literature and experiences, as well as veterinary protocols to ensure health. For optimal results dogs need to be fit. To promote a good working diet and veterinary care, costs are sponsored by the programme for the first year. The rest is in the hands of the farmer who must invest interest during the initial critical period. This will often be the deciding factor which will ensure success in the rearing of a productive guarder.

ANATOLIAN GUARD DOG TRIALS IN SA



Six dogs: Jedi, Boleyn, Tau, Gillian, Inca and Uthaya; are currently placed in Thabazimbi, Musina, Lepalale, Bray and Hermanus. They are regularly monitored to assess their development and effectiveness. To date indications are that this initiative could become a useful cheetah conservation tool in South Africa. An assessment will be made in 2006 and if appropriate a breeding and placement programme will be scheduled for 2006/7.



Uthaya, Hermanus, South Africa

By using this non-lethal method of predator control balance will be restored to the farmlands and the predator population reduced to a size able to exist on its natural prey. Inspired by CCF, funded and co-ordinated by Cheetah Outreach, delivered by De Wildt's WCMP, this effort is testament to what can be achieved by close co-operation of conservation organisations working together for a common goal.

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ASIATIC CHEETAHS CAUGHT ON CAMERA

It's amazing what a remote camera will pick up. This remarkable image of Asiatic cheetahs was captured by automatic equipment in an isolated region of Iran's Dar-e Anjir Wildlife Refuge.

The picture shows mum and her four youngsters resting in the shade of a tree. It is quite a catch as the big cat is now extremely rare. Once ranging from the Red Sea to India, the Asiatic cheetah today numbers fewer than 60 animals on the

entire Asian continent, mostly on Iran's arid central plateau.



The Asiatic cheetah lives on the edge (Image: I.R.Iran DOE/CACP/WCS/UNDP-GEF)

"As a species the cheetah is still in dire straits in Iran, so it is extremely encouraging to see an apparently healthy family in their native habitat," said Dr Peter Zahler, from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), which has been working with Iranian biologists to survey the cats since 2001. Initiated by a major grant and ongoing support from the United Nations Development Programme's Global Environment Facility, WCS began its collaboration with Iranian scientists by surveying five protected areas where cheetahs were still thought to exist.

The group found a variety of suitable habitats, but also discovered that prey species, such as jeeber gazelle and urial sheep, were scarce. The latest photographs hint at the gradual recovery of prey populations.

"Cheetahs in Iran live on a knife-edge in very marginal habitat," said Dr Luke Hunter, coordinator of WCS's Global Carnivore Programme.

"The fact that this female has managed to raise four cubs to six months of age is extremely encouraging.

"Hopefully, this indicates there are areas where the cheetah's prey species are coming back, a goal the Iranian Department of Environment and UNDP has been working very hard to achieve."

An article from the BBC website
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4201180.stm>

