

# CAT NEWS

N° 38 · Spring 2003

Edited by Peter Jackson

ISSN 1027-2992



**IUCN**  
The World Conservation Union



**CAT SPECIALIST GROUP**

CH-1172 Bougy, Switzerland

Tel/Fax: ++41 (21) 808-6012; Email: <[pjackson@sefanet.ch](mailto:pjackson@sefanet.ch)>

# Saharan Cheetahs in the Termit Region of Niger

by F. Claro\* and C. Sissler

**The Saharan cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) survives in the Termit region of Niger. Three adults were sighted, as well as many tracks and other signs of cheetah presence during an expedition in October–November 2002 (map p. 22).**

The expedition was organised by the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), the Zoological Society of Paris, and the Paris Museum of Natural History after fresh cheetah tracks were observed in the Termit during a visit in March 2002.

The main purpose of the mission was to assess the occurrence of cheetah and addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*); to evaluate the feasibility of research on these species in the Termit; and to investigate the direct and indirect threats to these species.

The mission travelled more than 1,500 km around Termit Massif with two 4x4 vehicles and a team of two drivers, one guide and five observers. During the trip, the team found 48 tracks and other indirect signs of cheetah presence, three scats, several resting places, including two with fresh urine, and escape tracks.

We also found remains of 12 Dorcas gazelles killed by cheetahs, with the characteristic skin turned back, and we were once able to observe signs of hunting, with side-by-side tracks of a gazelle and a cheetah, approaching at a distance, until the tracks led to where the gazelle was brought down.

After a long search by car and several kilometres following tracks on foot, three adult cheetahs were observed. Two individuals were met by chance on 24 October, and one individual was tracked on 27 October, when it was possible to take pictures of a lone female. These cheetahs resembled pictures taken by Alain Dragesco (1993, and cover Cat News 19), with a generally pale coat and less clear tear streaks (cover picture).

During the first observation, the two cheetahs were in the shade of an *Acacia torticolis* and moved away immediately, while the lone female went to lie under a tuft of *Panicum turgidum*, after several minutes lying on its side in the sun. The animal appeared afflicted and frightened. It was observed for several minutes from the car at 10 m distance and then from 30 m for several hours without any attempt to approach and disturb it.

The habitat of the cheetah in the Termit consists of rocky mountains, and wadis, where we found several shelters that had been used by cheetahs for shade in the hot hours of the day.

Our guide, who had been a nomad herder as a child, informed us that cheetahs hunted mainly in the plains, several kilometres away from the massif, during the cold season. In the hot season, however, the animals did not move such a long distance from the mountains, where they can find shade, and where they can escape easily, as their tracks are not noticeable on the rocks.

Suitable prey for cheetahs, such as Dorcas gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*), young dama gazelle (*Gazella dama*), Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), and Cape hares (*Lepus capensis*) were observed in the region.

Interviews with Toubou nomads indicated that they were little interested in the cheetah, which they considered a coward, since it rarely attacked herds to take a new-born camel or a goat.

The impact of strychnine poisoning campaigns against predators of domestic cattle, mainly golden jackal (*Canis aureus*) and striped hyaena (*Hyaena hyaena*), seemed to affect only carrion eating species, including Rüppell's vulture (*Gyps rueppellii*). We found only three tracks of striped hyaena during the trip, and nomad tracks were very rare, and so we consider that the species is on the verge of extinction in the region. However, we were able to observe golden jackals on seven occasions.

We conclude that there is no direct threat - such as hunting - to the cheetah. The limiting factor may be prey abundance, as we found many signs of poaching of ungulates in the area. We have recently been informed about a large poaching expedition of Arabian princes in the region.

The genetics of the North African cheetah will be extremely difficult to investigate. The collection of faeces was not very successful, and because of the special susceptibility to stress of the Saharan cheetahs that we observed in Termit, invasive sampling does not seem advisable.

There is an urgent need to protect the ungulate prey of the Termit cheetahs from poachers and to let the ungulate populations recover.

### **Reference**

Dragesco-Joffé, A. (1993) *La Vie Sauvage au Sahara*.  
Delachaux et Niestlé, Lausanne, 240 pp.

---

\* Museum of Natural History, Paris. <claro@mnhn.fr>