

Bartmann W. The cheetah problem in Namibia.

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Abstract: Namibia/S.W.Africa contains, by comparison with other countries of Africa south to the Sahara, still exceptional numbers of cheetah. The population is evidently increasing in the ranching areas as a result of various factors improving the life conditions of the cat. The cheetah is protected by law in Namibia, but individuals may be killed or trapped by the farmers, if the loss of livestock can be attributed to them. During the past 15 years a new trend toward live-capture had come into force, proved to be financial profit for the farmer over this livestock loss. Live-caught cheetahs could be sold to the two animal exporters in Namibia for a price much higher than the equivalent for the skins. Many farmers consider this by no doubt as the only reason to bring the cheetah's existence not to an end on the ranchlands. The Department of Nature Conservation in Namibia allows an export quota of 130 live spotted cats annually, filled almost entirely with farm-caught cheetahs. Since the Washington Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora has come into full effect, many cheetahs are killed again wherever they were to be found on ranchland, in default of a market outlet. A better cheetah protection must involve the farmers legitim interest as well as stimulate and supervise their cooperation in conservation and management of this cat on ranchland areas.

THE CHEETAH PROBLEM IN NAMIBIA/S. W. AFRICA

BY: Wolf Bartmann, Dortmund

*(Translated by Mrs. Don (Strow)*

If you have followed with concern the reports about extinction of the animal population in the whole world, you will know that one of the most endangered is the spotted cat (cheetah). We do not mean the Asian cheetah, whose habitat shrank to a small area in Iran and on the Turkish/Afghanistan border. We are talking about the African cheetah, who lives in the southern part of the Sahara Desert. THE RED DATA BOOK OF THE IUCN marks his status as "vulnerable". There are many reasons for the decline in cheetah population, but the main factors are human expansion for farming, ranching, and industry and the careless over-use of hunting.

Norman Myers, who in 1975 made an analysis for the IUCN and WWF about cheetahs in Africa, that the cheetah population in one decade (1960-1970) has declined by 50% and left us by the beginning of 1970 with only 15,000 cheetahs.

His report is based on studies in east, south, west and to Central Africa and points to Namibia and Botswana as the area with the strongest cheetah population. Local authorities believe that the number of cheetahs is on the increase in that part of the country.

During a five week trip through wide parts of southwest Africa in 1978-79 I had the opportunity to find out for myself about the conflicting opinion "Myers Publication" on one side and local authorities on cheetah life on the other. Even though my stay was relatively short, I was able to collect interesting and valuable information.

To understand Namibia as **cheetah** land, one has to picture the habitat in one's mind.

Major portions of the land are **desert** (Namib) or half **deserts** (Kalahari). The rest is still so dry it consists largely of vegetation and grassland in the south and brush and trees in the north.

One would assume to see the cheetah mostly in the wide open plains, where the hunting is easy for him since he outruns his prey. Because of the shrinking antelope and deer population in this largely fenced ranch and farmland, we see him very seldom. Occasionally he takes to killing highly prized karakul sheep. That of course leads to large and merciless hunting parties. The northern part near Windhoek with its trees and shrubs offers a better chance of survival for the cheetah. Apart from the national parks and reservations which make up about one fourth of the land, the cheetah population concentrates largely in the Northern part and east towards the Botswana border (Sand Veld). It comes as no surprise then, that the cheetah along with lions, hyenas, and wild dogs, through the use of poison, traps, and guns is getting close to extinction. Because of his lifestyle, (he changes his territory and does not return to his kill) he is harder to catch. Through his habit of climbing termite hills or easy accessible trees he is susceptible to traps. Those animals are then killed and their furs sold.

Since the beginning of 1960, through special efforts one of Namibia's leading wildlife preservers and exporters, (W. Delfs) boxlike wire traps are used to catch the animals. They are then

shipped to animal parkslike Etoscha and Kreuger National Park or sold to zoos and wildlife parks throughout the world. The local government limits the exports of spotted cats to to 130 a year. Despite the merciless hunting of the cheetah, authorities in Namibia are of the opinion, that the cheetah population is one the increase today. In fact some say, there are more now than ever before. According to old timers, seeing a cheetah in the past was rare. Lions, hyenas, and wild dogs, kept his food supply short. Through the extinction of these natural enemies of the cheetah, the farmers unwillingly helped him to expand. The constructing of watering holes for livestock also helped to multiply wildlife population. So in short the cheetah today, has a better chance of survival today. Two of Namibias well known wildlife exporteurs (Delfs and Schultz) are sure that the number of cheetahs has doubled during the last fifteen years. The use of wire traps has been especially beneficial since the fur of a cheetah brought local ranchers then of fifteen rand, but a live and healthy cheetah brings up to 160 rand. A sum, that makes up for the loss of livestock. Today the use of boxlike wire traps rather than the cruel old-fashioned iron traps, is widely practiced. The number of cheetahs caught is less than the one killed in the past and consequently there are less furs on the market.

To quote W. Delfs, "On a farm complex of 75,000 ha. during a period of four years, the number of cheetahs caught is 140. On neighboring farms during the same time the number has been close to 100 and in all cases the population showed now noticeable decrease." On his own place, Otjahevita, (15,000 ha.) he caught

eleven cheetahs during a period of less than a year and still enjoys a sizeable number of **them**.

During the 10 years of **free marketing** about 140 a year were shipped to different **parts** of the world. This worked out well until in 1973 the US limited the import of rare animals and plants. This resulted in an overflow of cheetahs on the various export farms throughout the country. During my visit in 1978-79, I counted 128 cheetahs of all ages on those farms. The feeding of the animals is costly and soon exporteurs only accepted females, and even those spent an average of a year on the farms. Farmers who cannot sell their cheetahs ususally kill them and sell the furn.

A list that W. Delfs keeps, shows how many cheetahs are killed and the reasons for not being able to sell them. In 12 months this amounted to approximately 120 animals, though he thinks number might be higher.

According to the Nature Conservation Ordinance 4/75 the cheetah is under wildlife protection in Namibia. That only means that the government does not give out licenses to hunt. To the farmers and ranchers, who hunt the animal like before, it makes little difference. The biggest reason for not completely extinguishing the cheetah is the high price for live and healthy animals. Though Washington's limit on imported wildlife has resulted in increased killing of the cheetah, it still would be in the best interest of the land to catch the cheetahs alive for sales to different countries in contrast to just putting them under wildlife conservation.