



CHEETAH NEWS – May

Sorry for the delay in this newsletter, we've had a very busy few months! I'm sure you'll forgive us since we've been out there doing cheetah conservation instead!

JWANENG RESEARCH CAMP

Everything continues to be exciting. We have been getting good data on our female with cubs. Now the cubs are older the group have been expanding their range. They used to be found always within the safety of the park. Now they are often found outside. This is a concern as there are many cattleposts in the area. We went to interview some of them in the area where she had been frequenting. Luckily, no one was aware of a cheetah in their midst and no one had experienced any losses. This is encouraging and we hope the cubs inherit their mother's good sense!

Sadly, we have been unable to locate our group of females. We are considering collar malfunction but still hoping they will turn up again one day.

It would have been an interesting group to monitor as groups of adult female cheetah are uncommon. Are they a group of unrelated females, sisters, or a mother with 2 daughters? When genetics are done on the blood samples this question will be answered and we hope to find them again one day to check up on their progress.

In early May we captured a coalition of 3 brothers. They were the biggest so far, the largest was 53 kgs! They were all in great condition and after samples were taken and one was fitted with a radiocollar, they were

released back into the park. They have been moving through the North and East.



Our project veterinarian is here assisted with the workup by 3 local farmers, who had provided the goat for the capture. They were fascinated at the chance of touching a wild cheetah and the work the project is doing to preserve them.

Overall, so far we have identified 20 individual cheetahs utilizing Jwaneng Game Reserve, through sightings. Most of them cycle through the park as part of their larger territory. The exception was the mother with young cubs, although their home range is now expanding. We have been having success with monitoring cats within the park but encounter problems with location once they move out of the park boundaries. We have been recently receiving assistance with aerial tracking but due to high costs of fuel this is limited. Our next plan to improve our monitoring is to purchase a microlight plane.

MICROLIGHT

Due to the wide ranging nature of cheetahs, they are notoriously difficult to study. Ground radiotracking has given us some valuable information on the cheetah in

Jwaneng but once they leave the park we are limited to aerial tracking to find them. It is far beyond us to purchase a fixed wing plane and rental and fuel is expensive. The National Cheetah Management Plan in South Africa has been utilizing a microlight for their monitoring of collared cats and has had great success with it. We are now looking for funding to purchase one. Initially, it is a large outlay but the running costs are much lower than standard aircraft. We are hoping to attract some major company sponsorship. Our field biologist Ann Marie Houser is currently down in South Africa training for her pilots license. Anyone, with any ideas of places we could approach for funding please let us know.

At this point, many thanks to Jeffrey Bensinger and Dianne Brondel who recently sent us \$2000 for use towards purchasing the microlight. Thanks a million for helping to get us airborne!

COMMUNITY

From the preliminary visits we have been making to communal farming areas, we have found a definite cheetah conflict problem in certain areas of the Southern District. We have also found that livestock management practices definitely decrease the likelihood of conflict. Those cattleposts which utilise kraaling, dogs and herders have few to no problems. Whereas areas which do not, encounter much more conflict. This also seems to increase with the size of the operation. Small cattleposts with fewer livestock can effectively manage them. As size increases it becomes more difficult to manage the herds and then farmers tend to utilise an

open range system, here is when problems occur.

Many communities continue to mention that their traditional method of protection was herding. Now all children are required to go to school and this method has not been replaced by anything else. During these visits we talk to people about the different methods they could be utilizing and provide information in handouts.

We will use data from this survey to show that cheetahs are a problem in many regions and the government needs to address this if it hopes to preserve healthy populations of free ranging cheetah.

FIRST RELOCATION



Captured cheetah awaiting release. D.Mills

In March the project was called to a farm in Sekoma in response to his cheetah complaints. We encouraged him to coexist with the cheetah on his farm but he claimed his losses were unsustainable. We patrolled his fence line and found many warthog holes, some with cheetah prints. We explained that this was how they were gaining access. He agreed if we moved the current proven problem cheetah off the farm, he would improve the fence line and consider alternative methods in the future.

Within 1 week, 2 males were captured, probably a brother coalition. These males were approximately 2-3 yrs of age and in good condition. The relocation of the two males was coordinated with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks. They were released in the Wildlife Management Area between the Kalahari and Kgalagadi National Parks. 1 brother was collared for monitoring.



EDUCATION

Our booklets are making a debut at Mokolodi's education centre where we are refining them before printing and distribution. We are also starting predator activities for the visiting schools. This is made possible by the assistance of Mokolodi Nature Reserve who have supported us from the early days. The centre sees over 12,000 children every year and subsidises disadvantaged children. These are the future policy makers, farmers and land owners of Botswana. Education is one of the most important aspects of conservation.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

A big thankyou goes to Bill and Pat Miller of CCF, USA who recently donated \$8000 for our on the ground work to save cheetah. It was great to meet you at the WCN Expo last year and we are thrilled you have considered us for your generous assistance We are

currently considering the most effective way to put the money to use and we'll keep you updated on how its utilized. Thankyou! Special thanks go to our friend Paul Czarnecki, a past volunteer with Mokolodi Nature Reserve who generously donated his 1981 Landcruiser. It's a great machine! Later he even sent us his laptop. Thankyou so much for your faith in us!

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Help us to distribute the survey to any farmers, landowners, game reserve managers you may know.
- Send us your cheetah sightings, past, present and future
- Raise awareness for predator conservation. Botswana still has a rich biodiversity and it is up to all of us to protect it!
- Make a donation, however large or small, everything makes a difference.

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