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Abstract: According the studies conducted in the late' 80s, in 2000 and in 2003, the cheetah is largely widespread in the Hoggar Mountains (Algeria) and its surroundings. Their numbers have probably risen since 2000. The potential preys of the cheetah are abundant. However, the cheetah is often killed by the Tuaregs despite their protection status. Cheetahs are reported to move on constantly from one valley to another, but have a territorial behaviour. The absence of competitors allows cheetah to hunt its preys without facing their robbery. The situation may be good in the Tassili Mountains too.

D'après les études menées à la fin des années 80, en 2000 et en 2003 le guépard est largement répandu dans les montagnes du Hoggar (Algérie) et ses environs. Leur nombre a probablement augmenté depuis 2000. Les proies potentielles du guépard sont abondantes. Cependant, malgré son statut d'espèce protégée, le guépard est souvent tué par les Touaregs. D'après les observations, les guépards se déplacent constamment d'une vallée à l'autre, mais gardent un comportement territorial. L'absence de compétiteurs permet au guépard de chasser ses proies sans avoir à faire face à leur vol. La situation doit également être bonne dans les montagnes du Tassili.

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Cheetah in and Around Hoggar National Park in Algeria

by Koen de Smet*

During the past 80 years we have had a fairly good idea about the abundance of wildlife in and around the Hoggar mountains of southern Algeria as the explorers and some military were keen on gazelles and other large wildlife. The information is fairly precise as many of the authors were interested in prehistoric art and history too and stayed long periods in the field, far away from the normal tracks, and they were always accompanied by Tuareg guides who, as nomads and herdsmen, knew the wildlife well.

The cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) was an important animal in Tuareg society and the hide was used as an ornament on camel saddles. The name of the Imenokal (Supreme Tuareg leader) was preceded by "Amayes" ("cheetah" in Tuareg Berber), just as kings in Saudi Arabia are called "Fahad" ("cheetah" in Arabic).

Wildlife numbers seem to have been lowest in the early 1970s, when even the famous French archaeologist, H. Lhote, stated that there were no cheetahs left in the Hoggar. This was not correct; some survived in the central part (the Koudiat) where two were killed in 1973.

In the late 1980s, the director of the Hoggar National Park recruited some wildlife staff and organised regular expeditions in cooperation with university departments in Algiers. As a result new facts became available and it became clear that the cheetah had not been wiped out, but survived in small numbers. Cheetahs were present all over the central Hoggar mountains, but as it is an area of more than 450,000 km², nearly as large as France, it was not easy to estimate numbers.

In November 2000, IUCN supported a new survey, and in about 10 days, T. Meftah, A. Sahki and I tried to get a better view of cheetah distribution in the north-eastern, eastern and south-eastern parts and surroundings of the Hoggar mountains. Tracks were found on several occasions; the cheetah was found to be known and seen by all the Tuareg herdsmen we

encountered, and even groups up to seven individuals were reported. Numbers were estimated to be at least 20 to 30 individuals in the Hoggar.

In February 2003, with private American aid, A. Fellous, F. Belbachir, A. Bazi and I went back to the same parts of the Hoggar, and spent three weeks in the field. We did not go south to the Oued Tin Tarabine to search in more detail, but still

covered 1,000 km. We used the same Tuareg guides from Tarzouk, who know the tracks very well.

The results were astonishing. We found cheetah tracks every day and sometimes twice a day at different locations when travelling. Most cheetahs were alone, but twice we found two together and, near Tazrouk, even an adult with one young, and two big adults in the same river bed. This indicates



that the cheetah is now very widespread throughout the Hoggar mountains and the surroundings and that numbers have certainly risen since 2000. Rainfall has been good in the region in recent years and was especially good last winter.

Dorcas gazelles (*Gazella dorcas*) were abundant everywhere, and hare (*Lepus capensis*) droppings were found within 50 m of every river bed. We have never seen as many free-ranging feral donkeys. In the mountains there were Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*) everywhere. Potential prey was thus very abundant and this was reflected in the large number of golden eagles (*Aquila chysaetos*) we also saw. I would say that the relative abundance has doubled since 2000.

Despite their protection status, cheetahs are still killed by the Tuareg when they attack their sheep and goats and young camels. This counts for at least 5-10 animals a year, but in good years, the population growth should be able to cope with this. The offenders are often beaten to death, even by women who are alone with their goat herds in the mountains.

Cheetahs are reported to move on constantly from one valley to another, but have a territorial behaviour by marking trees with their faeces (mostly Tamarix) and scratching them (Acacia). They rest under these trees or lie on the lower horizontal branches.

In the Hoggar they hunt at night, and this has been reported by all previous authors. It is much easier to get close to prey at night when the hunting technique is "hit and run", and in the Hoggar the cheetah is really the top predator as there are no lions, leopards or hyenas, and so no competitors. This makes it also possible to return to prey next day. We have personally seen that occur with a big male dorcas gazelle killed by a cheetah. There are no large vultures (*Gyps* spp.) in the Hoggar, and jackals (*Canis aureus*) are widespread but certainly not abundant.

The situation in the Hoggar is very important for recolonisation of the rest of the Sahara: cheetahs could now reach the vast sand desert of the Great Eastern Erg and Tunisia within two or three years. The situation in the Tassili mountains, south of the Hoggar, should be the same; reports from this national park show that the status of wildlife is good there too.

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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.